

**The Vikings**  
**Part I**  
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## The Vikings

### Scope:

The Vikings have long conjured up images either of ruthless pirates ravaging the coasts of Europe or of heroic pagan warriors dedicated to Odin, god of ecstasy, poetry, and battle. These images, well attested in the medieval sources, are only part of the story of the impact of the Scandinavians on early medieval civilization. The first 12 lectures of this course deal with the evolution of a distinct civilization in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) on the eve of the Viking Age (790–1100). In 790, Scandinavians still worshiped the ancient Germanic gods and, thus, were divided from their kin in Germany or the former Roman provinces of Gaul and Britain who had adopted Christianity and Roman institutions. Breakthroughs in shipbuilding and the emergence of a warrior ethos celebrated in Eddaic and later skaldic verse turned Scandinavians from merchants into Vikings at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The second set of 12 lectures deals with the course and impact of the Viking raids between the late 8<sup>th</sup> through the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Danish and Norwegian raiders profoundly altered the political balance of Western Europe. Danes conquered and settled eastern and northern England, a region known as the *Danelaw*. They compelled King Alfred the Great of Wessex (r. 870–899) and his successors to forge an effective monarchy. In France, Vikings under Rollo embraced Christianity and settled the fief of Normandy in 911, thereby founding one of the most formidable feudal states of Europe. Norwegian Vikings settled in the main towns of Ireland and braved the North Atlantic, settling the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland, as well as an ephemeral colony at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. In Eastern Europe, Swedes developed a major trade route from the Baltic to the Caspian, laying the foundations for the Russian principalities.

The last 12 lectures explain the passing of the Viking Age. Over two centuries of overseas raids, trade, and settlement altered Scandinavian civilization. Scandinavians accepted Christianity and gained the high culture of Latin Christendom. Christian Danish and Norwegian kings in the 10<sup>th</sup> century first harnessed the Viking spirit to establish monarchies. Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035), king of Denmark, England, and Norway, briefly turned the North Sea into a Scandinavian lake. His institutions and example inspired the formation of Christian kingdoms in Scandinavia and turned Vikings into Crusaders. Yet perhaps the most enduring of achievements of the Viking Age were the sagas and verse of Iceland that immortalized pagan heroes and Christian kings, Norse gods and indomitable settlers of the remote island.

## Lecture One

### The Vikings in Medieval History

**Scope:** The term *Viking*, originally used for a pirate who lurked in a cove (*vik*), came to designate the Scandinavians overseas engaged in war, commerce, and settlement in 790–1100. In popular imagination, the Vikings are cast as tall Nordic warriors, sporting horned helmets and wielding axes, who descended in longships to wreck havoc upon the civilized peoples of Western Europe, the Byzantine Empire, and the Islamic world. Such perceptions are based on the hostile reports of monks, so often the victims of Viking raids, who penned the medieval chronicles. Since the Reformation, Vikings have been idealized as noble Germanic savages untouched by corrupt civilization—an image based on stereotypes created by Roman authors. In recent decades, revisionist scholars have minimized the destructiveness and, thus, the importance of the Vikings. Yet for more than 300 years, Scandinavians excelled in shipbuilding and dominated the sea and river lanes of Europe with their longships and commercial vessels (*knarr*). Their attacks on Western Europe dictated the future of feudal Europe. They braved the Atlantic Ocean to plant settlements in Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland. In Eastern Europe, Scandinavians, known as *Rus*, extended the range of their commerce and created Orthodox Russia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Without the Vikings, the course of medieval European civilization would have been far different.

### Outline

- I. The Vikings had a far-ranging impact on medieval history, but before we begin to look at that history, it may be useful to look at some of the stereotypes about Vikings with which most of us are familiar.
  - A. The term *Viking* conjures up one's worst nightmare of a Nordic warrior, sporting a horned helmet, slashing with a two-headed axe, and descending upon monks and peasants from longships.
  - B. The word *Viking* comes from Norse *vik*, meaning a cove or a small fjord, a place where pirates could lurk and prey upon merchant ships. The term was extended to apply to any Scandinavians living between roughly 790 and 1100 who were engaged in raiding or conquering overseas kingdoms or in establishing settlements, such as in Iceland.
  - C. But, the term should be used only to designate Scandinavians overseas, especially as raiders or attackers of Christian kingdoms; later, as merchants and colonizers; and eventually, as kings.
  - D. *Viking* was just one of several names by which Scandinavian raiders were known overseas.
    1. Frankish chronicles often referred to these raiders as *Northmen*, from which derives the name *Normans*. A common prayer in the 9<sup>th</sup> century was "Oh Lord, deliver us from the fury of the Northmen."
    2. In England, where Danes were prominent, the Vikings were usually referred to as *Danes*.
    3. The term *Norman* was used for those Scandinavians who settled in Normandy in northern France.
    4. The Scandinavians from Russia were known as the *Rus* or *Varangians*, meaning "men of the pledge." This term designated Swedes and other Scandinavians who came to serve in the Byzantine armies.
- II. We have an enormous amount of information about the Vikings; unfortunately, most of it comes, at least in the early period, from their opponents.
  - A. We must balance the monastic chronicles and hostile reports of the Vikings' victims against archaeology and the chronicles of the Scandinavians themselves in later generations, when they converted to Christianity.
  - B. This course, then, looks at three very different sets of evidence: the contemporary literary records, written by Christians and some Muslims, who see the Vikings as foes; the work that has been done in archaeology, including the recovery of Viking ships and fortifications; and the sagas and poetry written in Norse in the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries but reporting events that took place in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.
  - C. As mentioned, stereotypes color our notions of the Vikings to this day and were, perhaps, even more powerful in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

1. For example, the operatic cycle of *Der Ring der Nibelungen*, composed by Richard Wagner in 1848–1874, is based on the Norse version of the legend of the Volsungs, the earliest set of heroes known in Scandinavian literature.
  2. The heroic and idealized image of the Vikings was also captured in paintings epitomizing the primeval barbarian, untouched by civilization.
  3. Unfortunately, this image was later combined with German political theories at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in the Aryan ideology of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these myths and legends were invoked by the Nazi regime in ways that would have stunned most Viking kings and warriors of the Middle Ages.
- D.** Modern scholarship since World War II has taken a new look at the Vikings. A great deal of work has been done in archaeology and in understanding both the Scandinavian and Western European sources.
1. Some scholars have shown a revisionist tendency in this work. Professor Peter Sawyer, for example, in his seminal history of the Vikings, tends to downgrade the size and monetary rewards of the raids. This, in turn, has led to revisions in our understanding of the impact and importance of the Vikings in Europe.
  2. Revisionist scholars have also stressed the continuity between the Viking Age and earlier periods. Agricultural change, for instance, is almost nonexistent. The pattern of agriculture seen in Scandinavia in the Viking Age is very much the same as that seen 700 years earlier.
  3. Several good studies have also stressed the importance of trade; the Scandinavians were probably more often engaged in trade than in raiding or attacking.
  4. Some of this scholarship may have gone a bit too far, however. It tends to downgrade the significance of the Scandinavian impact in medieval Europe by stressing social and economic patterns—more “ordinary” developments—over political and military matters, which are, by definition, “extraordinary.”

**III.** Given the nature of our sources, this course will take a broad perspective in looking at the age of the Vikings.

- A.** For the first third of the course, we will look at three related subjects.
1. The first of these is the importance of the people, geography, and early culture in Scandinavia, going back to the Bronze Age, particularly the period between 1550 and 1100 B.C. (often known as the Northern Bronze Age). In this period, many of the cultural foundations of later Viking Age Scandinavia are laid. We will come to understand the extraordinary continuity and the ancient quality of Scandinavian civilization at the time of the Viking Age.
  2. We shall also stress the importance of the ancient Scandinavian religion and its heroic, martial ethos. As a result of the survival of manuscripts in Iceland, we have the best evidence for a pre-Christian religion in medieval Europe from Scandinavia. We will look particularly at two works: the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of poems that may date back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and the *Prose Edda*, written by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1242), an Icelandic chieftain, which records many well-known Scandinavian myths.
  3. The last topic in the first part of the course will be the breakthroughs in shipbuilding and warfare that are an integral part of the Scandinavian background.
- B.** In the second third of the course, we shall look at the Viking impact on the wider medieval world.
1. The Vikings’ impact on the Carolingian Empire, what was essentially Western Christendom in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was profound. It revealed the weaknesses of the empire of Charlemagne and led to the emergence of feudal states.
  2. The Vikings also had a great impact on England; we shall look in particular at the movements and attacks of the Great Army from 865–878.
  3. We shall also examine the far reaches of Viking activity, in Ireland and Russia. Remarkably, the experiences of Norwegians in Ireland and Swedes in Russia were quite comparable in many ways, although the results of these experiences were quite different.
  4. As we close the second part of the course, we shall look at the most daunting and impressive of all the Viking achievements—their tackling of the North Atlantic. The Vikings were the first people to sail beyond the sight of land, and the settlement of Iceland by the Norwegians during the period 870–930 represents the first European colonial endeavor.

- C. The last third of this course will shift back to the Scandinavian homeland and assess this experience in the wider medieval world for the Vikings themselves. Here, we shall look at two important developments.
1. First, we shall examine the creation of the classic Scandinavian kingdoms. At the start of the Viking Age, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden did not exist as we understand them today; the region was politically divided. By the end of the Viking Age, the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden had come into existence as a direct outcome of the Viking experience.
    - a. The overseas ventures of the Vikings in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries netted an enormous amount of booty and wealth and led to the creation of ever-more professional armies and better ships.
    - b. Using this wealth and these fleets, sea kings imposed their control over chosen regions and set up territorial kingdoms. We see this first in Norway with King Harald Finehair (r. 880–930). Less than a generation later, the same is achieved in Denmark by Gorm the Old (r. c. 936–958), who created a kingdom in Jutland.
  2. The emergence of these territorial kingdoms went hand-in-hand with the second important development—the reception of Christianity, which helped end the Viking Age. We shall look at the slow Christianizing of the society, which saw the substitution of the ancient martial ethos with the acceptance of Christian doctrines and the establishment of Christian institutions.
  3. The Scandinavian Christian kings after 1100 reinvented the earlier martial ethos as a crusading mission. Our final two lectures in this course will look at Scandinavia in the immediate aftermath of the Viking Age and show how these Christian kingdoms redefined themselves in attempting to redirect their energies toward the Crusades.

**Further Reading:**

John Haywood. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Peter Sawyer. *The Oxford History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What accounted for the stereotypical images of the Vikings since the Middle Ages? How did these perceptions influence interpretations of the historical importance of the Vikings? How have these perceptions had wider ramifications in Western history?
2. How has the nature of the sources, both literary texts and archaeology, influenced our understanding of the Vikings? What are the value and limitations of these sources? What accounts for the current scholarly debate on the significance of the Viking Age?

## Lecture Two

### Land and People of Medieval Scandinavia

**Scope:** *Scandinavia* as a political and cultural term is more than the peninsula shared by Norway and Sweden, because it includes Denmark, the Faeroe Islands, and Iceland, settled by the Norse in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the Viking era, Scandinavia was cut off from Central Europe by dense forests, and only a single road, Haerveg (the “army route”), linked Jutland with Germany. Scandinavia, which is defined by the Baltic Sea and the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean, was best traversed by water. In the enclosed, nearly freshwater Baltic Sea, Swedes and Danes learned navigation early, then applied these lessons to the dangerous, rough waters of the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean. For all the diversity of landscape in their homeland, the medieval Scandinavians were bound by a common way of life based on the sea and a common culture, ancestry, and worship of ancestral gods.

### Outline

- I. This lecture introduces the land and peoples of Scandinavia and stresses some of the major features of the Scandinavian landscape, notably the northern climate, the forests, and the seas, that dictated the course of Scandinavian history. The lecture also introduces the ancestors of the Scandinavians, those who gave rise to the Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians.
- II. The term *Scandinavia* is used geographically to define the peninsula that is shared by Norway and Sweden. Norway is cut off from Sweden by the Kjolen (“Keel”) mountain range and faces toward the North Sea and the Atlantic. Sweden is oriented east toward the Baltic. Thus, when we use the term *Scandinavia* in this course, it has much more of a cultural sense than just a geographic term.
  - A. In this understanding of *Scandinavia*, we also include Denmark, which encompassed Jutland; the four large Danish islands, Sjaelland (Zealand), Funen, Lolland, and Falster; islands in the Baltic; and the islands of Öland and Gotland.
  - B. The Aland Islands and Finland were linked culturally to Sweden and, therefore, to Scandinavia.
  - C. Finally, colonies established in Iceland during the Viking Age are also considered to be part of the cultural unit of Scandinavia.
- III. We begin with some of the key features of Scandinavia that will influence the culture and history of its people.
  - A. First and foremost, the winters in Scandinavia are brutal, especially in Norway and Sweden. Sailing is possible for only five or six months of the year, and the icebergs in the North Atlantic posed serious threats to any early vessel.
    1. We shall learn more about these conditions as we explore the Icelandic sagas. Our first record of the harsh Scandinavian winters comes from a Greek explorer, Pytheas, who traveled up the rivers of Gaul, took passage to Britain, sailed across the North Sea, and landed on the northern coast of Norway, near the Arctic Circle.
    2. Pytheas tells us that the natives grew barley and vegetables, which they were able to do because of the long hours of sunlight. He also speaks of the aurora borealis, assumed by later Scandinavians of the Viking Age to be the Valkyries of Odin riding across the skies.
  - B. Scandinavians learned to adjust to this landscape and exploit its possibilities early in their history. They engaged in trapping and hunting in the winter, as well as local and regional trade. Thanks to the creation of skis, sleds, and skates, the early Scandinavians were quite capable of travel in winter.
  - C. The long winters preconditioned a number of social habits and attitudes in Scandinavia. For example, it was wrong to deny hospitality to travelers, particularly in winter; in later Scandinavian legends and myths, such travelers were frequently gods. Further, in the early spring, before planting and sailing were possible, the great halls of Scandinavian leaders were the centers of festivals and religious activities.
  - D. Another important feature of the landscape influencing Scandinavian history was the great forests.

1. In the Viking Age and before, Scandinavia was covered by dense forests and largely cut off from the rest of Europe by those forests. The only overland access into Scandinavia was a narrow track, the Haerveg (“army route”), which ran from Germany to the northern shore of Jutland.
  2. Denmark was largely cut off from outside influences in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries; there was no real threat of external invasion. This was also true of Norway and Sweden.
  3. Of course, the forests were also an important resource to most Scandinavians. Denmark, parts of southern Norway, and the regions around Lake Mälaren in central Sweden contained deciduous forests, especially oak, which was important for shipbuilding and fuel.
  4. Almost 75 percent of Sweden was covered with forests in the Viking Age. The conditions were even more extreme in Norway, where only 3 to 5 percent of the land was arable. Seventy percent of Norway above the tree line is mountain, and perhaps 25 percent is pine forest.
- E.** The sea is a third feature of influence throughout Scandinavian history. Knowledge of the sea was, perhaps, the common experience that bound all the Scandinavians together before and during the Viking Age.
1. The sea was the fastest means of travel. According to Adam of Bremen, writing in c. 1070, the journey by land from Roskilde in Denmark through central Sweden to Uppsala would require about four to six weeks. This same journey by ship took only three to five days.
  2. Adam also gives us sailing distances along the shores of the Baltic. To reach Hedeby on the eastern shore of Jutland in southern Denmark from any of the Baltic ports took a week by sea but four to eight weeks by land.
  3. Norse legends always account travel by land as long and arduous, whereas travel by sea is quick and relatively easy.
- F.** Their closeness to the sea gave the Scandinavians several advantages in seaborne commerce.
1. Scandinavia is washed by the Baltic and by the North Sea and the Atlantic. The Baltic is an enclosed sea, almost a freshwater lake. Despite its squalls and mists, it can be navigated easily and is teeming with fish. Further, the Baltic’s patterns of currents and winds favored travel from west to east; therefore, Hedeby in Jutland, ports in Sjaelland, the Swedish island of Gotland, and the Swedish market towns on Lake Mälaren became prime ports for sailing.
  2. The Scandinavians, starting with their first efforts at shipbuilding in the Neolithic Age, gained critical navigation skills and experience that would serve to their advantage in the Viking Age. They were accustomed to memorizing landmarks and experimenting with shipbuilding in the enclosed waters of the Baltic, expertise that could then be transferred to tackling the North Sea and the Atlantic.
- IV.** We shall close this lecture with a brief look at the peoples living in Scandinavia in earliest times and through the Viking Age.
- A.** Unfortunately, our archaeological evidence is not particularly good; we must depend on literary descriptions of Scandinavians written at later times. These include descriptions by Roman authors, starting with Julius Caesar in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.; Christian writers of the medieval period; and Arab geographers.
  - B.** Such writers uniformly give us the impression that the Scandinavians were tall and had fair complexions, light eyes, and blonde or reddish hair. By the standards of the Mediterranean and Western European worlds, the Scandinavians were large, probably the result of their diet. All the southern sources agree that the Scandinavians were, above all, hardy.
  - C.** The Scandinavians did not seem to be conscious of any racial distinctions among themselves. A peculiar poem, the *Rigsthula* (c. 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century), refers to the creation of the classes in Scandinavia, the aristocrats, the farmers, and the thralls, all fathered by the god Heimdall. All three classes seem to take on the qualities of various figures in Norse mythology.
  - D.** What really seemed to matter to the Scandinavians was speaking the Norse language, worshiping the ancestral gods, and being part of the Norse community, which was shaped by the landscape. In the next lecture, we shall look at these cultural and linguistic factors.

**Further Reading:**

John Haywood. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How have the climate and natural resources of Scandinavia influenced the course of civilization since the Neolithic Age (4000–2300 B.C.)? What resources were crucial for sustaining population growth and long-distance trade?
2. How have the seas united and challenged Scandinavians? Why did Scandinavians excel in seafaring and shipbuilding? How important a role has seaborne commerce played in Scandinavian history?

## Lecture Three

### Scandinavian Society in the Bronze Age

**Scope:** Since 8000 B.C., bands of hunters living in the lands around the Baltic Sea exploited the dense northern forests as the glaciers of the last Ice Age retreated. Into the Viking Age, many Scandinavians depended on hunting and fishing as a major source of food. From 4000 B.C. on, peoples learned cultivation of wheat and barley, and hence, Neolithic villages appeared in the core lands of southern Scandinavia: Jutland, the Danish islands, Skane, the lake districts of central Sweden, the lands of the Vik, and the western coastal districts of Norway between Rogaland the Sogne. These peoples, whose language and identity are unknown, cleared forest using slash-and-burn techniques, which quickly exhausted the soil. In 2500–2300 B.C., a new people speaking an Indo-European language migrated into Scandinavia. At the same time, the ancestors of the Lapps (Sami) and Finns (Suomi) appeared in their homelands. Trade with the lands of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East proved the catalyst of change. By 1750, Scandinavians had mastered the metallurgy of the Bronze Age. In the Northern Bronze Age (1750–1100 B.C.) were laid the foundations of later Scandinavian civilization. Grave goods and votive offerings, notably the gilt sun chariot found at Trundholm, attest to extraordinary prosperity. Scandinavians traded amber and furs to obtain finished goods from the Near East. But this prosperity waned after 1100 B.C. with the collapse of the great civilizations in the Near East.

### Outline

- I. This lecture discusses the earliest civilizations in Scandinavia, starting with the Late Paleolithic and Neolithic periods (c. 8000–2300 B.C.) and moving through the Bronze Age (2300–450 B.C.).
  - A. The Neolithic Age represents a fairly sophisticated level of human development, including expertise in creating flint and obsidian weapons and tools. This period also sees the advent of agriculture and the domestication of animals.
  - B. Developments in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages clearly established the fundamentals of Scandinavian civilization. As we will see, the Viking Age drew upon these cultural traditions in the Scandinavians' conception of the gods, the practice of shipbuilding, and other customs.
- II. Human habitation in Scandinavia came relatively late, only from about 8000 B.C. on.
  - A. The earliest inhabitants of Scandinavia were the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic Age. These inhabitants were well concentrated in the core lands of early Scandinavia: the Jutland peninsula; the Danish highlands; southern Sweden, especially the region of Skane; the Baltic islands of Gotland and Öland; the region around Lake Mälaren; and the southern shores of Norway. These regions offered easy access to the sea, along with deciduous forests teeming with game.
  - B. By 4000 B.C., a significant change came to Scandinavia with the advent of agriculture and domesticated animals. Knowledge of these practices was brought into Scandinavia from other areas.
    1. Goats, sheep, and pigs for domestication came from the Near East.
    2. The cultivation of barley and wheat allowed for stock-raising.
  - C. With these practices came the appearance of villages; these were far smaller than those that have been found in Central and Western Europe and the Near East.
    1. One important aspect of these communities was an emphasis on stock-raising, particularly cattle.
    2. Both Julius Caesar and Tacitus tell us that Germanic peoples preferred cattle-raising to farming.
  - D. Contact with Central Europe and the Near East also brought important innovations in weapons and tools to the Scandinavians. In contrast to the Megalithic peoples of Western Europe, however, the Scandinavians did not have the population and resources to raise great stone monuments, such as Stonehenge.
  - E. Older hunting patterns held on in Finland and the northern reaches of Scandinavia with the ancestors of the Finns (Suomi), the Lapps (Sami), and the Karelians.
  - F. We have indications that trade took place between the Scandinavians and Western Europeans in the Neolithic Age, via the great river systems, notably the Elbe, Oder, and Vistula.

- III.** Around 2300 B.C., we see another significant change in Scandinavia, usually associated with the arrival of newcomers.
- A.** From limited physical evidence, scholars have surmised that starting around 2300 B.C., the beginning of the Bronze Age, new people arrived in Scandinavia, speaking a language that was destined to evolve into the Germanic languages.
  - B.** The new population did not eliminate the older one; instead, intermarriage and assimilation probably took place.
    - 1.** This speculation is borne out by the fact that Germanic languages, in contrast to other Indo-European languages, have an unusual number of basic words of unknown origin.
    - 2.** The most common example cited by linguists is *dog*, a word unrelated to the variations of *hound* from Indo-European languages.
- IV.** The advent of the Bronze Age was, obviously, important for a number of reasons.
- A.** First, the use of bronze enabled the manufacture of weapons and tools that were far more efficient than those made of stone. Along with metallurgy came the production of ceramics, which allowed for the use of storage vessels to protect grain from rats. Skills in metallurgy enabled the creation of swords, axes, and jewelry.
  - B.** The need for metals to create bronze weapons, especially tin and copper, meant that the Scandinavians had to engage in long-distance trade. Access was required to Central Europe and, ultimately, to the trade centers of the eastern Mediterranean—the Greek world and the Near East.
  - C.** What did the Scandinavians have to trade? First and foremost were the products of the Arctic climate, including sealskins, furs, whalebone, and walrus ivory. Honey, wood, flax, and amber were also popular products for commerce. Finally, slaves, captured from the Scandinavians' neighbors, were also in high demand. By 1550, long-distance trade had spawned villages of fairly substantial size and enabled local chieftains to accumulate great wealth and power.
  - D.** Scandinavia was tied economically and, in some ways, culturally to the Mediterranean world and Western Europe through trade and, eventually, through political institutions and religion. During the Northern Bronze Age (1550–1100 B.C.), the Scandinavians adapted imports from these regions to their own context, creating a uniquely Scandinavian civilization that can be compared to the more successful and better known Bronze Age of Greece and the Near East.
  - E.** Populations increased and villages expanded, but agriculture did not change significantly from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age. Most agriculture was pursued through a slash-and-burn technique, which was used almost until 1100.
    - 1.** Despite the expansion of villages, Scandinavia remained a land of scattered settlements and farmsteads up until the end of the Viking Age.
    - 2.** The population shifted with relative frequency as a result of soil exhaustion.
- V.** Physical evidence suggests that the conception of the gods known to us from the Viking Age was already taking shape in the Bronze Age.
- A.** The most spectacular piece of evidence we have is a gilt-bronze chariot found in Denmark at Trundholm, dating to circa 1200 B.C. The chariot originally had a pair of horses, but only one survives. The iconography of it suggests that the chariot is the one described in the *Prose Edda* (which we shall discuss in a later lecture), in which the sun is pulled across the sky each day by two horses, Arvak and Alvsinn. The sun is being pursued by an enormous wolf that wants to swallow it and bring on Ragnarök, the end of days.
  - B.** Other representations in rock carvings and grave goods are also suggestive. Clearly, there are representations of a god associated with a hammer, giving rise to the primary god of the Viking Age, Thor, lord of the skies. Thor's goat-drawn cart is regarded as a symbol of sacred royalty among all the Germanic peoples.
  - C.** We also find representations of fertility gods, known later as the Vanir. These are the gods of prosperity and are associated with the boar.

- D. We have very little indication of the classic war god of the Viking Age, Odin. Odin did not acquire his importance until the Roman Age (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.), but he became the quintessential god of the Viking Age.
- E. Another aspect of religious life that can be detected in the Bronze Age is the importance of burials.
  - 1. Elite families deposited luxury goods into the burial sites of their members and, eventually, began to construct large barrows for burials of multiple generations.
  - 2. Families probably conducted certain rituals in veneration of their ancestors, a feature of Scandinavian worship that would hold through the Viking Age.
  - 3. This feature of Scandinavian life climaxed in the rich burials of the Vendel Age (4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries) in Sweden and the great ship burials of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries found in the Oslo area.

VI. Sometime after 1100, long-distance trade seemed to break down.

- A. Starting from about 1200, the great political orders of the Late Bronze Age, such as imperial Egypt and the Hittite Empire, collapsed, resulting in a general decline of organized, literate civilization in the Near East and a decline in markets and demand for the products of the Arctic. Repercussions of these collapses were felt across Central Europe and in Scandinavia.
- B. Nonetheless, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., trade began to revive as a result of the emergence of La Tène civilization in Central Europe, the Iron Age civilization of the Celts, which opened up a new chapter in Scandinavian history.

**Further Reading:**

Colin Renfrew. *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Herbert Schutz. *The Prehistory of Germanic Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the value and limits of archaeology in revealing societies before the advent of writing? In what ways can archaeology document material and social changes in early Scandinavia? What questions can archaeology not answer?
2. How important were innovations in technology and long-distance trade in the development of civilization in Scandinavia? What were the principal trade routes, and what were the prime goods exchanged? How could disruption of trade routes affect civilization in Scandinavia?

## Lecture Four

### Scandinavia in the Celtic and Roman Ages

**Scope:** Trade and prosperity returned to Scandinavia in the later Iron Age (450–50 B.C.) as Celtic merchants, craftsmen, and immigrants arrived in the lands of the Baltic Sea. The burgeoning towns (*oppida*) of Celtic La Tène civilization offered markets for Scandinavian forest products and the skins and ivory of the Arctic land. From the Celts came iron and shipbuilding technology, as well as better tools to extend the arable. Yet Scandinavia remained culturally distinct, with the Germanic language emerging in this era. Far more profound was the impact of imperial Rome. Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul (58–50 B.C.) disrupted the Celtic world, allowing Germanic-speaking peoples to migrate into Central Europe between the Rhine and Vistula rivers. The Roman historian Tacitus penned the earliest account of these Germans, whose gods and customs resembled those of Scandinavians in the Viking Age. Trade linked Scandinavia with the Roman cities of the Rhineland and Britain. The scale and range of Roman imports enriched all classes, foremost, petty monarchs who emerged with retinues of armed warriors (*comitatus*) by the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Roman civil war and barbarian invasion disrupted these links in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and the ultimate fall of Rome in the 5<sup>th</sup> century would open a new chapter in Scandinavian history.

### Outline

- I. This lecture deals with Scandinavia in the Celtic Age and the succeeding Roman Age, but we should keep in mind that these are only chronological references; although the ties were close, Scandinavia was never assimilated into either of these two civilizations.
- II. The Celtic civilization that had an important influence on Scandinavia was the La Tène civilization, which emerged about 450 B.C. with the Rhine as its heartland. This culture represented the climax of a series of Central European civilizations characterized by skill in metallurgy.
  - A. Celtic Europe, consisting of Gaul, southern Germany, and the Lowlands, also saw the emergence of towns, called by the Romans *oppida* (singular, *oppidum*). These were enclosures of several acres, with specialized areas for manufacturing and agricultural purposes. They were the urban basis for the success of Roman provincial civilization in Britain, Gaul, and the lands of the Danube starting in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and running to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.
  - B. These towns had enormous appetites for labor, luxury goods, and foodstuffs; thus, Scandinavia regained prominence as an area that could be tapped for raw materials and prestige objects.
  - C. Scandinavia prospered with the emergence of the Celtic La Tène civilization in Central Europe, as we see in its acquisition of expert metallurgy and iron work, and in the construction of carts and ships.
  - D. Celtic civilization also enriched and transformed the aesthetics and the arts of early Scandinavia in this period through prestige trade objects, such as the Gundestrup cauldron (c. 100 B.C.), a Celtic object found in Denmark depicting heads, marching warriors, a sacrificial scene, and gods that could easily be associated with Scandinavian divinities.
    1. The Scandinavian gods, or ancient Germanic gods, were, thus, enriched with the iconography and rituals of the Celtic world, a phenomenon that is common in many ancient religions.
    2. Tacitus, a Roman historian writing c. A.D. 100, mentions in his *Germania* that Danish tribes paraded the cult statue of the goddess Nerthus in a sacred cart, probably a ritual that came from the Celtic world.
- III. This influence did not mean that Scandinavia was part of the Celtic world. From around 450–500 B.C. on, distinctively Scandinavian developments also emerged.
  - A. For example, by 500 B.C., the early Germanic language was spoken. This language was quite distinct from Celtic, Latin, and Greek.
  - B. In their burial practices, Scandinavians adhered to ship imagery, never adopting carts in their burials.
  - C. Despite all the trade and activity with central Europe, Scandinavians never built towns, largely preferring scattered villages. This feature of early Germanic civilization lasted well into the Roman Age.

- D. The Romans saw a difference in religious practices between Celts and Germans; namely, the Scandinavians had no equivalent to the Druids, a priestly caste. Sacrificial rites in Scandinavia remained particularly Scandinavian. The Tollund man, excavated from a Danish bog, was probably strangled or hanged as a sacrifice to an early form of Odin.
- IV. This distinctive Scandinavian civilization was unexpectedly given a chance to expand by the Romans.
- A. From 58–49 B.C., Julius Caesar conquered Gaul and began the Roman conquest of Central Europe up the Danube; this conquest was completed by Caesar’s successor, Augustus. Within less than a generation, the Celtic world was shattered, the Celts had been incorporated into the Roman Empire, and most of Central Europe was left open for migration by Germanic peoples.
- B. With the Roman conquest of Gaul and the upper Danube, Germanic tribes spread from the Scandinavian heartland to the lands between the Rhine and the Vistula and north of the Danube. The Romans called this region *Germania*, meaning Central Europe and Scandinavia.
- V. Trade between the Celtic Age and the Roman Age increased dramatically.
- A. The Roman demand for goods was enormous. For example, 150,000 Roman soldiers were stationed along the Rhine. Scholars have now demonstrated that most of the cattle industry of western Germany and Denmark was devoted to feeding the Roman army on the Rhine.
- B. The Romans also had a tremendous need for labor, including slaves, day laborers, and auxiliaries, that is, warriors recruited into the auxiliary army. Large numbers of German tribes also moved to the region under Roman arrangements to settle as agriculturalists.
- C. The volume of imported goods from the Roman world into southern Scandinavia was extraordinary. The range of goods found in the Danish Isles and southern Sweden, including fine tableware, glass, and Roman ceramics, indicates that the material life of the upper classes had significantly changed with Roman contact. According to Tacitus, the Germans had also become accustomed to drinking wine and would “gamble their freedom” for fine imported vintages.
- D. Other items that traveled to Scandinavia, including superior weapons, were more alarming to the Romans. Our earliest chain mail, probably offerings to an early form of Tyr or Odin, was found in Danish bog deposits dating from A.D. 200–400. Other discoveries include finely wrought swords, weapons of choice for Roman Age Scandinavians.
- E. The trade goods coming into Scandinavia allowed consolidation of power around petty kings or dynasts.
1. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., Roman historians were confident that the Germans were disorganized, but from A.D. 100 on into the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., this was no longer the case.
  2. Trade enabled some warlords in Scandinavia and Central Europe to amass wealth and make themselves kings. Some of them kept retainers (*comitatus* in Latin), professional warriors. Tacitus’s description of these retainers is quite consistent with the description in Norse literature later on of the *berserkers*, that is, frenzied warriors inspired by Odin to fight for their lords.
  3. In turn, these warriors strengthened their fighting skills over time. Tacitus and later Roman authors describe the German soldiers forming a wedge (*cuneus*, “shield wall”), a dense infantry formation that could serve offensive or defensive purposes. In Norse legend, the wedge was a gift from Odin.
  4. By A.D. 260, in Central Europe, major confederations of Germans had emerged, including Franks, Saxons, Alemanni, and Goths.
- F. A warship from a burial at Nydam in Denmark (c. 350) and the impression of a ship from Sutton Hoo (c. 625), suggest another important benefit of Scandinavian contact with the Roman world: familiarity with the use of sails. The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus attests to the Germans’ use of sails in 4<sup>th</sup>-century raids.
1. Such vessels were important for launching Viking-style raids on the Roman Empire in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and for propelling the migration of the Anglo-Saxons from Denmark to Britain when the Roman Empire began to break up in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.
  2. Scholars have argued that enough Germanic-speaking peoples traveled from Denmark and northwestern Germany to Britain to linguistically and culturally change Britain into England.
  3. Further, the Goths, if they came from Sweden, probably crossed the Baltic, followed the amber routes, and moved into the Roman Empire, a voyage, again, enabled by improved shipbuilding.

- G.** Contact with the Roman world benefited Scandinavia enormously—through trade goods, the demographic safety valve offered by the Roman Empire, and the importation of weapons and ship technology.
1. These developments led to the emergence of petty kings served by retinues of warriors—confederations that were, in essence, the embryos of Viking civilization described in legends and sagas.
  2. The drawback to this contact was, of course, that the empire collapsed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and with it came the loss of the trade benefits. The succeeding centuries, from A.D. 400–600, would see a new chapter in the development of Scandinavian civilization.

**Further Reading:**

H. R. Ellis Davidson. *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988.

Herbert Schutz. *The Prehistory of Germanic Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. In what ways did trade with the Celtic world transform life in Scandinavia in the Iron Age? Why did this trade stimulate the emergence of a distinctly Germanic culture?
2. What was the impact of imperial Rome in shaping society in Scandinavia? How decisive was contact with Rome in changing political and military institutions? How important was trade for the prosperity of Scandinavia?

## Lecture Five

### The Age of Migrations

**Scope:** The migration of Germanic tribes into the western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century created a common Germanic culture centered on the lands around the North Sea. Angles and Jutes from Jutland joined Saxons to settle and transform Roman Britain into England. King Clovis made his Merovingian family and the Franks the dominant Germanic state in the former western Roman Empire. Protected by the Merovingian king, the Frisians dwelling on the lower Rhine developed trade between Scandinavia and Western Europe. Scandinavians emulated the ethos and material culture of Merovingian Gaul, as attested by rich grave goods found in Denmark and Sweden. Scandinavians also celebrated as their own the legendary heroes of the *Volsung* cycle, who were based on historical Gothic, Burgundian, and Frankish figures. From the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, these bonds were loosed as Anglo-Saxons and Franks embraced Christianity. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Scandinavian language underwent changes in morphology and syntax so that a distinct Norse tongue rapidly emerged. By 790, the Scandinavians of the Viking Age had arrived.

### Outline

- I. This lecture deals with three important developments during the period A.D. 400–600, an era often known as the Age of Migration, reflecting the fact that many Germanic tribes from Scandinavia and what is now West Germany migrated into the former Roman Empire.
  - A. The spread of Germanic civilization into the former Roman Empire had major consequences for the Scandinavian heartland and will be the first development discussed in this lecture.
  - B. We shall then examine the bonds that linked the Scandinavian homeland with the Germanic societies that were now transplanted to the Roman world. These ties formed part of a general Germanic culture (or *koine*) and led to the transmission of legendary material from the Germanic kinsmen of the Scandinavians back to Scandinavia. As we will see, both groups of Germanic people shared a martial ethos and a set of common values that would become quintessentially Scandinavian in the Viking Age.
  - C. In the third part of this lecture, we shall look at how this common Germanic culture began to split in different directions after A.D. 600, and how changes in Scandinavia removed the Scandinavians from their German kinsmen. By 790–800, the Germanic peoples of Western Europe had evolved into Christian Europeans, while the Scandinavians had evolved into a distinct Germanic pagan culture.
- II. We begin with some of the important ethnic changes in the political and linguistic landscape of northwestern Europe.
  - A. In the Age of Migrations, three major groups removed themselves from the Scandinavian heartland into the former Roman world.
    1. The first of these groups included the Angles and Jutes from Jutland and the Saxons, who migrated to England. Large numbers of Saxons also settled along the northern shores of France, the future area of Normandy.
    2. These Germanic-speaking people in England were very conscious of their Scandinavian origins, as we see expressed in the epic *Beowulf*. The epic was composed in England around 675–700 by a cleric, a man of noble class, in Germanic alliterative verse, yet it tells of the Goths of southern Scandinavia. The story was brought to England by settlers from Scandinavia and gives us a great deal of detail about rulers in the 6<sup>th</sup> century from parts of Norway and the Danish kingdom.
    3. These connections are also borne out by archaeology, particularly the Sutton Hoo treasure, which is quite similar to contemporary burials in Sweden.
  - B. Likewise, the ties were very close between Scandinavia and the Germanic people who moved into Gaul, primarily the Franks.
    1. The Frankish kings under Clovis (r. 486–511) were nominally Christian, but they remained similar in their habits to their contemporaries in Scandinavia. The political assassinations perpetrated by these Frankish kings, as described by Gregory of Tours, seem remarkably similar to actions depicted in *Beowulf* or the *Volsung* sagas.

2. The Franks were the most successful people in Western Europe; they gave political unity to the former western empire and renewed trade connections with the Scandinavians. Archaeological finds suggest that Swedish and Danish monarchs, for example, coveted the material culture of their Frankish contemporaries.
- C. The Frisians, from the islands along the shores of Holland and Germany, moved into sections of the Low Countries and along the lower Rhine.
1. The Frisians were the premier merchants, developing the trade networks between Western Europe and Scandinavia.
  2. Their primary market town was Dorestad, which emerged around 675 and served as the nexus of the trade routes going into Jutland and southern Sweden. Later, the Vikings would follow these trade routes in reverse.
- D. Geographically distant but linguistically close to the Scandinavians were the Goths, who migrated from Sweden and ended up in the Mediterranean world in Spain and Italy.
1. Until the Goths' departure to the Mediterranean West in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, most of Eastern Europe was under nominal Gothic control or, later, under the Huns, particularly Attila (r. 433–452). Scandinavia was thus tied to Eastern Europe through various trade routes.
  2. Some Goths returned to the Scandinavian world later in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as attested by large numbers of Roman gold coins found in Sweden.
- III. Literary traditions document Scandinavia's role in a much wider Germanic world. Most of our literary sources are prose sagas, based on earlier alliterative verse, preserved for us in manuscripts from Iceland.
- A. Early Germanic poetry is based on a qualitative verse form. In contrast, classical Greek poetry was, essentially, a mathematical equation, in which the number of short syllables and the number of long syllables must be equivalent. In Germanic poetry, the key is not the number of syllables in a verse but the number of stressed syllables.
- B. This type of composition is for oral recitation, not written communication. Runic inscriptions, which will be discussed in a later lecture, were used for communication with the gods, rather than for composing poetry.
- C. We find common features of these cultures in Germanic verse: Rulers maintained great halls, which also functioned as the ceremonial and religious centers of the communities. During the long winters, at social gatherings in the great halls, poets recited stories, running 300–500 lines long, for entertainment.
- D. Significantly during this period of migration, the Scandinavians shared in the same oral poetry as their kinsmen in other regions. Remarkably, the first heroes in Scandinavian poetry, who were based on historical figures, were not Scandinavians; rather, they were Germanic heroes of those various peoples who had moved into the Roman world.
1. These heroes came from a Gothic tradition of the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, as well as from traditions of the Franks and Burgundians. This poetry also celebrated Attila the Hun, known as Atli in Norse.
  2. The legends tell us nothing of the Roman world; rather, they focus on great heroes and deeds linked to the ancient gods and mythological traditions.
  3. One outgrowth of this poetic tradition was the cycle of three poems from which any poet could recite episodes. The most well-known of these cycles concerned the Burgundian king Gunnar, his half-brother Högni, and their sister Gudrun, historical figures destroyed by the Huns in 437.
  4. In Norse and Germanic legend, these figures lived on as heroes of the Rhineland and became associated with the cursed treasure of the Niflungs. Gunnar and Högni were lured to the great hall of Attila the Hun, where they were killed in a heroic battle. Their deaths were avenged by Gudrun, who had been reluctantly married off to Atli but kills him and sets fire to the hall.
  5. This independent cycle was also linked to a cycle of Frankish heroes, which included the famous couple Sigurd and Brynhild, again based on historical figures of the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> century.
  6. In the Norse tradition, Sigurd won Brynhild after he had slain the dragon Fafnir. In the Scandinavian version, the stories of Gunnar and Sigurd are merged; Sigurd marries Gudrun, Gunnar's sister, changing the action of the story. The primary figures become the two queens, Brynhild and Gudrun, with Brynhild arranging for the death of Sigurd and the story ending with the destruction of the hall of Atli.

7. This tradition became the basis of the *Volsung* cycle and served as grist for the mill of new legends told about Scandinavian heroes later in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the process, the West Germanic heroes became quintessentially Scandinavian.
- E. Indeed, by 625, the West Germanic kinsmen of the Scandinavians had converted to Christianity and had begun to forget their own stories. Between 650–700, new Christian cultures emerged in England, in the Frankish world, and in Frisia, which led to a parting of the ways between the Scandinavian heartland and the new states in the former Roman Empire.
- IV. Starting around 700, the Scandinavian language underwent a major morphological change, becoming unintelligible to the West Germanic peoples by about 800.
- A. The general term for this morphological change is *syncope*, which describes a shortening of words in Scandinavian. We see this readily in the names of heroes in *Beowulf* and their Scandinavian equivalents. For example, Hrothgar, the host of Beowulf, is rendered Hróarr in Old Norse.
  - B. We look at another illustration of this change, a runic inscription on one of the gold horns from Gallehus in Denmark (c. 400). The inscription is in a West Germanic dialect, probably close to English, that contains 13 syllables. When rendered in Norse of about A.D. 800, the same inscription has been reduced to 8 syllables.
  - C. The Scandinavian languages tended to drop final consonants, so that the German word *fahren* (“to carry,” “to bear”) became simply *fara*.
  - D. Vowel sounds also experienced significant change. We see this in the example of the cognates for Old English *scyld* and Norse *skjöldr*, “shield.”
  - E. This change in the Norse language is indicative of many other cultural changes that would redefine the Scandinavian identity by A.D. 800 as it evolved into the identity of the Viking Age.

**Further Reading:**

R. Hodges and W. Bowden. *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.  
 Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did trade and the celebration of common Germanic heroes foster bonds between Scandinavians and their Germanic kin in Gaul and Britain in 400–650? Why did Scandinavians admire the civilization of Frankish Gaul?
2. How did Christianity transform the Franks, Frisians, and Anglo-Saxons into Europeans between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries? How did these developments separate Scandinavians from their Germanic kinsmen?

## Lecture Six

### The Norse Gods

**Scope:** Scandinavians in the Viking Age were defined by their worship of the ancient Germanic gods, who are known from classical sources and archaeology. Devotion to ancestral gods was linked with respect to the graves of ancestors. The Eddaic poems composed in the Viking Age and the *Prose Edda*, penned by the witty Snorri Sturluson (1179–1242), preserve a remarkable vision of the Norse gods. The cosmos was conceived as distant worlds resting in the world tree, Yggdrasil. Asgard, citadel of the gods, and Midgarth, the land of mortals, were defended by good-natured Thor, frightful Odin, and mischievous Loki against giants and monsters. Creation itself was provisional, for the gods were destined to destruction in the final combat of Ragnarök. Yet the gods reflected the values and conditions of the Viking Age, and they rewarded and protected those who performed the ancient rites. Foremost, Odin, lord of poetry and ecstasy in battle, inspired the heroes of legend and the sea kings of the Viking Age. Thor, lord of the skies, was invoked at sea, and even trickster Loki reflected the Norse appreciation for wit and deceit. Worship of the gods united Scandinavians, divided them from their Christian neighbors, and inspired the martial ethos and daring of the Viking Age.

### Outline

- I. As mentioned in the last lecture, one of the great common bonds among the Scandinavians was their devotion to the ancient Germanic gods.
  - A. This lecture will stress the literary images of these gods that have come down to us in Norse poetry and saga.
  - B. We shall also examine archaeological and classical sources, both indicating that these divinities were worshiped for quite some time in Scandinavia.
    1. The Germanic gods were closely associated with veneration of the ancestors, which is well represented in burial practices.
    2. We have found both symbolic ship burials, containing model ships or stones arranged in the pattern of a ship, and full ship burials, reserved for the deceased of great rank. Descriptions of these ship burials include one from *Beowulf* and one dating from 921–922 by an Arab observer, Ibn Fadlan.
    3. The gods were associated with important social customs and perpetuation of family traditions, and the adherence to worship of the ancient gods was one of the hallmarks of Scandinavian civilization in the Viking Age.
- II. Literary traditions report much about these ancient Germanic gods.
  - A. Some of these literary sources have come under considerable question in recent years because they date from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, much later than the original tales would have been told. Nonetheless, without the literary sources, we would be unable to explain much of our archaeological evidence.
  - B. Our two main sources for the myths of the Norse gods are the *Poetic Edda*, a collection produced in Iceland that contains some poems dating back to oral traditions of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the *Prose Edda* (c. 1220), a handbook composed by Snorri Sturluson and based on Eddaic poems and other accounts now lost.
  - C. The gods depicted in these traditions are marvelously witty and creative and often serve as foils to human figures. Mythology reveals a great deal about the values of Scandinavian paganism, its importance in motivating society, and its close links to the heroic ethos, associated especially with the cult of Odin, Norse god of war.
- III. The *Prose Edda* is one of the literary masterpieces produced in the aftermath of the Viking Age. It was written in three parts as a means of instructing aspiring Icelandic poets in using ancient Norse mythology and poetic techniques to gain patronage at court.
  - A. The author, Snorri, cleverly recasts the Norse gods as “heroes of old” who came to be viewed as gods by later generations. In Anglo-Saxon England, in Frankish Gaul, among the Frisians of the Low Countries,

and in Saxony in West Germany, the ancient Germanic gods were expunged from the records by later Christians, but they are preserved in Scandinavia because of Snorri's literary conceit.

- B. Snorri poses most of the mythological material in the form of a dialogue conducted by a disguised king of Sweden and three mysterious figures. The king is Glyfi, but he is disguised as Gangleri ("wanderer"), and he is being instructed about the lore of old.
  - C. In this account comes a coherent view of the Scandinavian cosmology in the Viking Age. Snorri's prose account is closely based on the first poem in the *Poetic Edda*, the *Voluspa*. The earlier poem is cast as the prophecy of a *völva* ("prophetess") describing the creation of the world, the progress of the gods, and ultimately, the day of destruction, Ragnarök.
  - D. In the *Voluspa*, the *völva* sings of creation, which is conceived as an ice-bound chasm. There, a giant dwelled, Ymir, fed by a primeval cow. By licking the ice blocks, the cow uncovered the imprisoned god Buri, whose later offspring include the three creator gods, Odin, Vili, and Ve. These three gods slay Ymir and use his body to create the world.
    - 1. The world that is created is conceived as a huge, sacred tree, Yggdrasil, containing worlds in its branches. This conception corresponds well with the reality of Scandinavia in the Viking Age, divided, as it was, among various forests. These worlds included Midgarth, the middle world of the mortals; Asgard, where the gods dwelled; and Alfheim, home of the elves. The distances between these worlds are vast.
    - 2. The gods create humanity by breathing life into Askr and Embla, formless creatures who represent primeval trees.
    - 3. In this cosmology, the deceased return to great halls, such as Valhalla, the hall of Odin. One's station in the afterlife depends on one's activities in life. For example, women who die in childbearing, a noble death, go to the hall of Frigg, the wife of Odin. Those who die of old age or sickness were seen as despised and are consigned to the lower world of Niflheim, presided over by Hel, daughter of the trickster god Loki.
    - 4. The sacred tree that embodied all these worlds was the centerpiece of the mythology and of many Germanic rituals. We are told that most great halls were built around a sacred tree. The tree is constantly under attack by dragons and serpents, and it constantly renews itself. The tree has three great roots, where the representations of destiny reside, and a wisdom well, from which Odin drinks. Odin actually hangs himself from the world tree for nine days as a sacrifice to release the power of the runes.
    - 5. At some point, the forces of chaos are expected to be released and will bring about the day of destruction, known as Ragnarök. Odin's task is to populate Valhalla with great warriors for the final battle.
- IV. These ancient Germanic gods probably date from the Bronze Age and were articulated in the Celtic and Roman periods. As they come down to us in the Viking Age, they are a very different set of divine forces than any Christian would recognize.
- A. The supreme god was Odin, known as Wotan in German or Woden in English. He grew in importance from earlier times to become the lord of warriors and poets in the Viking Age. He is associated with ecstasy in all its aspects. He inspires the berserkers, as well as poets, because poetry was an ecstatic state in which great deeds were celebrated.
    - 1. Odin was also driven to attain wisdom. He sought the power of the runes, an alphabet dating back to about 200 B.C., devised from north Italic scripts, that was used to show possession of weapons or jewelry and had magical powers. Casting of runes was a powerful form of prophecy and magic that gave one victory in battle and enabled communication with the gods.
    - 2. Odin is remembered in the myths as handing out swords and horses to his warriors, but one did not take service with Odin lightly. Although he had great power, Odin was also jealous of his followers and would collect them at the appropriate time so that they could populate Valhalla for the final battle.
  - B. Other powerful gods of the Viking Age included Thor, regarded as the son of Odin. Thor is a red-haired, barrel-chested, good-natured god, quick to arouse to wrath but just as quick to appease. He rides across the sky in his goat-drawn chariot, hurling his primitive hammer.

1. Thor is, in some ways, a parody of Odin. The many myths told about Thor reflect the witty side of Scandinavian storytelling, and his exploits in battling the giants who threaten to bring on chaos are famous.
  2. Thor is matched up with one of the most delightful of all mythological figures, the trickster god Loki. Loki often accompanies Thor on various travels and acts as Thor's clever foil.
  3. Thor is associated with the skies and with sailing conditions and was often invoked by Scandinavians against the Christian God.
  4. Thor is also known for his attempts to defeat the Midgarth serpent who encircled the world. The myths of Thor, as well as others, are depicted in artwork, both in Scandinavia and the British Isles.
- C. Finally, the important divinities of the Vanir, Njord and his son and daughter, Frey and Freya ("lord" and "lady"), were associated with fertility, prosperity, and veneration of the ancestors.
- V. In comparison to other pagan cults, that of the Scandinavians in the Viking Age did not have the institutional organization that we associate with Greco-Roman paganism or Christianity.
- A. Very few temples have been excavated. Most rites seem to have been held in the open air. The great halls of kings and princes functioned as religious centers, particularly in the spring before the sailing and campaigning season.
  - B. No priestly caste is discernible in the Scandinavian traditions. Prophetesses were dedicated to Odin and Freya and were able to communicate with the other world but were not part of a centralized hierarchy.
  - C. Individual cults and numerous divinities were in evidence, but again, we don't see the institutionalized religion that we associate with medieval Christianity.
  - D. Nonetheless, in the face-to-face society of Scandinavia, these gods were well known. The morality and religious rites were understood by everyone; the religion was community and family oriented.
  - E. Veneration of the ancestors was an important obligation of all Scandinavians. Even the lower classes of society returned to the barrows and celebrated festivals in memory of their ancestors. Not properly propitiated, these ancestors could physically return to walk the earth and perform misdeeds.
  - F. The Germanic gods had been worshiped for centuries. On the eve of the Viking Age, they served as one of the key cultural values that distinguished the Scandinavians from other peoples of the world.

**Further Reading:**

H. R. Ellis Davidson. *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988.

Snorri Sturluson. *The Prose Edda*. Translated by A. Faulkes. London: J. M. Dent, 1987.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How much does the vision of the gods reported in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson correspond with the belief and rites of the Viking Age? Why did Icelanders preserve the memory of the old gods?
2. What features of Scandinavian paganism accounted for vitality of the cults in the face of Christian proselytizing between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries? How did successes of the Viking Age confirm Scandinavians' belief in the power of their gods?

## Lecture Seven

### Runes, Poetry, and Visual Arts

**Scope:** In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Scandinavians articulated their Germanic cultural traditions in poetry and visual arts into a distinctly Norse style. The Germanic runes were simplified as the *Short Futhark* of 16 letters and employed for communication with the gods. Scandinavian innovations in metalwork and woodcarving resulted in a succession of imaginative styles that contributed to later Christian art. Above all, Scandinavian poets adapted the alliterative, stressed epic verse common to all Germanic peoples into new meters well suited for the syncopated Norse language. Poets recited the ancient myths and legends orally, using formulaic language and relying on anticipation over surprise. The *Eddaic* poems, composed in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, gave personality to the Norse gods, and Norse poets recast the legendary heroes of the Age of the Migrations into quintessential Scandinavian heroes. While their kinsmen in England and the Frankish world forgot the old heroes, the Norse celebrated and embraced them as worthy of emulation by warriors of the Viking Age.

### Outline

- I. This lecture follows up on some of the themes discussed in the evolution of a distinct Scandinavian civilization during the Age of Migrations, particularly concentrating on the runes and decorative arts. We shall conclude by discussing the importance of poetry, how the techniques of oral composition functioned, and how the Scandinavians expanded on the basic Germanic verse. These three topics are all avenues for understanding how the Scandinavian society of the Viking Age emerged.
- II. The runes were an alphabetic system in two versions. The first of these was the *Long Futhark*, consisting of 24 letters, and the second was the *Short Futhark*, with 16 letters.
  - A. The runes were devised from a north Italic alphabet that had been transmitted north of the Alps to the Celtic peoples, who in turn, had carried it to Scandinavia somewhere between 200–100 B.C. The earliest surviving inscriptions probably date from A.D. 200–300.
  - B. The runic letters were never applied to the writing of documentary information; they did not lead to a literate society. As mentioned in an earlier lecture, most of the poetry that comes down to us from Icelandic manuscripts is based on oral poetry. Further, continuous prose narratives, such as legal documents or historical records, are not in evidence in Scandinavian civilization.
  - C. Nonetheless, the runes were extremely important as a method of communicating with the gods. The runes are best seen as a magical version of drawing.
  - D. The runes that survive are usually found on objects, such as weapons or jewelry, and have two features: First, they denote ownership, and second, they seem to have mathematical qualities, each letter representing a number or a magical power to augment the power of the inscribed object.
  - E. Runes were also used to cast magical spells, such as to protect one from poison, as evidenced in the *Volsung* saga.
  - F. The *völva*, a prophetess dedicated to the goddess Freya, cast the runes in a ceremony to foretell the future. This ceremony is reported by Julius Caesar. Often, runes were cast to determine who among a group of prisoners would be sacrificed to Odin by hanging.
  - G. Again, as a form of drawing, the runes were also used in commemoration of the dead. Large numbers of rune stones were erected in central Sweden in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries to honor warriors and merchant princes.
    1. One example shows episodes from the *Volsung* saga, in which the runic inscription is carved into a depiction of Fafnir the dragon.
    2. The rune stones are often dated based on the decorative motifs, particularly the various types of animal designs, that are also found on woodcarving and jewelry.

- III.** The Scandinavians were heirs to an ancient tradition of decorative arts that were common among all Germanic peoples.
- A.** The animal style and geometric techniques on distinctly English objects come from the Sutton Hoo treasure, including jewelry, a helmet, and shield. These objects show a style close to the Vendel style in Sweden, characterized by elaborate depictions of fantastic animals.
  - B.** The genius of artistic traditions in the Germanic world is found on personal ornamentation. We can trace the development of these ornamental styles very easily, starting from the Vendel Age (400–600) and running into the early Christian period.
  - C.** Starting c. A.D. 500–1200, Scandinavian woodworkers, jewelers, and rune masters devised an exquisite succession of stylistic designs.
    - 1.** One of the earliest of these is the Borre style (c. 825–975), characterized by stocky and thick designs, close to the Germanic styles found in Sutton Hoo, or 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic arts.
    - 2.** From this style, more fantastic and sinuous figures evolved, especially seen in the Mammen style (c. 975–1050).
    - 3.** Scandinavians also borrowed from Western European art; for example, we see floral designs from Carolingian art and geometric patterns from Islamic art.
  - D.** The climax of the native Scandinavian style can be seen, surprisingly, on door panels of Christian churches of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such panels show episodes from ancient myths, particularly the *Volsung* saga, depicted in the almost Baroque Urnes style (c. 980–1200).
  - E.** Scandinavian society did not have freestanding masonry architecture, nor did the society have a tradition of sculpture. The Scandinavians' chief building material was wood, also used for woodcarving, but much of the art crafted from wood does not survive. For this reason, decorative arts expressed the Scandinavian identity.
  - F.** There are also numerous references to tapestries and the weaving of runes in tapestries.
  - G.** These decorative arts repeated the myths and legends of poetry, emphasizing the deeds of heroes, and were important ways of marking rank in Viking society. As the Viking Age progressed, the number of jewelry styles proliferated and the amount of jewelry buried in graves increased significantly. The Vikings identified themselves by their personal ornamentation, which is where their artistic genius lay.
    - 1.** The visual arts generally correspond fairly well to what we are told in the myths and legends. For example, we often see Thor fishing for the Midgarth serpent on various pieces of jewelry and rune stones.
    - 2.** Perhaps the most famous example of this correspondence is found on some cult statuettes that have come down to us depicting Thor and his hammer, among other subjects.
    - 3.** In the *Laxdaela* saga (c. 1240), Olaf the Peacock commissioned the finest craftsmen to decorate his hall with woodcarvings depicting the stories of old. The figures were so skillfully carved that they seemed to come alive and dance when illuminated by the fires in the hearths. Hence, these decorative arts were interwoven with the religious beliefs and the daily lives of the Scandinavians.
- IV.** Finally, we turn to the poetry and its power in transmitting legendary figures from the West Germanic peoples to the Scandinavians, attesting to the common Germanic culture.
- A.** This poetic tradition is based on oral poetry devised for recitation. Keep in mind that reciting oral poetry is not a task of memorization. Instead, poets were trained to understand how meters worked.
    - 1.** In Germanic meter, the technique was based on a half-line of four or five syllables with two stressed syllables, followed by another half-line with at least one stressed syllable.
    - 2.** The line was tied together by the alliteration of the stressed syllables, and the half-lines could be arranged in various patterns.
  - B.** Because the poetry was less concerned with the number of syllables than with the number of stressed syllables, it closely followed the cadence of spoken language. Most poets learned the ability to think in half-lines and composed with a harp, enabling them to keep time.
  - C.** Poets had other techniques to help them in recitations, such as the use of formulas and *kennings*, that is, metaphorical phrases worked out to immediately identify mythological figures and situations.

- D. Hence, as poets composed, they were aided by both a structure of verse that followed the cadence of the language and formulaic phrases. The stories they recited were well known, although each composition was independent. The art thus created can be compared to the very structured form of a Bach fugue, which also allows for infinite variation.
- E. These poetic recitations were adaptable to the audience and the setting in which they were performed and could encompass any number of digressions and allusions.
- F. Again, the knowledge behind the poetic recitations, taken in conjunction with what we know of the decorative arts and the runes, serves as a powerful representation of the bonds of society. Poetry was the main means of communicating and educating within the Viking world. The launching of the Viking raids in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries was a stimulus for a new wave of poetry, for improvisation and innovation on traditional meters, and for incorporating new heroes of the present with the memories of the past.

**Further Reading:**

Brigit Sawyer. *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

David M. Wilson and Ole Kindt-Jensen. *Viking Art*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did Scandinavians from the 8<sup>th</sup> century on adapt their poetry and visual arts into distinctly new forms? How did these arts and aesthetics define the Scandinavians in the Viking Age?
2. What were the various purposes of the runes? Why did Scandinavians not employ the runes for the composition of poetry or the recording of documents?

## Lecture Eight

### Legendary Kings and Heroes

**Scope:** In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, noble kings, served by valiant berserkers, ruled from great halls and inspired poems celebrating the earliest Scandinavian heroes. The Skjöldung kings, favored by Odin, ruled from the hall at Hleidr (OE: Hereot) on the Danish island of Sjaelland. At Uppsala in central Sweden, the Yngling kings reigned. The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* celebrated the deeds of this Gautish warrior performed in the service of the Danish king Hrothgar, or in Norse, Hroar. Icelandic poets and saga writers, too, recalled these great figures, but they recounted the deeds of the generation after Beowulf (who was not remembered in the Norse tradition). King Hrolf Kraki, who gathered to Hleidr the greatest of northern heroes, rode to Uppsala and humiliated his rival, Adils. These traditions of valorous lords and their devoted warriors dedicated to Odin emphasized reckless courage that gave Scandinavian warriors the will to win or to accept a heroic death. Viking sea kings would later set forth in their longships with an ecstatic joy in battle that stunned their Christian foes. Honor, riches, emulation of the ancient heroes, and entrance into Valhalla inspired Viking warriors for the next three centuries to prevail over their far more numerous and better armed opponents.

### Outline

- I. This lecture concludes our discussion of the cultural and religious background of Scandinavia in the Viking Age, concentrating on the earliest heroes of Scandinavia, celebrated in legend and poetry, those associated with the later kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden. This lecture is an important transition into the Viking Age for several reasons.
  - A. The heroes we will discuss date from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., and in many ways, they were not only characters to emulate but also historical figures, kings who ruled in what later came to be Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Thus, they had a dual influence on the later Viking Age.
  - B. These heroes served as models for later kings of Scandinavia, including the Skjöldung kings, who were associated with the great hall at Hleidr (OE: Hereot) on the island of Sjaelland; the Yngling kings in central Sweden at Uppsala; and the Gautar kings (OE: Geats) in what would become the basis of the kingdom of Norway.
  - C. These legends give us another version of the Scandinavian heroic ethos, as well as window into some of the political geography that was beginning to take shape in Scandinavia on the eve of the Viking Age.
- II. How do we know about these legendary figures of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries who came to be regarded as the first kings of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway?
  - A. One of our sources is the Old English epic *Beowulf* (c. 675–700), which harkens back to the techniques of oral poetry but was created as a work of written literature. It was written as a single epic, combining three or four stories and probably using Vergil's *Aeneid* as its model. *Beowulf* is set in pagan Scandinavia, but it is also imbued with Christian ideas.
    1. The poem reflects events in Scandinavia more faithfully, in some ways, than the later Norse tradition. The Anglo-Saxon settlers who carried these stories to England came from a Scandinavia that had not yet coalesced into anything that looked remotely like the kingdoms of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark; therefore, they more accurately remembered the homeland of Beowulf and his Geats.
    2. These settlers also remembered that the Swedes dwelled around Uppsala and that much of what is now Sweden was divided into independent tribes. There was great distance separating the Swedes from the Danes, who were primarily located on the island of Sjaelland.
  - B. In contrast, the later Norse sources usually include quotations from earlier poems encapsulated in narrative prose sagas. The most famous of these is the saga of the Danish king Hrolf Kraki (c. 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), which discusses the same figures that are seen in *Beowulf*, but where *Beowulf* deals with figures from the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the saga of Hrolf Kraki concentrates on the generation after *Beowulf*.
  - C. A number of chronicles and legendary histories have also come down to us, written in Latin by Danish authors. The most important of these was penned by Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150–1216), a Danish cleric writing in the age of the Christian king Valdemar I (r. 1157–1182).

- D. Again, the Norse accounts were written without an understanding of the fragmented political geography that must have existed before the Viking Age and in the time of *Beowulf*. These accounts have already cast the heroes of these sagas into the classic three kingdoms.
- III. The realm of *Beowulf*, along the western shores of Sweden today, is borne out in the archaeology as a royal center, although Beowulf himself is not remembered in the Norse tradition. (Beowulf may be represented as Bothvar Bjarki, a Norwegian berserker at the court of Hrolf Kraki who fights in the form of a great bear.)
- A. Already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century on the island of Sjaelland, both the Anglo-Saxon and the Norse sources agree, there was a powerful kingdom, ruled from the great hall of Hleidr (OE: Hereot). At the time, the legendary kings ruling there, the Skjöldung (“kings of the shield”), traced their descent to an eponymous hero who was said to be descended from Odin. These Danish rulers had very little control outside of the main island of Sjaelland.
- B. Their contemporaries and rivals were the Yngling kings of Sweden, who claimed descent from the god Frey and were remembered in the epics as great opponents. Again, archaeology verifies the fact that there were dense populations around the Uppsala Lake Mälaren area, on the island of Sjaelland, and in the apparent heartland of *Beowulf*. These three regions would become the nucleus for the later Scandinavian kingdoms.
- IV. The action of *Beowulf* is concentrated on a hero who travels to Denmark to rid the hall Hereot of the horrid creature Grendel.
- A. Beowulf fights Grendel and Grendel’s mother in tremendous combats, then returns to rule over his kingdom after his lord is killed. Ultimately, Beowulf dies fighting a dragon that seems to come straight out of Germanic mythology. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, this story is a fantastic legend embodying creatures and beasts from a primeval past.
- B. In the Norse tradition, the legends concentrate on human action and reveal conflicts between personalities. The Norse writers of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, in other words, saw these earlier kingdoms as the prototypes of the kingdoms of their own day.
- V. Hrolf Kraki, without a doubt, must have been a remarkable figure. He probably lived sometime between A.D. 550 and A.D. 575 and was remembered in the tradition as one of the favorites of Odin.
- A. Hrolf’s birth was the result of an incestuous union between his father, a Viking chief named Helgi, and Helgi’s daughter, Yrsa.
- B. Hrolf himself is the epitome of a king of the Age of Migrations and of the Viking Age. By his charisma and because of his favor from Odin, he collects around him the greatest heroes of the northland. Hrolf presides over his hall in much the same way that Odin presides over Valhalla.
- C. As a result, numerous heroes and figures, many of them probably unrelated to Hrolf or his time period, are incorporated into this Danish legend and become part of Hrolf’s group of retainers. In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and in the Viking Age, these men were probably known as berserkers, although this perspective changed in the later Christian accounts of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- D. Hrolf clashed with his contemporary in Sweden, Adils, who eventually married Hrolf’s mother/sister. In the legend, Hrolf made a famous ride to challenge the king at Uppsala, a journey through the forests of Sweden that would have taken a month to six weeks.
1. Along the way, Hrolf meets Odin, disguised as the farmer Hrani, who tests Hrolf’s warriors. Ultimately, all the warriors fail except for Hrolf’s 12 companions, so all the rest are sent back to Denmark. When Hrolf arrives at Uppsala, he is accompanied only by these 12 champions.
  2. Hrolf and his men take over the hall at Uppsala, slaying the Swedish warriors who are waiting to trap them. The Swedish king Adils flees, and Hrolf is established as the greater king.
  3. Eventually, Adils raises an army and returns, and Hrolf and his companions ride off. In the course of their escape, they throw the gold that they have captured across the fields of Uppsala. Of course, the Swedes dismount and fight over the gold, and the Danes gallop away.
- E. The story may seem odd to us, but ultimately, it tells of a test of valor and honor. The clash was not about territory but about who was the greater king. A great king was a man who attracted to himself great warriors and showed an example of generosity to those warriors. In the Age of Migration, this ability was politically important; kingship was acquired through personal reputation and charisma.

F. This same world is captured vividly in *Beowulf* in the boasting that takes place during the feasts at the great halls. Oaths were sworn on rings associated with Odin, and those who made these boasts had to deliver. These traditions were very powerful, and when we look at the legends of Beowulf and Hrolf Kraki, we see the way in which politics was played out.

VI. What was the importance of these legendary figures in the Viking Age?

- A. To some extent, they were added to the great hall of heroes going back to the Volsungs. They also reveal an important point that is now being debated among scholars.
- B. Revisionist scholars have argued that the impact of the Vikings was greatly exaggerated: They were essentially pirates and were marginal to the development of Western Europe. These same scholars have noted that Western Europeans in Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Europe were hardly models of Christian piety. In fact, the Christian warrior caste was also brutal.
- C. But the Scandinavians who launched out on raids several generations later than the epics we have been discussing were not burdened with any notion of a “just war.” The Western Europeans were not prepared to face the Scandinavians, who saw themselves as the emulators of their great heroes of the past. The Scandinavians knew that in battle, victory goes to those who have the will and determination to prevail, enabling them, as we shall see, to sweep aside more numerous and better armed opponents.

**Further Reading:**

Turville-Petre, G. *The Heroic Age of Scandinavia*. London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1951.

*The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. Translated by J. Byock. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How do the Old English epic *Beowulf* and the Norse sagas about legendary figures associated with the Skjöldung kings of Denmark reflect conditions in Scandinavia during the Age of Migrations (400–600)? How accurate are the depictions of social and religious practices?
2. How important was honor in motivating warriors to serve their lord? Why was Hrolf Kraki remembered as a great lord?
3. Why would the heroes of this legendary past exercise such an influence on the imagination of later Scandinavians in the Viking Age? Why would later Christian Scandinavians also regard these heroes as worthy of emulation?

## Lecture Nine

### A Revolution in Shipbuilding

**Scope:** At the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Scandinavians achieved breakthroughs in ship design and the rigging of the sails that enabled them to perfect warships and ocean-going cargo vessels (*knarr*). For the next three centuries, Viking ships dominated the seas and rivers of Europe. The ship recovered at Nydam (c. A.D. 350–400) indicates that Scandinavians had mastered *clinker* construction and, perhaps, had experimented with sails. Shortly after 750, Norse shipwrights learned to lay down ships based on a keel, with a *keelson* to carry a tall mast. These vessels combined flexibility with strength, allowing Viking ships to ride the waves, rather than battle them. Given their low draught, Viking ships could be beached on sandy shores or sail up the rivers of Europe. Hence, Viking fleets enjoyed strategic mobility, while their cargo ships, capable of conveying 50 tonnes, transported settlers and livestock across the Atlantic Ocean. Under sail, warships recovered at Gokstad in Norway (c. 900–905) and at Skuldelev near Roskilde (c. 975–1050) could attain maximum speeds of 12 knots. The performance of these ships can be demonstrated by the fleet of 120 longships under Ragnar Lodbrok that sailed from Denmark to capture Paris on March 28, 845, covering more than 1,000 miles within a month and defeating a Frankish army en route. No medieval army could counter the speed or daring of Vikings in their longships.

### Outline

- I. This lecture describes developments in Scandinavian shipbuilding from prehistoric times up to end of the Viking Age, concentrating on three essential issues. Without certain breakthroughs in shipbuilding that were achieved at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and certain innovations that occurred in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Viking Age, that is, the Scandinavian domination of the waters of Northern Europe from 790–1100, would have been impossible.
  - A. The first topic is the evolution of shipbuilding, including why the Scandinavians were able to achieve these breakthroughs.
  - B. We shall then turn to the construction of ships in the Viking Age, which had major economic and social consequences for Scandinavian communities. The culture of the sea was one of the quintessential elements of Scandinavian civilization.
  - C. Finally, we shall close with an example of what the Scandinavians' skill in shipbuilding meant in terms of military advantages.
- II. Viking Age ships represented the climax of a long history of shipbuilding in Scandinavia going back to the prehistoric age.
  - A. A number of remarkable rock carvings of 4000–2300 B.C. reveal that the ancestors of the Scandinavians were familiar with constructing ships. These ships seem to have been propelled by paddles, rather than by oars, and they had no sails, but they must have been able to negotiate coastal waters.
  - B. The first major ship we have is the Hjortspring ship from Als, an island of Denmark, dating from about 300–200 B.C. Most ships from archaeological excavations are funerary, not working vessels, and these were probably modified for burial operations. Sails and masts were removed, and the ships were filled with large amounts of goods.
  - C. The Hjortspring ship is about 40 feet long and would have had 20 men on each side propelling it with paddles; there is no evidence of a sail. It was probably a vessel used for moving people along coastal waters, somewhat similar to a flatboat or ferry.
    1. The Hjortspring ship shows the adaptation of Celtic building styles that we know from Roman descriptions, in particular, the construction of skin boats. The Celts first made a skeleton construction of ribs, then covered it with skins and caulked it. Such boats were known as *currachs*.
    2. The Hjortspring ship was also tied together with planks, so that it shows a mixture of Northern European *clinker*, or skeleton, construction and shell construction.
  - D. The Scandinavians probably started building their first successful warships and cargo vessels as a result of the influence of Roman ship design. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D., large numbers of Roman

commercial vessels arrived in the Scandinavian world, sailed by provincials of Celtic and Germanic origins.

1. The most important innovations of the Romans was the sail. Some scholars date the addition of the sail in Scandinavia to 750–790, at most a generation before the first raids of the Viking Age. Others argue that the sail was being used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on comments by Roman authors and archaeological evidence from the two surviving ships we have, which are clearly the ancestors of Viking Age ships.
  2. The first of these, the Nydam ship (c. 350–400), is again, a burial ship from Denmark. This vessel is 80 feet long and may have had its mast and sail removed for burial. The Nydam ship, too, shows a combination of building styles, but it is propelled by oars, not paddles. Based on several reconstructions, this ship certainly could negotiate the coastal waters of the North Sea quite easily.
  3. The Sutton Hoo ship of about A.D. 625 does not give us as much information, because the ship is known only from its impression left in the clay of the burial site. Similarly, there is not much remaining of the timber construction of the Kvalsund ship (Norway, c. 700).
- E. Sometime in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Scandinavians learned how to put down a keel, which became a major feature of Scandinavian shipbuilding. The keel allowed Scandinavians to construct ships that could negotiate the sea and open waters. The keel also allowed for a *keelson*, a base to accommodate a large mast with an enormous sail.

### III. Several excavations are important in telling us how these ships were constructed.

- A. The Oseberg ship (834), found in Vestfold, Norway, is the equivalent of a royal yacht, rather than a working warship. It has all the classic features of a Viking Age ship: It has a keel and a sail and shows a sophisticated method of construction that involved building up by levels of *strakes* on the keel.
- B. The Gokstad burial ship (c. 900–905) is a warship; it is 75 feet long and had a keel and keelson capable of carrying a mast close to 45 feet in height. The sail might have been 750–825 square feet. This ship is a brilliant piece of work in combining strength and flexibility. All such Viking Age ships were built to ride the water, rather than to fight the waves.
- C. A third set of five ships, excavated starting in 1962, was found in the Roskilde fjord near Skuldelev, Sjaelland. These ships were probably sunk in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to block the bay and prevent warships from attacking the Danish capital of Roskilde.
  1. The Skuldelev ships include two classic longships; a *knarr*, which is an ocean-going cargo ship of the type used to settle Iceland; a coastal trader; and a fishing ship. Together, they show us the culmination of Scandinavian shipbuilding.
  2. One of the warships is about 92 feet long with a breadth of 14–15 feet. It is the type of ship that would have been used by the armies of King Cnut (r. 1014–1035) to invade England.
  3. The *knarr* could have carried 30–40 tons of cargo and is of the type that was regularly used in trade between Norway and Iceland.

### IV. Thus, by 790, the Scandinavians had constructed a remarkable set of war and cargo vessels that no other civilization possessed. Such ships could be constructed readily from the materials at hand and did not require the same kind of specialized labor and facilities as Mediterranean shipbuilding.

- A. Both *knarrs* and longships could be constructed quickly and easily in Norse communities. They could be built close to shore, protected by simple temporary structures.
- B. Since Viking ships rode so low in the water, they could be beached anywhere, which was an important tactical advantage for both cargo vessels and warships. They could travel up rivers quite far and were very easy to pick up and carry from one river system to another.
- C. These ships were built from the existing hardwoods in Scandinavia, particularly oak. An ideal oak tree was located, maybe 60–90 feet long, and cut down to form the keel. Large branches would often be used as ribs. Green, unseasoned timber was used to maintain flexibility and allow the ship to ride the waves. Altogether, 12 or 13 oak trees would be needed for construction.
- D. After the keel was laid down, the *strakes*, levels of planking, would be built up, followed by installation of the ribs and crossbeams for reinforcement. Remarkably, the ships are not heavy; for instance, the bottom planking of a Viking ship is only about an inch thick.

- E. The decks were probably movable to enable bailing if necessary. After the strakes were built up, the keelson and mast would be installed, with the mast itself another oak tree. Finally, slots were cut for the oars, which were constructed of prime oak.
  - F. The level of technical skill of shipwrights overseeing this construction was quite sophisticated, but the actual work could be performed quickly by almost any woodworker.
- V. These vessels were built for speed and efficiency in moving people and goods, definitely not for comfort.
- A. Vikings voyaging in these ships on the North Atlantic lived on salted and boiled foods and drank curdled milk. They were exposed to the elements and could not build fires.
  - B. The performance of these ships can be deduced by building reconstructions. A standard longship of the 9<sup>th</sup> century probably carried a crew of at least 50; in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the crew probably numbered 100 or 200.
    1. Based on these reconstructions, a Viking warship of the Gokstad design, sailing an 8-hour day, could easily average 3–4 knots; running under sail and with the wind, it might make 8–12 knots.
    2. As an example, we know that on March 28, Easter Sunday, 845, a large Danish army occupied Paris. The fleet was reputedly 120 vessels and may have been commanded by the legendary hero Ragnar Lodbrok.
    3. Working out the times and distances, this force could have covered the 900 statute miles from Scandinavia to the mouth of the Seine in about three weeks. The Vikings would then have sailed up the Seine 150 miles to Paris, which would have taken a week or less.
    4. In the course of traveling to Paris, the Vikings met two Frankish armies led by Charles the Bald. They defeated and hanged 111 prisoners from one of these forces on one side of the Seine, and so terrorized the other force into fleeing.
    5. In comparison to the speed of these ships, most medieval armies on land could, on average, travel only 12–15 miles a day, assuming that they had ideal conditions and well-maintained roads. Viking fleets, which could negotiate along any coast of Europe and could travel deeply into most river systems, could move three to five times faster than any opponent on land.
  - C. Given the fact that the Scandinavians held a monopoly on sea power, it is no surprise that the Vikings could raid and attack at will before most of their opponents could even get their armies in the field. This strategic advantage would be held by the Vikings for the next 300 years.

**Further Reading:**

A. W. Brogger and Haakon Shetelig. *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*. New York: Twayne, 1971.  
 John Haywood. *Dark Age Naval Power*. London/New York: Routledge, 1991.  
 Unger, Richard W. *The Ship in Medieval Economy, 600–1600*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How were Viking ships constructed? What were the economic and cultural ramifications of such shipbuilding?
2. How did Viking ships give Scandinavians advantages in war, overseas settlement, and trade? What were the specific advantages of war and cargo ships?

## Lecture Ten

### Warfare and Society in the Viking Age

**Scope:** Viking warriors differed little from their opponents in Western Europe in weapons and tactics, but they waged war far more violently. They were quick to learn from their foes. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Vikings favored heavy Frankish swords and chain mail, and in the next century, they developed the famed double-headed axe. Scandinavian warriors excelled in leaping and running, because rowing their ships put them in first-rate physical condition, and they were expert in foraging, even in winter. Sea kings and jarls assembled their warriors from among kinsmen and neighbors, so that Viking companies were held together by devotion to honor and charismatic leaders. Scandinavians, while appreciating horses for their mobility, fought as infantry drawn up in a shield wall, the tactical gift of the god Odin. Foremost, they waged war by attrition, and fortified their bases with moats and palisades. This construction is evident in the fortified camps and the Danevirke constructed by King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark (r. c. 958–986). The discipline and effectiveness of Viking forces can be seen in the campaigns of the Great Army in 865–878. This Viking army, numbering between 5,000 and 10,000 veteran warriors, by careful logistics and fortified bases, combined with swift strategic strikes, overthrew three of the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and brought King Alfred of Wessex to his knees.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we shall look at warfare in the Viking Age, including the Vikings' weapons, training, tactics, and performance as warriors.
  - A. The popular image of Vikings as warriors depicts them as quite savage, slashing with their axes and destroying everything in their path.
  - B. Of course, in the popular imagination, the Vikings also wore horned helmets, but this perception is false.
- II. We will first look at the types of weapons and armament available to the Vikings, which were similar to those used by their opponents in Western Europe. Many of these weapons evolved from a common Roman and Germanic tradition.
  - A. The primary weapon of attack for the Vikings was a long steel sword. These broadswords evolved from a Roman *spatha* ("saber") and were 2½ to 3 feet long, considerably longer than the Roman *gladius*. Such swords required a good deal of space, skill, and strength to use and were wielded with two hands.
  - B. By the Viking Age, the Scandinavians were adept in forging iron and steel weapons, but the best swords available and the ones the Scandinavians desired were of Frankish manufacture. Large numbers of Frankish weapons have been found in Scandinavia, despite the Carolingian kings' ban on the export of weapons to that region.
  - C. The Scandinavians also used the axe as a serious fighting weapon, which had declined in use in Western Europe. A throwing axe might have a range of up to 40 feet, and Scandinavians were deadly in hurling this weapon. Later, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a double-headed axe was developed, which was used by professional warriors in the armies of Cnut and other leaders.
  - D. The spear also remained important to the Scandinavians. Their spears were quite long, 2 ½ to 4 feet, and fitted with iron heads. Viking warriors were able to catch an opponent's shield with the spear and tear the shield away.
  - E. Scandinavians had effective defensive armor, and by the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, many Scandinavian forces sported chain mail. A suit of chain mail consisted of about 35,000 to 40,000 interlocking iron or steel links, covering most of the vital parts of the body and worn over a linen padding.
  - F. Of course, warriors were also equipped with helmets. These were based on a late Roman design; they were conical and fitted with nose and cheek plates, often made in multiple parts. Such helmets could deflect most blows delivered to the head.
  - G. This equipment weighed about 30–40 pounds, about the same load that an infantryman today carries into battle. The Scandinavians, accustomed to rowing in longships and performing other types of hard labor, were conditioned to carry this weight easily.

- H. Missile weapons, such as javelins and bows and arrows, had rather limited range. The bow was an adapted hunting weapon, about 4 feet long, and was used effectively in boarding tactics in ship-to-ship combat. Javelins were used similarly and had a range of about 40 yards. Icelandic sagas relate several instances of warriors catching javelins thrown at them, then throwing the weapons back at their opponents.
  - I. In terms of weapons and armament, when the Vikings launched out on their attacks in 790, they had comparable equipment to the Carolingian armies of northwestern Europe, and they were much better armed than the Celtic peoples of Ireland and northern Britain and the Slavic tribes in Eastern Europe.
  - J. As soldiers, Vikings appreciated mobility on land as they did at sea; thus, Viking nobles, particularly *jarls* (“earls”), and *lendirmenn* (“leading men”) were accomplished horsemen. Viking forces would gather horses after landing their ships and ride inland to the battlefield, but they would then dismount and fight as infantry.
- III. If the Vikings’ weapons and armament were not too dissimilar from those of their opponents, what gave them the edge in battle?
- A. One answer to this question can be found in the bonds of cohesion within these Viking groups. Some scholars have tried to compare the Vikings in this regard to, for example, the pirates of the Spanish Main, but the raiding Vikings were not groups of outsiders like these later pirates.
    1. Viking armies comprised *lendirmenn* and free members of the community and were commanded by sea kings and jarls.
    2. Most Viking fleets had from 3 to 10 ships, all built by members of the same community.
    3. All men of free rank knew how to use weapons, and most were in prime physical condition from rowing and hunting.
    4. These groups of warriors were far more coherent than pirate bands.
  - B. Furthermore, from living in the conditions of Scandinavia, the Vikings had several advantages over their opponents.
    1. They were incredibly agile, able to leap to other ships in boarding maneuvers.
    2. They had been hardened by Scandinavian winters and had a sound understanding of logistics. Campaigning in winter in France or England would have been easy for the Vikings.
    3. Vikings also knew to seize stocks of grain and supplies just after the harvest to stock up to meet future requirements.
  - C. All free men in Scandinavia were familiar with the use of arms from childhood, and they became expert hunters. This situation stands in strong contrast to what had come about in Western Europe from about 500 on.
    1. Most Western European societies were built around a warrior caste, but the majority of the population had come to see military service as a burden. Large numbers of the available forces were essentially militia forces, called out to defend the immediate area. These soldiers lacked the experience and cohesion of Viking warriors.
    2. Western European soldiers could be easily ambushed by Viking columns and were often induced to make reckless attacks on Viking shield walls. Western Europeans were not skilled in using edged weapons and were no match for the Scandinavian expertise and determination.
  - D. The exact numbers of Viking forces are difficult to calculate, and again, there is a tendency by some scholars to minimize the sizes of Viking armies and fleets.
    1. The size of individual forces is sometimes estimated at only 1,000–2,000 strong, but in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the size and scale of Viking attacks increased significantly.
    2. By the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, small contingents of Viking forces, which might represent 10–20 ships, could easily assemble into groups of 100 or more ships. This would bring together 5,000–10,000 seasoned and well-trained warriors.
    3. These numbers are the only way to account for the remarkable success of the Vikings, particularly in England in 865–878 or in the siege of Paris.
  - E. Finally, Vikings applied their skills in woodworking to warfare; they were extremely good at building fortifications, which were often simple earthen ramparts with stockades.

1. We have two remarkable sets of such fortifications in Denmark. One of them, the Danevirke, was first built in c. 739–740; it runs from the Eider River to the town of Hedeby at the base of the Danish peninsula, essentially sealing off Jutland from Central Europe.
  2. The full system, completed by 960, has an earthen wall about 30 feet wide, a stockade about 6 to 8 feet high, and a huge moat.
  3. From a later building phase, four Viking camps have been excavated that could have housed 2,000–4,000 warriors. The most famous of these is Trelleborg on the island of Sjaelland. These are fortified, circular camps, almost built to Roman specifications, and are associated with King Harald Bluetooth.
  4. In discussing the Vikings’ activities overseas, we know that these soldiers understood positional warfare. We have one account of the Battle of the Dyle in 891, in which a Frankish army assaulted a Viking camp, but the fortifications were such that the Vikings were able to reach their ships and escape before the camp was overrun.
- IV. To get some sense of the effectiveness of Viking warfare, we’ll close with a brief description of a campaign in England that stretched over the years 865–878.
- A. The Anglo-Saxons offer us a detailed account of *micel here* (“the Great Army”). This was an army of Danes and Norwegians who had spent the previous 10 or 15 years ransacking the Carolingian Empire.
  - B. The army arrived in East Anglia in the autumn of 865 and intimidated the East Anglian king to allow them to build a base and gather provisions and horses.
  - C. In the fall of 866, the army carried out a lightning advance about 180 miles north and seized the city of York, the largest city in northern England and the capital of the kingdom of Northumbria.
  - D. Northumbria was enmeshed in a civil war, but the two rival Anglo-Saxon kings joined arms and attacked the Vikings in early 867. The Norsemen set themselves up with a shield wall, drove back the English levies, then counterattacked and swept the field, killing both English kings.
  - E. Then the Vikings moved into Mercia, in the Midlands of England; set up another base at Nottingham; and raided the kingdom of Mercia. The Vikings then relocated back to East Anglia and conquered this kingdom before turning back on Mercia and Wessex.
  - F. Wessex was only saved when King Alfred took over in 871, rallied the English army, and eventually won a victory that enabled him to negotiate a treaty in 878.
  - G. All the advantages the Vikings possessed in warfare, that is, their knowledge of logistics, fortifications, political situations, winter campaigning, and so on, are seen in this campaign in microcosm. In 15 years, the Vikings had conquered eastern England and half the Midlands, a feat that had taken the Anglo-Saxons nearly 150 years to achieve.

**Further Reading:**

G. Halsall. *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*. London/New York: Routledge, 2002.

P. H. Sawyer. *The Age of the Vikings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Edward Arnold, Inc., 1971, pp. 127–132.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did Viking armies mirror Scandinavian society? How important were traditions of valor and honor and the devotion to Odin? How did these advantages ensure success on the battlefield?
2. What accounted for Viking skills in logistics and engineering?
3. How did the success of the Great Army in England epitomize the military advantages and skills of the Vikings?

## Lecture Eleven

### Merchants and Commerce in the Viking Age

**Scope:** The first Vikings raided to seize booty and slaves because of the growth of trade resulting from the economic and demographic recovery of Western Europe during what historians call the *long 8<sup>th</sup> century* (c. 675–840). Under Charlemagne (r. 768–814), the Frisian port of Dorestad emerged as the leading market town of Northern Europe. Dorestad was the terminus of both the sea routes from Scandinavia and the Mediterranean commerce that arrived at Venice and moved across northern Italy and down the Rhine. European commerce was fueled by the demand for slaves and raw materials in the great cities of the Abbasid caliphate. Scandinavians, too, contributed to commerce in the Viking Age. They extended the range and scale of trade, thereby creating the *northern arc* that stretched from Ireland to the Black and Caspian Seas. Swedes developed the slave trade down the Volga and Dneiper, while their kinsmen in Western Europe traded in Muslim Spain, the British Isles, and the Carolingian Empire. In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, market towns first emerged in Scandinavia at Hedeby and Ribe in Denmark, Birka in Sweden, and Kaupang in Norway. Scandinavians then took over the carrying trade across Northern Europe. The profits of commerce, along with the booty and slaves acquired in raids, enriched and transformed Scandinavian society.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we will deal with trade, especially seaborne trade, conducted by Scandinavians and other peoples from the 8<sup>th</sup> century through the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup>. The Scandinavians of the Viking Age were just as much engaged in trade as they were in raiding and settling overseas.
  - A. The Scandinavians' advances in shipbuilding, so important to their success in warfare, also translated into success in commerce.
  - B. The direction and volume of trade and the types of goods that were exchanged all changed significantly in the Viking Age. Many economic historians speak of the Vikings as developing the *northern trade arc*, which eventually extended from Dublin to the mouth of the Volga River and to the shores of the Black Sea.
  - C. We shall look at two topics in this lecture: first, the forces that drove trade and commerce in the medieval world and, second, the role of the Scandinavians in directing and amplifying this trade.
- II. The Viking raids could not have occurred without general prosperity in Western Europe.
  - A. When the Vikings began to attack Western Europe in 790, they traveled a series of well-established trade routes to hit kingdoms in England and the Carolingian Empire. These areas had been in economic recovery for a period known as the *long 8<sup>th</sup> century* (675–840). Several important forces were driving this economic development and prosperity.
    1. By the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, a certain amount of political order had been imposed in Western Europe. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been simplified into Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, and East Anglia, and Western Europe had been unified by the Frankish kings, first the Merovingians, then the Carolingians. The imposition of this political order allowed for commerce to proceed.
    2. Also important were currency reforms instituted by Charlemagne (r. 768–814) and his father, Pepin the Short (r. 751–768). The silver hammered denier was introduced across Western Europe.
  - B. Starting from 675, the Frisians emerged as the major merchants in the North Sea and beyond. They depended on hulks and cogs, cargo vessels, that were capable of moving large numbers of goods and people. The Frisians moved timber, slaves, furs, and Arctic products from Scandinavia into Western Europe and brought back ceramics, wine, and weapons from the Carolingian Empire.
  - C. In Frisia, Dorestad emerged as the most important market town in Western Europe.
    1. It stands at the base of the Rhine River system and was, thus, linked to Cologne. From Cologne, goods were moved across the Alps to Venice, the prime port for export into the Mediterranean, Byzantine, and Islamic worlds.
    2. In this way, the Carolingian Empire linked the northern lands to Western Europe—goods were taken over the river systems of Europe to the port towns in the Mediterranean, where the products were exported south and east.

3. Dorestad also had trading partners in Quentovic, near modern Boulogne, and Hamwic (Southampton).
  4. In Scandinavia, the trade routes helped stimulate the development of other market towns, such as Hedeby.
- D.** The revival of long-distance trade routes was important to the success of the early medieval economy. Scholars debate whether the European economy in general was underdeveloped, essentially little more than a subsistence economy, or whether these economies were more sophisticated, with trade and commerce playing significant roles in medieval life. One major point to note in this debate is that commerce generated income for Carolingian monarchs and Scandinavian sea kings from tolls and taxes levied on trade and collected in silver.
- III.** It is important to note that the driving force behind this economic development was the Islamic world.
- A.** Scandinavia and Christian Western Europe were economically quite undeveloped in comparison to the Mediterranean world, the former heartland of the Roman Empire, the southern and eastern portions of which were now part of the Islamic world. The Abbasid caliphs had established the city of Baghdad as the capital of Islam.
  - B.** The cities of the Islamic world, which included Baghdad, the caravan centers of Iran, and the cities of Central Asia, as well as Cairo, Damascus, Tunis, and Cordoba, had an enormous appetite for labor, consumables, and raw materials, and this was fed by European markets.
  - C.** In the generation just before the Viking Age, from about 750–800, the prime commodity exported from Western Europe was slaves, many of them obtained from the peoples of Central Europe who spoke various Slavic languages. The slave market in Western Europe was drying up as a result of both economic and religious factors, so that these Slavic peoples became prime targets of slave raids.
  - D.** The huge demand for slaves can be partly explained by recovery from a demographic collapse in the Islamic and Carolingian empires that had started in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, a plague had swept across Europe and the Middle East that was probably on the same order of magnitude as the Black Death in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
  - E.** When the Vikings launched out on their raids, they found in place a well-established network of trade routes and markets. By 840, with the superiority of the Scandinavian ships, the Vikings captured the carrying trade and developed the northern arc. Starting at this time, the Scandinavians took over Northern European trading activities, many of which led to markets in the Islamic or Byzantine worlds. The Scandinavians succeeded for several reasons.
    1. They had built ocean-going cargo vessels that could move products more efficiently than the Frisian vessels.
    2. The ability to carry Scandinavian ships from one river system to another gave the Swedes, in particular, the advantage of developing the river routes of Russia. Starting about 750, the Swedes moved into trading posts in Russia and further developed two trade routes, one down the Volga to the Caspian Sea and the other through various river systems that flow into the Black Sea. These became major trade routes in the Middle Ages.
    3. The Scandinavians thus were raiding the Slavic populations of Eastern Europe and selling them to the Islamic world. The result was the development of fortified market towns, which became the future Russian cities, as well as sophisticated trading arrangements with the Turkomen khans, who acted as the middlemen between Northern Europe and the Islamic world.
    4. In return for their exported goods, the Swedes acquired silver in the form of Muslim coins, as well as silk, spices, and other goods. One of the most remarkable objects acquired was found at Helgö, a bronze statue of a Buddha from the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.
  - F.** The Scandinavians also pioneered a western extension of the northern arc, terminating in the cities of York in England and Dublin in Ireland. Dublin, in particular, became the most important market for the export of slaves from Western Europe, again, destined for the Islamic world. By one estimate, somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of all the slaves arriving in the Islamic world for a period of 250 years were sold by Scandinavian merchants.
- IV.** In addition to the products brought into the Scandinavian world, including silks and wine, trade also led to the development of market towns, concentrations of populations not seen before in Scandinavian history. Three of

these are extremely well known from archaeology and from a curious document prepared for King Alfred the Great, probably dating from just before 895.

- A. This document is an Anglo-Saxon translation of a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish bishop's world history written to justify Christianity. Appended to it are accounts of two voyages: First, Oththere (ON: Ottar) reports a voyage from the Arctic circle, along the coast of Norway, to a town believed to be the archaeological site of Kaupang. This was a major market town of more than 100 acres that was clearly a processing center for Arctic goods to be exported east and west.
- B. The other voyage is recorded by Wulfstan, who tells of traveling from Hedeby, in southern Denmark, along the southern shores of the Baltic. Wulfstan names several important ports on this route, illustrating the expansion of Scandinavian-style market towns at the mouths of all the great rivers of the Baltic by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
- C. Hedeby, Birka, and Kaupang have several similarities, including a resident population of more than 1,000 people, specialized areas for manufacturing, and impressive numbers of imported goods. This is the result of wealth coming into these towns from commerce, plunder, and the slave trade.
  1. These towns were also homes to foreigners, including Frisians, English, Saxons, and so on.
  2. The towns played an economic role in Scandinavia that was out of proportion to their size. In these towns, Scandinavians came into contact with other civilizations, discovering new products and learning new skills.
  3. Given their economic importance, these towns were also targets for aspiring Scandinavian kings. It is no accident that the three classic Scandinavian monarchies that would emerge at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century were all centered on one of these towns.
  4. Finally, these towns would also host the first Christian missionaries, starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with St. Anskar (801–865), and it is through these towns that Christianity would be transmitted to the northern peoples.

**Further Reading:**

R. Hodges. *Dark Age Economics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Duckworth, 1969.

Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What accounted for the success of Scandinavians in developing their northern trade arc? What were the prime goods exchanged?
2. What was the significance of the rise of market towns, such as Hedeby, Birka, and Kaupang? How did trade transform Scandinavian society?

## Lecture Twelve

### Christendom on the Eve of the Viking Age

**Scope:** On the eve of the Viking Age, Scandinavians were long familiar with the wider world through commerce, and they had gained invaluable information on currents and winds in the northern waters. The Carolingian Empire, forged by Charlemagne, was the heartland of Western Christendom, but its state lacked the institutions to withstand the stress of civil war and Viking raids after 825. To Scandinavians, the Carolingian world was a source of silver, weapons, textiles, ceramics, and prestige goods. Carolingian kings were also aggressively Christian. In 772–806, Charlemagne conquered and forcibly converted to Christianity the Saxons of northwestern Europe. In southern England, the rival kings of Mercia and Wessex clashed repeatedly, while Northumbria was plagued by civil war. Elsewhere, the Vikings encountered no organized states other than the distant Byzantine Empire. In the Celtic West, monasteries were centers of Christian culture and prosperity, while warlords clashed with local rivals. The Slavic peoples dwelling in the forest zones of Central and Eastern Europe lived in tribal societies. They were ruthlessly raided for slaves by Western Europeans, Turkomen nomads, and Scandinavians. The Vikings, in attacking Christendom, forced their foes to organize into far more effective states.

### Outline

- I. This lecture serves as a transition between our examination of the development of Scandinavian civilization in the first third of the course and our study of the Scandinavians' impact on the wider medieval world in the Viking Age.
  - A. The Scandinavians encountered three medieval civilizations that emerged out of the late Roman world and are now seen as related: Latin Christendom, which would eventually become modern Western Europe; the Byzantine Empire, that is, the eastern portions of the former Roman Empire, centered on the city of Constantinople; and the Islamic caliphate, stretching from Spain across North Africa to its heartland in the Middle East.
  - B. The greatest interaction between Scandinavia and these civilizations occurs with Western Europe, although the Scandinavians did have a profound influence in Eastern Europe, which is being increasingly documented through archaeology. The Scandinavians' interaction with the Islamic world was primarily through their slave-trading activities.
- II. We begin with Latin Christendom at the onset of the Viking Age in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.
  - A. The Carolingian Empire stretched from the Pyrenees across Western Europe to the Elba and across most of northern and central Italy. To the Scandinavians, this was an impressive domain. Several important changes had taken place, however, since the last contact of the Scandinavians with the Frankish world in the Age of Migrations.
  - B. The first of these was a major change of dynasty in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, when a new family, the Carolingians, took over rule of the Frankish heartland from the Merovingian kings. In 751, Pepin the Short, Charlemagne's father, took the crown for himself and was recognized as king of the Franks by the papacy in 754.
    1. Pepin and the succeeding Carolingian kings forged medieval Europe. The Carolingian kingdom represented the first synthesis of Roman Christian and Germanic institutions into a major political order since the fall of the western Roman Empire.
    2. In many ways, Pepin and Charlemagne saw themselves as the heirs of the Roman tradition. For Charlemagne, this view culminated in his coronation on Christmas Day in the year 800 as Holy Roman Emperor. Henceforth, Carolingian monarchs and their descendants in Western Europe ruled as Roman emperors.
  - C. By his conquests, Charlemagne greatly extended the range of Frankish political control, which from the Scandinavian viewpoint, was frightening. From 772–804, Charlemagne campaigned repeatedly in northwestern Europe and conquered the region known as Saxony, which is northwest Germany.
    1. The Romans had never brought this region under control; it was inhabited by Germanic-speaking peoples who worshiped the ancient gods and maintained close contact with the Danes.

2. The conquest of Saxony was also accompanied by a forced conversion. Those who refused to submit to Christianity were massacred. As a result, many Saxons fled to Denmark, and a resistance movement evolved. We know of one Saxon rebel leader, Widukind, who received aid from Danish kings.
  3. When Saxony was finally brought under Frankish control, the Eider River became the northeastern boundary of the Carolingian Empire; the Danish kings saw this as a threat. Many of the early raids carried out against the Frankish Empire might have been in response to threatening moves by Charlemagne.
- D. The Carolingian Empire was also the basis for our understanding of the association of political and ecclesiastical institutions in the medieval world.
1. With this monarchy, the prelates of the Latin Western Church also became secular princes. They administered royal revenues and properties, and they dispensed royal justice. They were members of the same military warrior caste as the nobility.
  2. In the course of the development of Latin Christendom, the Carolingian vision of the episcopacy triumphed, and the hierarchy of the clergy became closely associated with the political order of the monarchy.
- E. The Scandinavians also saw Charlemagne's empire as extremely wealthy—a prime target if it could be raided. After 814, such action became much easier.
1. Charlemagne was succeeded by his son Louis the Pious (r. 814–840), who was politically ineffective. Louis, in turn, tried to transmit power to his oldest son, Lothar (r. 840–855), but his other three sons contested this move. Starting very early in Louis's reign, from the 820s on, the Carolingian Empire saw a number of civil wars over this issue.
  2. In 843, the first significant partition of the kingdom was carried out by the three surviving sons of Louis the Pious. Lothar received the so-called Middle Kingdom and the imperial title; Charles the Bald received what would evolve into the kingdom of France; and Louis the German received the lands that would evolve into Germany.
  3. The civil wars and this partition serve as an ideal entrée for the Viking attacks into Western Europe. The Vikings had begun raiding into Frankish lands in the time of Charlemagne but encountered his naval defenses. After Charlemagne's death, no attempt was made to maintain these naval defenses because the Frankish nobility was too involved in fighting civil wars.
  4. The failure, especially of Charles the Bald, to halt Viking attacks would bankrupt the Carolingian monarchy, bring about its demise, and result in the division of the kingdom in the west into feudal states.
- F. Finally, there were in Western Europe the various kingdoms and chiefdoms in the British Isles. This region had a mix of Celtic-speaking and Germanic-speaking peoples and no political unity; the only common bond was that all these peoples were members of the Christian Church.
1. By 800, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, linguistically and culturally, were part of Western Europe. They were members of the wider Christian community, used Latin as their literary language, and embraced the monastic life, as well as the arts of Western Europe. Many of the monasteries in both Ireland and England were important economic centers, and they were totally undefended.
  2. England had politically simplified itself into four leading kingdoms by the time of the Viking Age. Mercia in the Midlands was ruled by Offa (r. 757–796), who imposed his hegemony over the kings of East Anglia and Wessex and held sway in England south of the Humber. North of the Humber was the kingdom of Northumbria, the center of monastic and cultural life associated with early Anglo-Saxon England.
  3. On the eve of the Viking Age, Northumbria was in trouble. It essentially consisted of two kingdoms, Bernicia, centered on the port at Bamburgh, and Deira, based on York. These two regions were never well integrated. When the Vikings began raiding England in the 780s and 790s, not only did they find undefended monasteries along the shores, but they also found little organized opposition.
  4. The rest of the British Isles, including Wales, Cornwall, Cumbria, Scotland, and Ireland, were not organized in any fashion as states. Ireland, in particular, was a collection of different tribes and regional kings; it existed only as a geographic expression.

- III.** In closing, we turn briefly to the other two civilizations that the Scandinavians encountered in the medieval world.
- A.** The Islamic world was the greatest civilization and the primary economic force driving trade and development in the early Middle Ages. Few Scandinavians ever experienced the cities of Islam; indeed, after 975, the original trade route along the Volga diminished, and the trade route shifted to one along the Dneiper that led Scandinavians into the Byzantine Empire.
  - B.** In Constantinople, the Scandinavians encountered a great bureaucratic state, and in contrast to the Islamic world, they actually visited this capital.
    - 1.** Based in the city of Kiev, the Swedish Rus, the Scandinavians who operated in Eastern Europe, brought their ships down the Dneiper, reached the Black Sea, and sailed to Constantinople.
    - 2.** Without a doubt, Constantinople was the greatest city in the Christian world. The Byzantine Empire was heir to the Roman political and military traditions; it had an organized trade system and was the source of silk, gold, and spices, acquired through middlemen on the Volga.
    - 3.** It is difficult to exaggerate the impact of the experience of Scandinavians upon entering Constantinople. Many Scandinavians traveled to Byzantium to take service as mercenaries, make their fortunes as merchants, and even to settle.
    - 4.** In Constantinople, the Scandinavians also encountered Orthodox Christianity, a religion associated with the Macedonian emperors and, in contrast to Christianity in Western Europe, a religion associated with victory.
  - C.** Scandinavian contact with the Byzantine world would have a significant impact. It would lead to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity by the Scandinavians in Russia and have an important influence on state formation in Sweden and Denmark.

**Further Reading:**

Adriaan Verhulst. *The Carolingian Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Mark Whittow. *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1.** In what ways was the Carolingian Empire of Charlemagne the most successful state in Latin Christendom? What accounted for the peace and prosperity under Charlemagne? What were the achievements and weaknesses of the later Carolingian empire?
- 2.** What were the achievements and strengths of the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid caliphate? How did Scandinavians view these distant empires?

## Timeline

- 4000–2300 B.C..... Neolithic Age: beginning of agriculture and stock-raising
- 2300–1950 B.C..... Chalcolithic Age  
Arrival of Indo-European speakers into southern Scandinavia  
Evolution of Finns (Suomi) and Lapps (Sami)
- 2300–450 B.C..... Bronze Age
- 1550–1100 B.C..... Apex of the Northern Bronze Age in Scandinavia  
Expansion of settlements in central Sweden and western Norway  
Amber route between the Baltic and Mediterranean worlds
- 1100 B.C..... Solar chariot at Trundholm (Denmark)
- 1100–500 B.C..... Collapse of long-distance trade and decline of prosperity  
Spread of cremation as a burial practice
- 800–500 B.C..... Emergence of Halstatt Celtic Iron Age civilization in Central Europe
- 500–100 B.C..... La Tène Celtic civilization: Rise of towns (*oppida*) and iron technology
- 450 B.C..... Rise of trade between Scandinavia and Celtic Europe (450–50 B.C.)  
Formation of Germanic languages
- c. 325–310 B.C..... Visit of Thule (Norway) by Pytheas of Massilia
- c. 200–100 B.C..... Creation of runes based on north Italic scripts
- 125–120 B.C..... Migration of Cimbri and Teutones from Jutland into Central Europe  
Decline of Celtic towns in southern Germany (c. 125–75 B.C.)
- c. 100 B.C..... Gundestrup cauldron
- 58–49 B.C..... Julius Caesar conquers Gaul
- c. 50–1 B.C..... Germanic tribes settle Central Europe between the Rhine and the Vistula
- 27 B.C.– A.D.14..... Reign of Augustus: foundation of the Roman Empire  
Expansion of trade between Scandinavia and Western Europe
- 16–9 B.C..... Roman conquest of the Germanic tribes between the Rhine and the Elbe
- A.D. 5..... Tiberius’s naval expedition to Jutland
- A.D. 9..... Arminius destroys Roman legions in Teutoburg Forest  
Romans withdraw to the Rhine and Danube frontiers
- c. A.D. 50–200..... Revival of the Amber route  
Rising prosperity in bog deposits in Denmark  
Shift to wealthy barrow tombs in Denmark and Sweden
- 98..... Cornelius Tacitus writes *Germania*
- c. 150–200..... Goths cross from Sweden to the southern Baltic shores
- 235–285..... Civil war and frontier wars in the Roman Empire  
Consolidation of West Germanic confederations of Franks, Saxons, Alemanni, and Sueves
- c. 245–280..... Goths and East Germanic tribes raid the upper and lower Danube frontier
- c. 260–285..... Frankish and Saxon pirates raid the shores of Britain and Gaul
- 284–305..... Reign of Diocletian: establishment of the dominate (Roman autocracy)

- 306–337 ..... Reign of Constantine: creation of Christian monarchy (312–337)
- c. 350 ..... Nydam ship burial, Denmark  
Gallehus horns of Jutland
- 378 ..... Battle of Adrianople: Goths defeat and slay Emperor Valens  
Renewed Germanic migrations into the Roman Empire (378–476)
- 395 ..... Division of eastern (Byzantine) and western Roman Empires  
Collapse of the western Roman Empire (395–476)
- 432 ..... St. Patrick (389–461) consecrated apostle to the Irish  
Conversion of Ulidia (eastern Ulster) by Patrick (432–461)
- 433–452 ..... Reign of Attila the Hun
- c. 450–650 ..... Migration of Jutes, Angles, Saxons, and Frisians from Jutland and northwestern  
Germany to England
- 481–511 ..... Clovis, king of the Franks, founds Merovingian kingdom in Gaul
- 494 ..... Clovis and the Franks convert to Catholic Christianity
- c. 523–528 ..... Raid of Hygelac (ON: Hugelík), king of Gotar, on Frisia
- c. 530–550 ..... Reign of Beowulf over Gotar
- c. 550–575 ..... Reign of Hrolf Kraki, Skjoldung king of Hleidr  
Reign of Adils, Yngling king of Uppsala
- 597 ..... Mission of St. Augustine to England: conversion of the English
- 600–800 ..... Vendel period in Scandinavia: royal Swedish burials  
Helgo, leading port of Lake Mälaren
- c. 625 ..... Ship burial of Sutton Hoo, East Anglia
- 627 ..... Conversion of King Edwin of Bernicia (r. 616–633) to Christianity
- 634–642 ..... King Oswald unites Bernicia and Deira into the kingdom of Northumbria  
Cultural flowering of northern England (650–800)
- 675 ..... Foundation of Dorestad: rise of Frisian trade (675–840)
- c. 675–700 ..... Composition of *Beowulf*: rise of a Christian literature in Old English
- c. 700 ..... Ship burial at Kvalsund, Norway  
Construction of port town Birka, Sweden  
Emergence of Scandinavian languages (700–800)
- c. 700–710 ..... St. Willibrod’s mission to Ongendus (Angantyr), king in Jutland
- c. 737–740 ..... First construction of the Danevirke and Haeveg (“army route”) in Jutland  
Development of Danish port at Ribe
- c. 750–790 ..... Breakthroughs in Scandinavian shipbuilding (keel, sails, and rigging)  
Swedes open eastern routes along the Volga River to Atil on the Caspian Sea
- c. 750–775 ..... Battle of Bravellir: Harald the Wartooth, last of the Skjöldung kings, defeated by Sigurd  
Hring, ruler of the Gautar.  
Oseberg/Borre decorative styles in Scandinavia (c. 750–975)
- 751 ..... Pepin the Short seizes the Frankish throne and founds the Carolingian dynasty
- 757 ..... Accession of King Offa of Mercia (r. 757–796)
- 768 ..... Accession of Charlemagne (r. 768–814), king of the Franks

- 772..... Charlemagne initiates Frankish conquest of Saxony (772–804)  
Destruction of the Sacred Tree (Irmisul) at Erseburg
- 778–785..... Rebellion of the Saxons under Widukind
- 789..... Danish Vikings raid the shores of Portland, Wessex
- 793..... Three Norwegian ships sack the monastery of Lindisfarne, Northumbria
- 794..... Norwegian Vikings sack the monastery of Jarrow, Northumbria
- 795..... Norwegian Vikings sack the monastery of Iona, Scotland  
Norwegian Vikings sack the monastery Rechru on the island of Lambay  
Vikings raid the shores of Ireland and the Shannon Valley (795–840)  
Viking base camps at Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick
- 800..... Coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor of the Romans  
Charlemagne constructs naval defenses along the Scheldt and lower Rhine  
King Guthfrith (also known as Godfred; ON: Guthfrid) secures Jutland and Hedeby (c. 800–810)  
Second phase of construction at Danevirke  
Norse settle Shetlands, Orkney, and Hebrides (800–825)
- 802..... Accession of King Ecgbert of Wessex (r. 802–839)  
Rivalry between Wessex and Mercia
- 809–855..... Vikings raid the eastern and southern shores of England
- 810..... Danes raid Frisia and attack Dorestad  
Charlemagne launches abortive attack into Jutland (810–811)
- 814..... Accession of Louis the Pious (r. 814–840)
- 820..... Danes raid the shores of Frisia, northern France, and Aquitaine  
Norwegians raid the lower Loire, expelling the monks of Noirmoutier (820–835)
- c. 825–850..... Norse settlement of the Faeroes
- 826..... Harald Klak baptized and receives fief in Frisia from King Louis the Pious  
First mission of St. Anskar to Hedeby (826–828)
- 829..... Mission of St. Anskar to Birka (829–831)
- 830..... Outbreak of civil wars in the Carolingian Empire (830–843)
- 831..... St. Anskar consecrated archbishop of Hamburg
- 834..... Ship burial of Queen Asa at Oseberg
- 834–837..... Four successive sacks by Danish Vikings ruin Dorestad  
Rapid growth of trade at Hedeby, Birka, and Kaupang (835–975)  
Importation of Arabic silver *dirhems* into Sweden (c. 840–975)
- 835..... Vikings fortify base at Noirmoutier  
Vikings attack the Isle of Sheppey and disrupt trade on the Thames (835–855)
- c. 838–839..... Arrival of Thorgils (Turgeis) and fleet from Norway  
Thorgils organizes Viking Dublin  
First Norwegian immigration to Ireland (c. 840–870)
- 839..... Louis the Pious receives Rus envoys along with Byzantine mission
- 840..... Thorgils captures Armagh and performs rites of Thor  
Thorgils's wife, Aud (Ota), acts as seer (*völva*) at the monastery of Clonmacnoise  
Gail Gaidail, Irish apostates, ally with the Vikings (840–870)

- 841 ..... Harald Klak receives island of Walcheren  
Danish Vikings sack Rouen and raid the lower Seine valley
- 842 ..... Vikings sack Hamwic (Southampton) and Quentovic (Boulogne)
- 843 ..... Treaty of Verdun: partition of the Carolingian Empire
- 844 ..... Vikings ravage Garonne valley, shores of Asturias, and sack Seville, Spain
- 845 ..... Mission of al-Ghazal from Muslim Cordoba to the Vikings of Dublin  
Horik, “king in Denmark,” sacks Hamburg  
Vikings under Ragnar Lodbrok defeat Charles the Bald and sack Paris  
Charles the Bald pays Ragnar *danegeld* of 7,000 pounds of silver
- 846 or 847 ..... Defeat and death of Thorgils in Meath
- 847 ..... St. Anskar succeeds to joint archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen
- 848–850 ..... Danish Vikings (“Black Foreigners”) challenge Norwegians for Ireland
- 850 ..... Danish Viking establish base on Sheppey, England  
Death of Harald Klak, Viking lord in Frisia  
Emergence of skaldic poetry in Scandinavia (c. 850–900)  
Christian mission of Ardgar to Birka (850–852)
- 851 ..... Battle of Carlingford Lough: Danes and Irish allies defeat Norwegians  
Danes occupy Dublin
- 852 ..... Arrival of Olaf and second great fleet from Norway  
Submission of Vikings to Olaf at Dublin (c. 852–871)  
Development of slave trade in Ireland
- 855–857 ..... Bjorn Ironside fortifies Viking base on Oissel at the mouth of the Seine
- 859 ..... Danish sea kings Hastein and Bjorn Ironside raid Spain
- 860 ..... Gardar Svavarrrsson discovers Iceland  
Hastein and Bjorn Ironside enter Mediterranean, raid shores of southern France, and sack Luna (860–861)  
Rurik (ON: Erik) invited to rule the Slavs from Holmgard (Novgorod)  
Foundation of Kiev as Rus market town  
First Rus naval attack on Constantinople
- 861 ..... Weland and Danish Vikings ravage the Seine and Somme valleys
- 863 ..... Dorestad abandoned
- 864 ..... King Charles the Bald issues the Edicts of Pîtres
- 865 ..... Great Army arrives in East Anglia under Halfdane and Ivar the Boneless  
Voyage of Floki Vilgerderson to Iceland (875)
- 866 ..... Great Army captures York
- 867 ..... Battle of York: Vikings defeat and slay Northumbrian Kings Osbert and Aelle: Danish conquest of southern Northumbria (Deira)  
Collapse of first English kingdom; English earls rule at Bamburgh
- 868 ..... Great Army ravages northern Mercia from base at Nottingham  
King Burgred (r. 852–874) pays *danegeld* for the Great Army to retire into East Anglia
- 869 ..... Battle of Hoxne: defeat and martyrdom of King Edmund (r. 855–869)  
Great Army overruns East Anglia: collapse of the second English kingdom  
Ivar the Boneless departs for Ireland (869–873)
- 870 ..... Halfdane and the Great Army seize Wallingford, ravaging Mercia and Wessex

- Arrival of reinforcements from Scandinavia and the Carolingian Empire  
Great Army seizes and fortifies Reading
- 871 ..... Battle of Ashdown: Halfdane defeats King Aethelred I of Wessex (r. 865–871)  
Death of Aethelred I and accession of Alfred the Great (r. 871–899)  
Battle of Wilton: Alfred defeated by the Great Army Alfred pays *danegeld* for withdrawal of the Great Army  
Ingolf Arnarson settles Iceland (871–873)  
Norwegian emigration to Iceland (c. 870–930)
- 872 ..... Rebellion in York against the Viking client king Ecgbert  
Halfdane and the Great Army move north against the rebels in York
- 873 ..... Great Army seizes Repton: Burgred abdicates and makes a pilgrimage to Rome;  
Halfdane proclaims Ceowulf II (r. 874–879) king of Mercia  
Vikings fortify the Five Boroughs in northern Mercia (Nottingham, Derby, Stamford, Lincoln, and Leicester)
- 874 ..... With reinforcements from Scandinavia, Guthrum pacifies East Anglia  
Halfdane and veterans of the Great Army secure Yorkshire (874–975)
- c. 875 ..... Emergence of Jellinge decorative style (c. 875–975)  
Battle of Hafsford: Harald Finehair defeats *jarls* and kings of Vestlandet
- 875 ..... Halfdane partitions the lands of Yorkshire among veterans of the Great Army  
Creation of Viking Kingdom of York  
Guthrum and the Great Army invade and ravage Wessex (874–877)  
Alfred the Great assumes a defensive positional war
- 876 ..... Accession of Charles the Fat (r. 876–888) as king of East Francia (Germany)
- 877 ..... Death of Charles the Bald, king of West Francia (France)  
Accession of Louis II (r. 877–879): civil war in the Frankish world
- 877–879 ..... Partition of lands in East Anglia to veterans of the Great Army  
Second Danish settlement in England
- 878 ..... Guthrum and the Great Army capture Chippenham (January 8)  
Alfred and his *thegns* driven into exile; Alfred rallies his army  
Battle of Eddington: Alfred defeats Guthrum  
Treaty of Wedmore: Vikings withdraw north of the Thames  
Guthrum, baptized as Aethelstan, rules in East Anglia (r. 878–890)
- 879 ..... Danish Vikings cross from England to seize base at Ghent  
Vikings raid Lowlands, Rhineland, and western Saxony (879–881)
- c. 880 ..... King Harald Finehair unites Norway (r. 880–930)  
Prince Oleg (r. 879–913) relocates Rus capital from Holmgard to Kiev
- 881 ..... Election of Charles the Fat as Holy Roman Emperor (r. 881–887)  
King Louis III of France (r. 879–881) defeats Vikings at Sancourt
- 882 ..... Vikings sack Trier and Cologne  
Charles the Fat fails to contain Danes in the Lowlands
- 885 ..... Siegfried (ON: Sigurd) and Danish Vikings besiege Paris (885–886)
- 886 ..... Charles the Fat pays Vikings 7,000 pounds of silver to raise the siege of Paris  
Alfred occupies London and the lower Thames  
Alfred reforms army, constructs burghs and fleet, and improves coinage
- 887 ..... Charles the Fat deposed by Frankish nobility  
Arnulf the Bastard (r. 887–899) elected king of East Francia

- Eudes (Odo; r. 888–897) elected king of West Francia
- 890..... Battle of the Dyle: King Arnulf storms Viking base camp
- 891..... Vikings strike first silver pennies in East Anglia and York  
Trade and prosperity rise in the Danelaw (890–1000)
- 891–894..... Viking attacks on Wessex by Haesten (ON: Hadding)  
Inconclusive fighting: Vikings retire to France or settle in England
- 895..... Arrival of sea king Hrolf (Rollo) in the lower Seine valley
- 897..... Accession of Charles the Simple (r. 897–922) as king of France
- 899..... Accession of Edward the Elder as king of Wessex (r. 899–924)
- c. 900–905..... Gokstad ship burial, Norway
- 902..... King Cearbhall of Leinster occupies Dublin (r. 902–914)
- 907..... Prince Oleg (ON: Helgi) leads second Rus naval attack on Constantinople
- 911..... Charles the Simple invests Hrolf (Rollo) with fief in Rouen, Normandy  
First Byzantine-Rus commercial treaty
- 914..... Arrival of Sigtrygg and the third great Norwegian fleet  
Norwegian sea kings seize the Hiberno-Norse ports (914–920)  
Second Norwegian immigration to Ireland (914–950)
- 917–918..... Edward the Elder subjects the Danes of East Anglia
- 919..... German nobility elects Henry the Fowler (r. 919–936) king of Germany  
End of Carolingian Dynasty in East Francia (Germany)  
Vikings under Rognvald seize Nantes and raid Brittany (919–937)  
The Five Boroughs submit to the authority of Edward the Elder
- 920..... Hiberno-Norse of York acknowledge Edward the Elder as their lord  
Unification of England under Edward the Elder  
Sigtrygg, exiled Hiberno-Norse king of Dublin, seizes and rules York (920–927)
- 921–922..... Ibn Fadhlān, Abbasid envoy to Bulgars, describes the Rus on the Volga
- 924..... Accession of Aethelstan, king of Wessex (r. 924–939)
- 925..... William Longsword (r. 925–942) succeeds as count of Rouen  
Normans adopt French language and perfect heavy cavalry (c. 925–1000)
- 927..... Death of Sigtrygg I; Olaf Kvaran Sigtryggson succeeds at York  
Aethelstan occupies York, expelling Olaf Kvaran
- 930..... Ulfljot establishes the *Althing* of Iceland  
Erik the Bloodaxe succeeds as king of Norway (r. 930–936)
- 934..... Accession of Olaf Guthfrithson as king of Dublin (r. 934–941)  
Imposition of Norse power over the lands of the Irish Sea  
Norwegian settlements of Galloway and Wales  
German King Henry I invades Jutland
- 936..... Battle of St. Brieuc: Duke Alain of Brittany defeats Viking raiders  
Gorm the Old secures Jutland as his kingdom (r. 936–958)  
Hakon the Good received as king of Norway (r. 936–960)
- 937..... Battle of Brunanburh: Aethelstan defeats coalition of Hiberno-Norse, Scots, and Britons  
and recaptures York  
Duke Alain captures Nantes, ending the Viking state in the lower Loire valley

- 939..... Death of Aethelstan; accession of Edmund (r. 939–946) as king of Wessex  
Olaf Guthfrithson (r. 939–941) and Hiberno-Norse reoccupy York
- 940..... King Edmund cedes the Five Boroughs to Olaf Guthfrithson
- 941..... Death of Olaf Guthfrithson; Hiberno-Norse army proclaims Olaf Kvaran king of York
- 942..... Edmund retakes the Five Boroughs
- 943..... Expulsion of Olaf Kvaran from York by his Danish subjects  
Dispute over leadership in the Hiberno-Norse army at York (943–947)  
Igor (ON: Ingvar) leads third Rus naval attack on Constantinople
- 944..... Igor leads fourth Rus naval attack on Constantinople
- 945..... Olaf Kvaran seizes Dublin (r. 945–980): apex of Hiberno-Norse power  
Second Byzantine-Rus commercial treaty  
Queen Olga (Helga) assumes regency of Kiev (r. 945–964)
- 948–952..... Olaf Kvaran fails to secure York and the northern Danelaw  
Erik the Bloodaxe, exiled king of Norway, intervenes in York
- 954..... The Danes of York drive out Eric the Bloodaxe and accept as their lord King Edwig of  
Wessex (r. 946–959)
- 958..... Accession of Harald Bluetooth as king of Denmark (r. 958–986)  
Construction of military camps and third building phase of Danevirke
- 959..... Accession of Edgar (r. 959–975) as king of England  
Reform of royal institutions and English Church
- 960..... Battle of Strotth: death of Hakon the Good  
Harald Greycloak acclaimed king of Norway (r. 960–970)  
Conversion of Harald Bluetooth to Christianity
- 964..... Sviatoslav, prince of Kiev, attains his majority (r. 964–972)
- 965..... Reform of the *Althing*, Iceland  
Prince Sviatoslav smashes the Khazar kaganate  
Decline of Baltic-Volga-Caspian trade route  
Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor, invades Jutland
- 967–971..... Prince Sviatoslav invades the Balkans: war with Byzantium
- 970..... Murder of Harald Greycloak  
Harald Bluetooth annexes the lands of the Viken  
Jarl Hakon the Great rules Trondelag (r. 970–995)
- 971..... Defeat of Sviatoslav at Durostorum and withdrawal to Russia
- 972..... Pechenegs defeat and slay Sviatoslav on the lower Dneiper  
Succession crisis and civil war in Kiev (972–980)
- 975..... Accession of Edward the Martyr as king of England (r. 975–978)  
Emergence of Ringervirke decorative style (c. 975–1075)
- c. 975–1050..... Emergence of Mammen decorative style (c. 975–1065)
- 976..... Accession of Brian Bóruma (r. 976–1014) as king of Munster, Ireland
- 978..... Accession of Aethelred II (r. 978–1016), the Unready, as king of England
- 980..... Battle of Tara: Olaf Kvaran defeated by Mael Sechlainn II of Meath (r. 980–1022): end  
of Hiberno-Norse military power  
Construction of market town Sigtuna, Sweden  
Accession of Prince Vladimir (ON: Valdemar) as prince of Kiev (r. 980–1015)

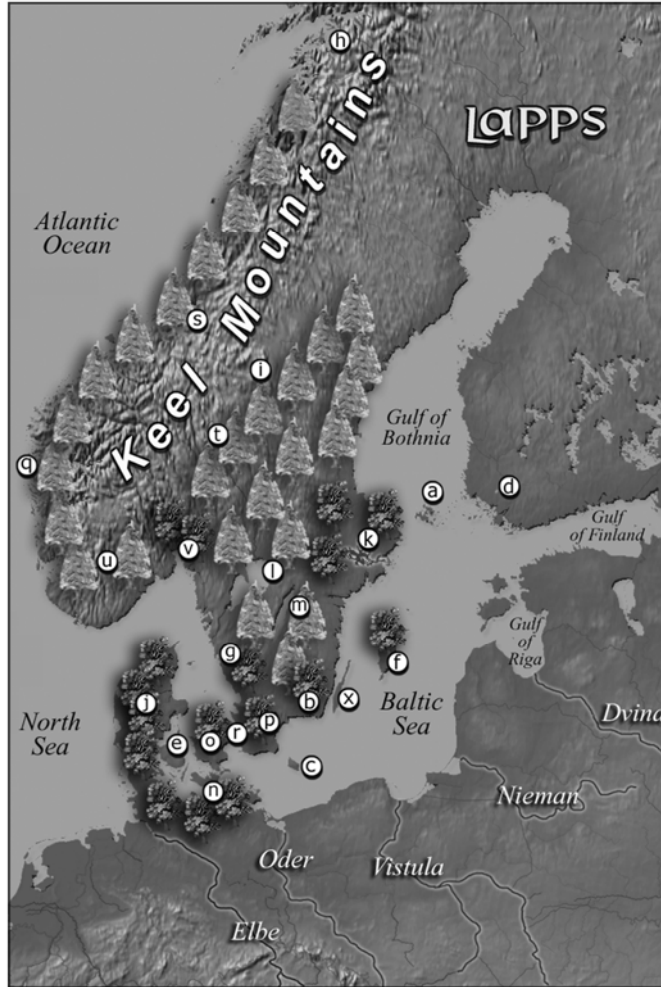
	Accession of Erik the Victorious as king of Sweden (r. 980–995)
980–1200	Emergence of the Urnes decorative style
983–984	Erik the Red explores Greenland
985	Erik the Red founds the Greenland colonies
986	Svein Forkbeard (r. 986–1014) expels his father, Harald Bluetooth Bjarni Herjulfsson first reaches North America
987	French nobility elect Hugh Capet (r. 987–996) as king of France End of the Carolingian Dynasty in West Francia (France)
c. 988	Battle of Hjorungavag: Jarl Hakon defeats Danish-Jomsviking fleet
989	Accession of Sigtrygg III Silkbeard as Hiberno-Norse king of Dublin Christianization of Dublin and rise of trade Conversion of Vladimir to Orthodox Christianity Emperor Basil II forms Varangian Guard
991	Renewed Viking attacks on England (r. 991–1002) Svein Forkbeard consolidates his control over Denmark
995	Olaf Trygvason acclaimed king of Norway Promotion of Christianity in Norway Accession of Olof Skötkonung as king of Sweden (r. 995–1022)
997	Bishop Thrangbrand preaches Christianity in Iceland (997–1000)
1000	Brian Bóruma recognized as high king of Ireland <i>Althing</i> in Iceland officially converts to Christianity Battle of Svold: death of Olaf Trygvason Svein Forkbeard imposes overlordship on Norway
1001	Voyage of Leif Eriksson to Vinland
1002	St. Brice's Day Massacre: Svein Forkbeard declares war on England
1003	Svein Forkbeard invades England
1004–1005	Voyage of Thorvald Eriksson to North America
1006–1007	Jarl Tore directs Danish attacks on England
1009	Jarl Thorkell the Tall commands Danish forces in England (1009–1011) Thorfinn Karlsefni leads first settlement in Vinland (1009–1012)
1013	Svein Forkbeard and Cnut invade England Freydis and Thorvald lead second settlement in Vinland (1013–1014)
1014	Death of Svein Forkbeard: Cnut hailed as king by the Danish army
1015	St. Olaf acclaimed king in Norway Edmund Ironside recovers Wessex (1015–1016)
1016	Battle of Nesjar: St. Olaf secures Norway Deaths of Aethelred II and Edmund Ironside Cnut hailed as king of England and appoints earls
1019	Accession of Prince Yaroslav the Wise of Kiev (r. 1019–1054) Emergence of Slavic Orthodox civilization Cnut accepted as sole king of Denmark; institutes royal reforms
1022	Accession of Anund Jakob as king of Sweden (r. 1022–1050)
1026	Battle of the Holy River: strategic check of St. Olaf

- 1028..... St. Olaf driven out of Norway  
Cnut the Great hailed as king of Norway
- 1030..... Battle of Stiklestad: defeat and death of St. Olaf  
Svein Alfivason (r. 1030–1035) alienates his Norwegian subjects
- 1034..... Harald Hardardi enters the Varangian Guard (1034–1043)
- 1035..... Magnus the Good received as king of Norway  
Death of Cnut the Great: succession crisis  
Harthacnut recognized as king of Denmark and England
- 1037..... Harold I Harefoot usurps the throne of England (r. 1037–1040)
- 1038..... Treaty of succession between Harthacnut and Magnus the Good
- 1040..... Death of Harold II; Harthacnut received as king of England
- 1042..... Death of Harthacnut: succession crisis in Denmark  
Edward the Confessor acclaimed king of England
- 1043..... Magnus the Good received as king of Denmark  
Magnus wages war against Wends and Jomsborg
- 1044..... Svein Estrithson (r. 1042–1044) raises revolt in Denmark  
Danish-Norwegian War (1044–1064)
- 1045..... Harald Hardardi and Svein Estrithson ally against Magnus the Good  
Sinking of ships in Limsfjord, near Skuldelev (c. 1045–1050)
- 1046..... Harald Hardardi and Magnus the Good share the Norwegian kingdom
- 1047..... Death of Magnus the Good
- 1062..... Battle of Nissa River: Harald Hardardi defeats Svein Estrithson
- 1064..... Treaty between Harald Hardardi and Svein Estrithson
- 1066..... Death of Edward the Confessor; Harold II hailed as king of England  
Harald Hardardi invades England and wins the Battle of Fulford  
Battle of Stamford Bridge: defeat and death of Harald Hardardi  
Battle of Hastings: defeat and death of Harold II  
William I, the Conqueror, king of England (r. 1066–1087)
- 1067..... Accession of Harald Kyrii as king of Norway (r. 1067–1093)
- 1069–1071..... Svein Estrithson supports English rebels against William I
- 1086..... Murder of St. Cnut IV (r. 1080–1086): end of Danish aims in England  
Accession of Olaf The Hungry as king of Denmark (r. 1086–1095)
- 1093..... Accession of Magnus III, Barelegs, as king of Norway (r. 1093–1103)
- 1096..... Bishop Gizur Isleifsson takes first census of Iceland
- 1098..... First expedition of King Magnus III to the Western Islands
- 1102–1103..... Second expedition of King Magnus III to western Islands
- 1104..... Lund elevated to archbishopric and primate of Denmark
- 1107..... King Sigurd I of Norway departs on Crusade (1107–1110)
- c. 1115–1116..... *Gragas* (“Grey Goose Laws”) of Iceland
- 1130..... Election of Sverker I as king of Sweden (1130–1150)  
Eruption of dynastic civil wars (1135–1250)

- 1131 ..... Accession of Inge II as king of Norway (r. 1131–1161)  
Civil wars between Croziers and Birchlegs (1131–1217)
- 1153 ..... Nidaros elevated to archbishopric and primate of Norway
- 1156 ..... Accession of St. Erik IX as king of Sweden (r. 1156–1160)
- 1157 ..... Accession of Valdemar I, the Great, as king of Denmark (r. 1157–1182)  
Absalon, bishop of Roskilde (r. 1158–1178)  
Political and cultural zenith of Denmark  
Founding of German port Lübeck
- 1164 ..... Uppsala elevated to archbishopric and primate of Sweden
- 1169 ..... Valdemar leads Wendish crusade and conquers Rügen  
Danish expansion along the southern Baltic littoral (1169–1180)
- 1170 ..... Arrival of Richard de Clare, “Strongbow,” earl of Pembroke  
English conquest of Dublin and the Pale  
End of Hiberno-Norse civilization
- 1182 ..... Accession of Cnut VI as king of Denmark (r. 1182–1202)
- 1202 ..... Accession of Valdemar II as king of Denmark (r. 1202–1241)  
Extension of Danish power in northern Germany (1202–1227)
- 1210 ..... Valdemar II leads Danish crusades into Estonia (1210–1219)  
First Swedish crusade against the Finns (1210–1216)
- 1217 ..... Accession of Hakon IV as king of Norway (r. 1217–1263)  
Centralization of royal power and prosperity in Norway
- 1220 ..... Snorri Sturluson composes the *Prose Edda*  
Composition of the *King’s Mirror*
- 1225 ..... Snorri Sturluson composes *Heimskringla*  
Hanseatic *kontor* (“community”) founded on Visby, Gotland
- 1227 ..... Battle of Bornhöved: defeat of Valdemar II by German vassals  
End of Danish domination in the Baltic  
German ports and Teutonic Order colonize Baltic lands
- 1249 ..... Second Swedish crusade against the Finns
- 1250 ..... Election of Valdemar as king of Sweden (r. 1250–1275)  
Establishment of Folkung Dynasty and royal institutions  
Emergence of Hanseatic League in the Baltic Sea
- 1262–1264 ..... Icelandic *things* vote to accept Norwegian king as lord
- 1271 ..... Magnus VI (r. 1263–1280) of Norway issues new law code for Iceland
- 1291–1294 ..... Third Swedish crusade against Novgorod
- 1340 ..... Accession of Valdemar IV (r. 1340–1375): restoration of Danish power
- 1347–1351 ..... The Black Death
- 1397 ..... Union of Kalmar  
Erik of Pomerania rules as king of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden
- 1500–1540 ..... End of the Norse colonies in Greenland

## Maps

# Guide to the Scandinavian Landscape



# Key

Aland Islands	a
Blekinge	b
Bornholm	c
Finland	d
Fyn	e
Gotland	f
Halland	g
Halogaland	h
Jamtland	i
Jutland	j
Lake Malaren	k
Lake Vanern	l
Lake Vattern	m
Lolland & Falster	n
Oland	x
Sjaelland	o
Skane	p
Sogne Fjord	q
Sund	r
Trondelag	s
Upplands	t
Vestfold	u
Viken & Oslo Fjord area	v



coniferous  
forest, e.g.  
pine



deciduous  
forest, e.g.  
oak

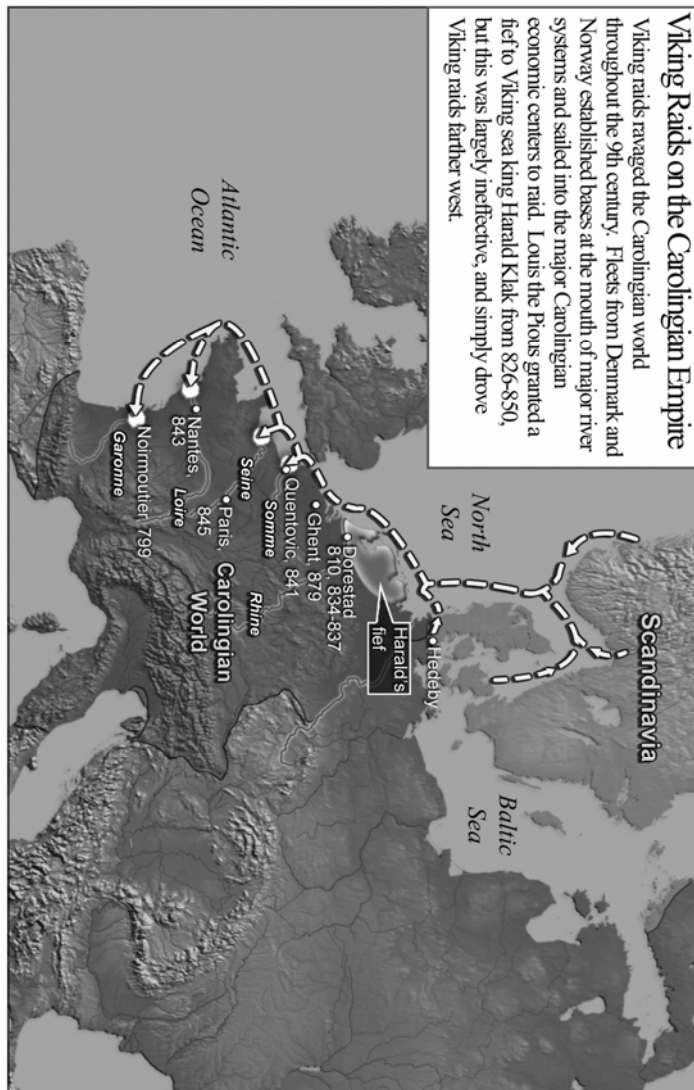


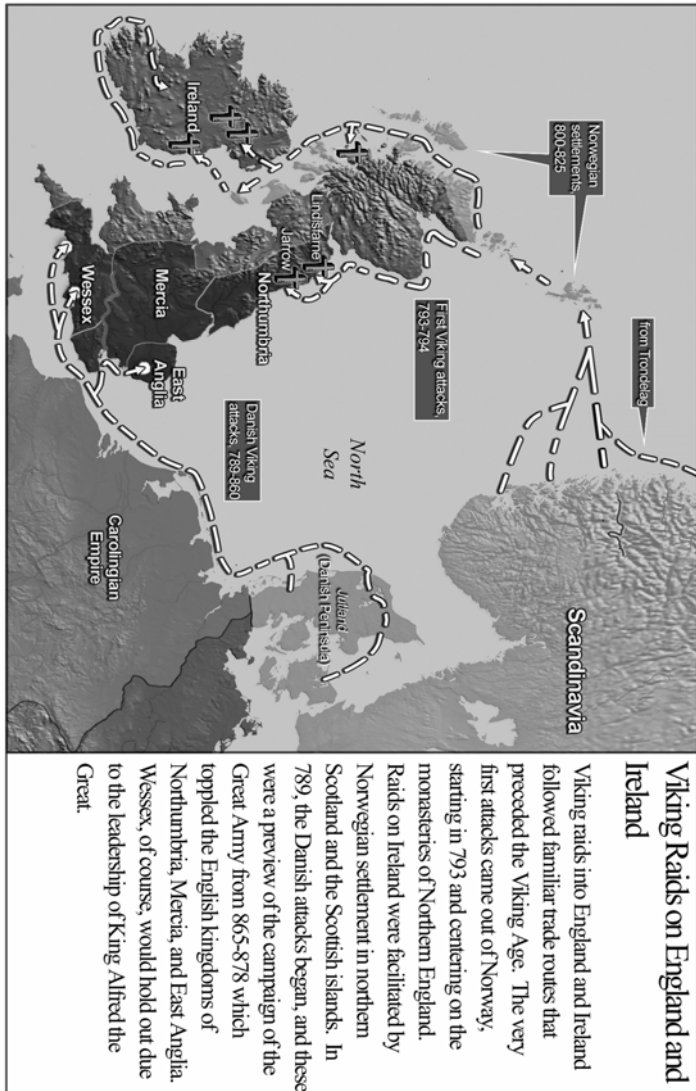
## Heroic Scandinavia, 475-600

The Heroic Age in Scandinavia precedes the period of true territorial states. The boundaries shown here reflect not political borders, but areas inhabited by the peoples (Danes, Gotar, Swedes) that would form the basis for the kingdoms that emerged by 1100. Kingdoms in this period centered around great halls such as Hleidr, the home of the legendary figure Hrolf Kraki, and Uppsala, the seat of his Swedish rival Adils. Note also that in this period, Danish power was concentrated on the island of Sjaelland, not the Jutland peninsula.

### Viking Raids on the Carolingian Empire

Viking raids ravaged the Carolingian world throughout the 9th century. Fleets from Denmark and Norway established bases at the mouth of major river systems and sailed into the major Carolingian economic centers to raid. Louis the Pious granted a fief to Viking sea king Harald Klak from 826-850, but this was largely ineffective, and simply drove Viking raids farther west.





### Viking Raids on England and Ireland

Viking raids into England and Ireland followed familiar trade routes that preceded the Viking Age. The very first attacks came out of Norway, starting in 793 and centering on the monasteries of Northern England. Raids on Ireland were facilitated by Norwegian settlement in northern Scotland and the Scottish islands. In 789, the Danish attacks began, and these were a preview of the campaign of the Great Army from 865-878 which toppled the English kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia. Wessex, of course, would hold out due to the leadership of King Alfred the Great.



### Scandinavian Kingdoms, 1100-1300

Shown here are the three kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway as they existed from 1100-1300. These newly Christianized kingdoms established primates in Uppsala, Lund, and Nidaros, and became integrated into Europe. Their primacy receded during this period, however, as Denmark's influence was checked by the Holy Roman Empire to the south, and Sweden was challenged by Russia to the east.



**The Vikings**  
**Part II**  
**Professor Kenneth W. Harl**



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## The Vikings

### Scope:

The Vikings have long conjured up images either of ruthless pirates ravaging the coasts of Europe or of heroic pagan warriors dedicated to Odin, god of ecstasy, poetry, and battle. These images, well attested in the medieval sources, are only part of the story of the impact of the Scandinavians on early medieval civilization. The first 12 lectures of this course deal with the evolution of a distinct civilization in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) on the eve of the Viking Age (790–1100). In 790, Scandinavians still worshiped the ancient Germanic gods and, thus, were divided from their kin in Germany or the former Roman provinces of Gaul and Britain who had adopted Christianity and Roman institutions. Breakthroughs in shipbuilding and the emergence of a warrior ethos celebrated in Eddaic and later skaldic verse turned Scandinavians from merchants into Vikings at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The second set of 12 lectures deals with the course and impact of the Viking raids between the late 8<sup>th</sup> through the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Danish and Norwegian raiders profoundly altered the political balance of Western Europe. Danes conquered and settled eastern and northern England, a region known as the *Danelaw*. They compelled King Alfred the Great of Wessex (r. 870–899) and his successors to forge an effective monarchy. In France, Vikings under Rollo embraced Christianity and settled the fief of Normandy in 911, thereby founding one of the most formidable feudal states of Europe. Norwegian Vikings settled in the main towns of Ireland and braved the North Atlantic, settling the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland, as well as an ephemeral colony at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. In Eastern Europe, Swedes developed a major trade route from the Baltic to the Caspian, laying the foundations for the Russian principalities.

The last 12 lectures explain the passing of the Viking Age. Over two centuries of overseas raids, trade, and settlement altered Scandinavian civilization. Scandinavians accepted Christianity and gained the high culture of Latin Christendom. Christian Danish and Norwegian kings in the 10<sup>th</sup> century first harnessed the Viking spirit to establish monarchies. Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035), king of Denmark, England, and Norway, briefly turned the North Sea into a Scandinavian lake. His institutions and example inspired the formation of Christian kingdoms in Scandinavia and turned Vikings into Crusaders. Yet perhaps the most enduring of achievements of the Viking Age were the sagas and verse of Iceland that immortalized pagan heroes and Christian kings, Norse gods and indomitable settlers of the remote island.

## Lecture Thirteen

### Viking Raids on the Carolingian Empire

**Scope:** From 790–825, Viking raiders targeted monasteries and unwallled towns of the Carolingian Empire, and their raids can be viewed as acts of piracy. Louis the Pious (r. 814–840) failed to maintain his father’s naval defenses, and after 830, civil wars erupted in the Carolingian Empire between Louis and his sons. After the partition of the empire in 843, it fell to Charles the Bald (r. 840–877), king of Western Francia, to deal with Vikings originating from Denmark and southwestern Norway. Since the 830s, the scale of Viking attacks had mounted. Dorestad was repeatedly sacked by Danes in 834–837 and abandoned by 865. In 845, Charles the Bald suffered a humiliating defeat when Ragnar Lodbrok sacked Paris and had to be bought off by a payment of *danegeld*. Thereafter, veteran Viking fleets operated off every major river from the Elbe to the Garonne. Frankish kings resorted to paying *danegeld* or hiring Viking companies as allies and mercenaries. It is estimated that from 845–886, perhaps one-third of the specie of the Carolingian Empire was paid out to Vikings. The departure of the Great Army to England (865–878) gave continental Europe a respite, but in 879–881, Viking fleets returned in force. This second wave of attacks climaxed in the siege of Paris (885–886). The emperor Charles the Fat (r. 881–888) also chose to buy off the Danes under Sigurd. Viking attacks irrevocably compromised the Carolingian monarchy and institutions, with the result that feudal lords emerged and reorganized Western Europe along new lines in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

### Outline

- I. Viking attacks on the Carolingian Empire began c. 790.
  - A. During the initial stage of the political clashes between the Scandinavians and the Frankish kings Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious, Viking attacks were of two kinds: pirate-type raids and clashes between the kings in Denmark and those in the Carolingian Empire over the common frontier.
  - B. The second phase of the Viking assault saw the raids intensify after the 830s. The Carolingian Empire was plunged into a period of civil wars, climaxing with Viking attacks on the Seine, Loire, and Somme, all the critical river systems leading into the heartland of France and the coastal regions stretching from the Seine up to the Elbe.
  - C. After a period of relative inactivity in 865–878, Vikings renewed their attacks on continental Europe. These attacks undermined the Carolingian monarchy and establish conditions for the emergence of feudal states in Europe in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
    1. By the 840s and 850s, Viking attacks had intensified, and the Vikings began to occupy the territories they had formerly raided.
    2. Veteran Viking companies constructed fortified camps and bases, established trade relationships with towns in the Carolingian Empire, and acquired a sense of identity as professional warriors.
    3. These companies became the basis of the royal armies of the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were used by the kings of Denmark and Norway to consolidate territorial kingdoms in Scandinavia.
- II. The initial phase of Viking attacks came during the time of Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious.
  - A. The earliest Viking attack in the Carolingian Empire was a pirate raid on the monastery of Noirmoutier at the mouth of the Loire River in 799. Recall that monasteries were major economic centers in the Carolingian period. Vikings quickly learned they could ransom certain captives in these raids, particularly abbots, as well as Christian relics.
  - B. This initial phase also saw a clash between Charlemagne and Danish King Guthfrith (r. c. 800–810; also Godfred; ON: Guthfrid), who was probably the king who controlled Hedeby and may have been responsible for the second phase of the construction of Danevirke, fortifications on Denmark’s southern borders on the Eider River.
    1. Guthfrith carried out a massive naval demonstration off Frisia and threatened Dorestad, Northern Europe’s premier market city and jewel of the Carolingian Empire’s economic system. No Frankish king could afford to see that city threatened.
    2. Charlemagne countered with a threatened invasion of Denmark and, ultimately, made a treaty with Hemming (r. c. 810–812), Guthfrith’s murderer and successor.

3. This clash convinced Charlemagne to take action to protect the ports stretching between the mouths of the Seine and the Rhine. The lower Rhine offered access to Cologne, Trier, and other cities and manufacturing centers of the Carolingian Empire.
  4. He set up a series of naval defenses, including signal towers and fortified posts, which proved to be fairly effective. Significantly, he did not establish a navy to counter Viking ships.
  5. Charlemagne could not stop the raids completely. Viking forces were still able to beach their ships in an uninhabited area, perhaps set up a fortified camp, then move in and ravage the surrounding region or attack a monastery. Very often, after these raids, a market was held to sort out the captives and booty.
- C. Starting in the 820s, Louis the Pious faced two major problems: his sons wanted to carve up the Carolingian Empire into independent states rather than allow the eldest brother, Lothar (r. 840–855), to rule the empire as a whole, and Viking attacks increased.
1. As the various vassals of the Carolingian Empire lined up behind the sons of Louis, the naval defenses were neglected.
  2. Further, the competing sons of Louis hired Vikings as their allies or mercenaries in some of their struggles.
- D. The increase in Viking attacks can be seen in the sacking of Dorestad every year between 834 and 837, continuing through the 840s, until the town was eventually abandoned in the 860s.
- E. To defend the area around Dorestad and Frisia, Louis handed out a fief to a Danish sea king, Harald Klak. Harald would rule Frisia as a vassal of Louis if he could control the raids.
1. Harald forestalled some raids, but he also gave information to Viking navigators and allowed Dorestad to be used as a convenient market for raiders to sell off their booty and plunder.
  2. Louis's action only served to direct Viking raids farther down the coast to the Somme, Seine, Loire, and Rhône.
- III. When Louis died in 840, a second round of civil wars ensued. His three surviving sons divided up the Frankish Empire at the Treaty of Verdun (843). The western third—essentially France today—went to Charles the Bald, and with it came the bulk of the fighting with the Vikings.
- A. Charles lacked the money and manpower to meet the Viking threat effectively; further, he had to devote much of his time to countering the ambitions of his brothers and their descendants.
- B. By this time, the Vikings had acquired a great deal of knowledge about the Frankish Empire and superb skill in negotiating its river systems and understanding its political divisions.
1. As the second phase of Viking attacks opened in the 830s and 840s, the raiders had become adept at traveling deep into the Frankish kingdom, attacking towns, and extorting ransom or tribute, known as *danegeld* (“payments to the Danes”).
  2. Between the reign of Charles the Bald and his final descendant, Charles the Simple, at least 45,000 pounds of silver was reported to have been paid by the Franks to the Vikings; this represents probably only about one-third of the total that was paid out.
- C. Charles suffered several very embarrassing attacks.
1. On June 24, 843, during the festival of St. John, a group of Norwegians sailed up the Loire and sacked Nantes.
  2. More humiliating was the 845 attack, when a large fleet of Danish and Norwegian ships, commanded by the legendary Ragnar Lodbrok, sailed up the Seine and met an army of Charles the Bald. The Vikings defeated half of Charles's forces, and hanged 111 prisoners, causing the other half to flee, and occupied Paris. Charles paid them 7,000 pounds of silver to leave the region.
- D. Ultimately, Charles spent most of his reign trying to counter multiple Viking attacks coming in on four different river systems: the Somme, Seine, Loire, and Rhône.
- E. In one instance, Charles hired a group of Vikings operating on the Somme and led by Weland to attack another group, operating at the mouth of the Seine and led by Bjorn Ironside. After laying siege to Bjorn's forces, Weland was paid by Bjorn to allow his forces to go free and conduct their raids in the Mediterranean.

- F. Charles admitted that his reign was a failure when, in 864, he summoned the nobility of his kingdom and issued a series of capitularies, or laws, in the tradition of Charlemagne. These are known as the Edicts of Pîtres.
    - 1. The edicts specified that towns and cities should be fortified to protect them from invaders.
    - 2. Further, the nobility should not requisition horses and labor under the guise of fighting the Vikings. By the 860s, a number of prominent vassals in the Frankish Empire were using Viking attacks as a means to consolidate regional control in their areas. Such figures included Robert the Strong and Baldwin of Flanders.
    - 3. Bans were also called on the sale of arms to Vikings, but these were generally ignored.
- IV. Not because of these edicts, but because they had depleted the spoils in the Frankish Empire, the Vikings decided to assault England, beginning in 865. By 878–879, many of those same Vikings, along with new arrivals from Scandinavia, returned to Europe in a new wave of attacks.
- A. In 879, a Viking force that had been fighting in England crossed the Channel, seized and fortified Ghent, and proceeded to ravage Holland and parts of western Germany, the heart of the Frankish Empire.
  - B. In 881, one of the Viking columns was intercepted and destroyed by the king of the western Franks, Louis III. This represented the first victory won by a Carolingian king over the Vikings, and it is celebrated in an Old High German epic, the *Ludwigslied*.
  - C. Also in that year, Charles the Fat, ruler of the eastern Frankish kingdom, came to the throne and, in the next several years, reunited the old Carolingian Empire. The nobility of the Frankish kingdoms had agreed to this unification because of the renewed Viking attacks.
  - D. Charles quickly showed, however, that he was unequal to the task of facing the Vikings. In 884–885, large number of Viking forces, under the command of Siegfried (ON: Sigurd), sailed up the Seine and put Paris under siege.
    - 1. Paris held out for about 18 months, defended by Count Odo.
    - 2. Charles raised a large army and rushed to Paris, but instead of fighting the Vikings, he gave them a *danegeld* payment of 7,000 pounds of silver and *carte blanche* to plunder Burgundy.
  - E. The Frankish nobility deposed Charles the Fat and confined him to a monastery. New kings were elected, including Arnulf the Bastard (r. 887–899) in the eastern Frankish kingdom and, in the western kingdom, Count Odo (r. 888–897), the first Capetian king and the hero of Paris.
    - 1. Both of these kings had modest success in countering the Vikings.
    - 2. Arnulf attacked a Viking camp on the Dyle River in 891, but the Vikings were able to withdraw to raid England.
    - 3. Odo did not face any serious Viking attacks during his reign, and the situation seemed stable on his death in 897.
  - F. By 895–900, a new generation of Viking warriors emerged from Scandinavia with the intention of starting a third wave of attacks. When these Vikings arrived, they encountered a politically divided and bankrupt Frankish Empire.
    - 1. One Scandinavian leader, the Danish sea king Hrolf, or Rollo, laid siege to Paris and was given, in exchange for freeing the city, a fiefdom in Normandy in an attempt to transform him into a Frankish vassal.
    - 2. This strategy of Charles the Simple worked and, as we will see in the next lecture, had major implications for halting Viking attacks into the Carolingian Empire and launching the system of feudal states.

#### Further Reading:

Janet L. Nelson. *Charles the Bald*. London/New York: Longman, 1992.

Pierre Riché. *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*. Translated by M. I. Allen. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Why were Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald unable to maintain coastal defenses? How did their indifferent leadership and institutional weaknesses contribute to Viking success? How important were the Carolingian civil wars?
2. What were the decisive advantages enjoyed by the Vikings in mounting their attacks against the Carolingian Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century? What motivated the sea kings and jarls who commanded these fleets?

## Lecture Fourteen

### The Duchy of Normandy

**Scope:** In 911, the Carolingian king of Western Francia, Charles the Simple (r. 897–923), invested the Viking sea king Hrolf (or Rollo) as count of Rouen and its environs. Charles the Simple, by enfeoffing Hrolf with Normandy, halted Viking attacks against Paris. In contrast to similar Viking settlements in Frisia and Brittany, Normandy was transformed into the greatest feudal state in Latin Christendom by Hrolf and his successors (who ruled as dukes after 996). The numerous veteran Vikings who settled in Normandy in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century transformed themselves into a Christian landed nobility. Within a generation, these Normans, the Christian descendants of Vikings, had adopted the French tongue and fielded the finest knights of Europe. Their dukes, with Richard II (r. 996–1026), were numbered among the peers of France. Norman adventurers carved out principalities, then a kingdom, in southern Italy and Sicily. In 1066, William the Conqueror (r. 1035–1087), also a duke of Normandy, conquered England. The settlement in Normandy announced the political and fiscal bankruptcy of the Carolingian house; thus, after 987, the Capetians, descendants of the counts of Paris who had defended their capital against the Vikings, ruled as kings of France.

### Outline

- I. This lecture focuses on the creation of the duchy of Normandy, originally referred to as the county of Rouen.
  - A. The founding of Normandy was an event of major European importance. It not only closed the period of Viking attacks into the Carolingian Empire but also represented a significant change in the development of feudal Europe.
  - B. The Normans would play a major role across Europe from the 10<sup>th</sup> century up until the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. These were descendants of Vikings who acquired land in northern France as a result of the act of enfeoffment by Charles the Simple.
- II. Why did Charles award the fief of Normandy to the sea king Hrolf, and how did Hrolf begin the transformation of Normandy into the premier feudal state of Europe?
  - A. Charles the Simple was a descendant of Charlemagne but had twice been passed over for the throne of western France. In 897, the Capetian Count Odo died, and Charles was finally chosen, but he was in a weak position. He was fiscally bankrupt and faced powerful vassals; he could not endure a third siege of Paris by the Vikings.
  - B. In 895–897, Hrolf's company arrived at the mouth of the Seine and embarked on a series of raids. Finally, in 911, Hrolf and Charles reached a settlement, in which Charles agreed to invest Hrolf with a fief. The land included the lower sections of the Seine around the city of Rouen, the cathedral city of Rouen itself, and the strategic bridges around Pîtres that guarded the approaches to Paris.
  - C. Both sides had good reasons to accept the arrangement. The Frankish monarchy had lost control of its finances, and Charles was unable to pay the *danegeld* demanded by Hrolf. His solution was to turn the invaders into vassals and hope that they would assist in protecting his kingdom.
  - D. Hrolf's warriors were in the third generation of Viking attackers; many of them had been raiding for 10 or 15 years, so that these veterans were keenly interested in acquiring land.
    1. Hrolf's fleet did not constitute an organized military body in the modern sense. The Viking companies represented contingents of smaller fleets that each owed allegiance to its own leader (jarl) and fellow warriors, who were generally members of the same community.
    2. By satisfying the aspirations of these warriors to obtain land, Hrolf was able to keep control over them and transform himself into a territorial lord.
  - E. The act of homage to complete the transaction took place at St. Clair on the Seine. In the ceremony, Hrolf was required, first, to convert to Christianity and, second, to kiss the foot of his new lord, Charles the Simple. Hrolf directed one of his warriors to perform this demeaning act, who in turn, picked up the king's foot, thereby unceremoniously dumping Charles on his back.

- III.** The success of Hrolf's duchy can be underscored by looking at another Viking state that was founded at about the same time.
- A.** In about 916–917, a group of Norwegians and Danes settled on the mouth of the Loire around the city of Nantes. In some ways, it seemed that they would carve out a second Viking principality in the Carolingian Empire.
  - B.** These warriors had been operating on the Loire for about 10 or 15 years and were led by another sea king, Rognvald. They had aspirations to rule the region of Brittany, but they embodied two significant differences from Hrolf's group.
    - 1.** First, the group had never been invested in the region by the Frankish king. In contrast, the counts and dukes of Normandy who came after Hrolf had legitimate claim to that area, despite their general disregard for the leadership of the Frankish kings. The nobility of Normandy could gain the cooperation of the clergy and the locals necessary to run an effective feudal state. The same could not be said for the Vikings in Nantes.
    - 2.** Second, the group in Nantes was never under the full control of its leader. These Vikings never made the switch from being raiders to being landlords and knights.
  - C.** In effect, Nantes became a base for this group to raid widely over Brittany for the next 20 years. Ultimately, in 936, Count Alain Barbetorte ("twisted beard") defeated the Vikings in a major battle in northern Brittany, marched on Nantes, captured the city, and scattered the Vikings.
  - D.** The difference between the group settling in Brittany and Hrolf's group is significant. Although the group in Nantes never made the transition from being raiders to being landholders, Hrolf's group understood what it had attained from the start: one of the premier areas of northern France. Within just a few years, Hrolf's men transformed themselves from warriors into landlords and began to learn how to fight as mounted cavalry.
- IV.** Scandinavians who came to the region of Normandy settled, primarily around Rouen, in significant numbers.
- A.** Within a generation of Hrolf's enfeoffment, Vikings had intermarried with local women, given up their Norse tongue, and become Christians. This stands in contrast to the situation that we shall soon discuss in England, where the Danes came in great numbers but retained their ancestral language and had major influences on the English language and legal institutions.
    - 1.** In Normandy, the number of Norse words that passed into French was limited. These included specialized terms of navigation and other words related to the sea. Otherwise, the language at the court of Rouen was French.
    - 2.** Further, Hrolf married the daughter of the count of Maine, Poppa, and their son carried the Frankish name William.
  - B.** This family of Norman rulers understood that they could gain more by exploiting the weaknesses of the Carolingian monarchs than they could by obeying their ties of vassalage.
    - 1.** Charles the Simple and his successors had doubts about whether they should have given these lands over to the Normans, and there were several efforts in the 930s and 940s to repossess the fief.
    - 2.** In all instances, the Normans proved themselves the equals to any invading French army. They quickly learned to make use of heavy cavalry and to build motte-and-bailey castles. These stockades, erected at strong points and manned by cavalry, enabled the Normans to dominate the countryside.
  - C.** The Norman rulers also aligned themselves with the counts of Paris, members of the Capetian family. This alliance ultimately resulted in the deposition of the Carolingian monarchs of France.
    - 1.** This goal was reached in 987, when Hugh Capet (r. 987–996) was proclaimed king of France, establishing a dynasty that would rule France until the time of the revolution.
    - 2.** In 996, Richard II was made duke of Normandy, becoming one of the peers of France. From that point on, the Norman dukes were established as among the great secular rulers of Western Europe.
- V.** How did the Normans achieve this level of success?
- A.** Most of this accomplishment can be attributed to Hrolf, who set the pattern for all his successors. He quickly adopted the French language and Frankish institutions and forged alliances with the French clergy, particularly the bishops of Rouen and the great monasteries.

- B. Hrolf and his descendants followed the example of the Carolingian kings in appointing members of their nobility to run the Church. The greatest example of this was Bishop Odo of Bayeux, who was the half-brother of William the Conqueror, as well as a nobleman and warrior.
  - C. The Normans also bestowed patronage on monasteries and supported the monastic reforms emanating from Cluny, particularly the Peace of God.
  - D. Above all, the Norman leaders, from Hrolf to William the Conqueror, kept tight control over their vassals and could tap into that military power. By 925–930, no more Viking attacks occurred on the northern shores of France.
    - 1. To some extent, Viking activity had shifted to the British Isles and to colonization of Iceland.
    - 2. The population pressure that had driven some of the Viking attacks had also diminished.
    - 3. In large part, however, Hrolf and his successors were so aggressive in patrolling the Norman coast that further attacks were discouraged.
  - E. The descendants of Hrolf, although they spoke French, actively remembered and promoted the connection with Scandinavia. For instance, they hosted a number of important Viking sea kings, including St. Olaf (r. 1015–1030), the future king of Norway, who was reputedly baptized at Rouen.
  - F. The descendants of the original Vikings who settled in Normandy later carved out two of the four great kingdoms of Western Europe.
    - 1. As we know, in 1066, William the Conqueror, then duke of Normandy, would cross the Channel, conquer England, and rule as king; his descendants would forge an effective monarchy in one of these four great kingdoms.
    - 2. A lesser known kingdom but just as important was the one created by those Normans who trekked into southern Italy, took service as mercenaries in the Byzantine army, and eventually carved out a kingdom in southern Italy and Sicily. This Norman kingdom came to be one of the dominant powers during the period of the Crusades and, in some ways, was more successful and important than either the original duchy or the kingdom of England.
- VI. In summing up the overall historical implications of the Viking attacks on the Carolingian Empire, we should keep several conclusions in mind.
- A. First, these attacks were not the sole reason that the Frankish monarchy failed. The Carolingian Empire had attempted to play the role of the Roman Empire, but it did not have the money or the resources to do so. It was also plagued by perpetual civil wars surrounding the issue of succession.
  - B. Nonetheless, the Vikings revealed, more dramatically than any other invader, the institutional weaknesses of the Carolingian monarchy. They eliminated the family of Charles the Bald as the rulers of France and carved out the premier feudal state of the new order that was to emerge.

**Further Reading:**

Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Charles Homer Haskins. *The Normans in European History*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What led to the decision of Charles the Simple to invest Hrolf with a fief in Normandy in 911? What were the precedents for this action? Why did the Norse settlement and rule in Normandy differ from that in Brittany and the lower Loire?
2. How did the Viking attacks and creation of Normandy transform the Carolingian world?

## Lecture Fifteen

### Viking Assault on England

**Scope:** Vikings attacked the British Isles from two directions in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Norwegians, crossing the Atlantic via the Shetland Islands, raided the coasts of northeastern England ruled by the Anglo-Saxon kings of Northumbria. In 793 and 794, Norwegians sacked, respectively, the celebrated monasteries of Lindisfarne and Jarrow—acts taken as the start of the Viking Age. Danish Vikings, raiding the Carolingian Empire in 830–865, also sacked ports and monasteries along the southern and southeastern shores of England. None of the English kingdoms offered serious resistance. In 865, the Great Army, under Halfdan and Ivar, sons of Ragnar Lodbrok, arrived and fortified a base in East Anglia. In 866–871, this Danish army occupied York, destroyed the Northumbrian kingdom, conquered East Anglia, and ravaged Mercia so thoroughly that King Burgred (r. 852–874) abdicated and retired to monastic life. The Great Army was only checked by the determined defense of King Alfred the Great of Wessex (r. 871–899). Alfred reorganized Wessex and, by his victory at Eddington in 878, imposed a treaty on Guthrum, then leader of the Vikings. In contrast to his Carolingian contemporaries, Alfred the Great had forged a kingdom in response to the most disciplined Viking attack of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and it fell to his heirs to drive back future Viking invaders.

### Outline

- I. This lecture examines the Viking assaults on England in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.
  - A. There are a certain number of similarities between these attacks and those that took place in the Carolingian Empire. That is, the assaults started as pirate raids, then escalated to more serious attacks, and climaxed in the conquests of the Great Army (865–878).
  - B. The period of attacks was followed by a period of settlement, including the settlement of the *Danelaw*, the eastern and northern portions of England, which was comparable to the settlement in Normandy.
  - C. There was also a significant difference between the Viking attacks in England and those in the Carolingian Empire: In England, the attacks did not result in political fragmentation; rather, their effect was to galvanize Wessex, the one English kingdom to survive the Viking assaults, under a truly remarkable ruler, Alfred the Great (r. 871–899). Without the Viking attacks, England, as we understand it today, might never have come into being.
- II. At the opening of the Viking Age, Scandinavians had been familiar with England through trade connections for some time.
  - A. The Viking assaults on England followed trade routes and came from two directions: a northern route, pioneered by Norwegians, that led to the shores of the Northumbrian kingdom and a southern route, followed primarily by Danes, that led to the southern and southeastern shores of England, especially East Anglia.
  - B. Northumbria was essentially two kingdoms. The first of these, Bernicia, comprised lands stretching from the Tees River to modern Edinburgh and included the eastern Scottish lowlands and northern England. Its principal town was Bamburgh. The other kingdom was Deira, which centered on York.
  - C. The name *Northumbria* simply meant all of England north of the Humber, which bisects England.
    1. Northumbria had been consolidated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and was the first of the successful Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It had close cultural ties to Ireland at the start of the Viking Age. Indeed, many of the great monasteries along the northern shores of England, notably Lindisfarne and Jarrow, had been founded by Celtic monks.
    2. The Northumbrian kings ruled a diverse set of subjects, and tension always existed between the northern and southern halves of the kingdom. The 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries saw several civil wars pitting the two halves of the kingdom against each other.

3. Northumbria represented a rich target to Viking raiders. The monasteries there had a reputation of being among the finest cultural centers in Christendom and were homes to such scholars as the Venerable Bede (673–735) and Alcuin of York (735–804). After the Viking attacks, the economic and cultural influence of Northumbria shifted into the Midlands and southern England.
- D. In 793, a group of three Norwegian ships sailed across the North Atlantic, came down the coast of Scotland and northern England, and landed at the monastery at Lindisfarne.
1. The monks there assumed that the newcomers were merchants because they had apparently dealt with Scandinavian traders in the past. On this occasion, some of the monks were killed, and the monastery was sacked.
  2. This attack is usually taken as the start of the Viking Age, even though it is not the earliest attack in Western Europe.
  3. The next year, a similar raid was conducted by Norwegian pirates against the sister monastery of Jarrow. In the course of the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, a number of reports of these types of attacks reveal that Northumbria was totally unprepared. These reports are confirmed by archaeological finds, which reveal large numbers of English goods found in Norwegian graves of the time.
  4. A legendary account in the saga tradition of the Norse holds that Ragnar Lodbrok, the greatest Viking hero of the first generation of raiders, was captured off the shores of Northumbria, perhaps on a scouting mission, and thrown into a snake pit by King Aelle. Later, in 866–867, the saga reports that the sons of Ragnar attacked York to avenge their father, capturing King Aelle and subjecting him to the “blood eagle.”
- III. The other place of action at the start of the Viking Age was southern England, consisting of the three kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia, and Wessex. At the time of the Viking raids, control of southern England was contested by Mercia and Wessex; as a result of the raids, the balance was shifted in favor of Wessex.
- A. Again, in the initial phases, the attacks were raids by the Danish, who sailed across the Channel to hit English ports. In 865, Viking companies, led by two of the three sons of Ragnar Lodbrok, Halfdan and Ivar, relocated from the Carolingian Empire and attacked England.
  - B. The Great Army that arrived in East Anglia might have comprised as many as 250–300 ships and 5,000–10,000 warriors. This force established a base near Thetford and, in the autumn of 866, swiftly moved into Northumbria and captured York. In the spring of 867, these Viking forces defeated a Northumbrian army commanded by rival kings, Osberth and Aelle.
  - C. The conquest of Northumbria was stunning. The Vikings immediately established a client king in York and invaded Mercia in the Midlands, seizing the royal center at Nottingham.
  - D. The Mercian army that arrived to counter the Vikings was led by King Burgred, accompanied by his brother-in-law, King Aethelred I of Wessex, and Aethelred’s younger brother Alfred, the future king. The Mercians could do little against the Vikings, and Burgred decided to pay them *danegeld*. The Great Army then withdrew to East Anglia, overthrowing the kingdom there when King Edmund demanded that they depart.
- IV. In less than three years, the Danes had overthrown two of the four English kingdoms; news of this success spread across Scandinavia.
- A. By 870–871, large numbers of new recruits were joining the Great Army, one contingent led by a new sea king, Guthrum.
  - B. The Great Army now seized Reading in the Thames valley and used it as a base to ravage Mercia and Wessex. In the face of this, King Burgred of Mercia abdicated and retired to Rome. The Vikings moved into the Midlands, occupied the so-called Five Boroughs, and transformed the region into an area of Danish settlement.
  - C. At the same time, the Vikings were also attempting to overthrow the monarchy in Wessex, but there they met a tougher opponent, King Aethelred I.

1. In the course of the fighting in Wessex, in 871, Aethelred I died, and his younger brother Alfred was declared king. Alfred turned out to be the one serious royal opponent that the Vikings met in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
  2. After 12 inconclusive battles, Alfred paid the Vikings *danegeld* in the summer of 871, and they withdrew into their conquests in northern England.
- D. In 874, the Great Army reappeared in the Thames valley, commanded by Guthrum. The army occupied the valley and, from there, moved south to ravage portions of Wessex. The army was also accompanied by a Viking fleet operating along the southern shores of England. The ultimate goal of the action was to force the English king to submit to the supremacy of the Viking sea kings.
- E. Alfred had learned in 871 not to meet the Vikings head on. Most English forces had been defeated by the Viking strategy of drawing their men into a shield wall and provoking the English into attack. The Viking warriors could repel the initial assault and would then counterattack and sweep the English off the battlefield.
- F. For several years, Alfred's forces and the Vikings engaged in a war of strategic movement before Guthrum agreed to pull out of Wessex in the fall of 877. Both Alfred and Guthrum retired to winter quarters, with Guthrum signing an armistice and receiving *danegeld*. It seemed that the war had ended inconclusively.
- G. Of course, Guthrum then launched a winter campaign. On Twelfth Night 878, the Viking forces left Gloucester, marched down the Avon, and almost captured Alfred at Chippenham. Alfred fled, his army was scattered, and the Vikings seized the royal center.
- H. In the spring of 878, Alfred returned from exile, raised an army, and took on Guthrum in a hard-fought battle at Eddington. This action forced Guthrum to accept the Treaty of Wedmore (May 878), which had two important provisions.
1. First, Alfred was to make a *danegeld* payment to the Danish army, and the Danish forces were to withdraw back into their areas of conquest.
  2. Second, the Danes had to accept baptism and respect Wessex as an independent kingdom.
- V. The Treaty of Wedmore bought Alfred time to earn the name "the Great."
- A. Alfred drew on classical models and his own experience to organize an effective royal army and kingdom. He divided the kingdom into *shires* (now called *counties*) and imposed taxation and the requirement of military service. He also made a concerted effort to fortify towns, bridges, and roads to restrict the movement of raiding Viking columns.
- B. Alfred's reforms came in tandem with a revival of monastic and cultural life. Indeed, Alfred is sometimes known as the Solomon of England for his wisdom as a lawgiver and patron. His own writings, including a translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, served to shift the cultural axis of England from the north, which had been overthrown by Vikings, to Wessex and the south.
- C. By the time a new Viking army appeared in 891–894, the changes wrought by Alfred enabled Wessex to weather the attack with no significant loss of territory. Of the kings of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred alone checked a major Viking conquest and gave to his heirs the means to drive back future invaders and create the kingdom of England.

**Further Reading:**

Richard Adels. *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*. London/New York: Longman, 1998.

Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What was the nature of the initial Viking raids on England? How did previous contacts by trade assist the Vikings in launching their raids? Why did Anglo-Saxon kings fail to launch an effective navy in response to these attacks?
2. How did the Viking assault lead to the creation of England? How did the English response differ from that of the Carolingian world?

## Lecture Sixteen

### The Danelaw

**Scope:** By the terms of the 826 treaty, the Viking king Guthrum and Alfred the Great defined the boundaries of the Danelaw, comprising East Anglia, the Five Boroughs of northern Mercia, and southern Northumbria, based at York. Considerable numbers of Vikings settled as the landed class, transforming their new homeland's language and customs. The Danelaw's distinct legal institutions, including the use of juries, were recognized into the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Danes converted to Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. York prospered as a Scandinavian city, its wealth and population of 10,000 rivaling those of London. Yet the Danes failed to forge an effective monarchy. The Anglo-Danish landed classes of East Anglia and the Five Boroughs accepted as their king Edward the Elder (r. 899–924), son of Alfred the Great. In 927, Edward's son Aethelstan (r. 924–939) imposed his authority over the Danes of York. His successors faced a new Viking challenge from the Hiberno-Norse sea kings of Dublin, who sought to control York in 939–954. The Hiberno-Norse failed because the Anglo-Danish landholders preferred the English king, who respected their laws. In 954, King Eadred (r. 946–954) ruled all England, but the England's unification had only resulted because of the Viking challenge.

### Outline

- I. Late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> -century Viking settlement in England and the transformation of Vikings into Englishmen bear some similarities to the situation in Normandy, but there are also important distinctions.
  - A. A major questions concerns the nature of the settlement: How many Danes settled in England? How did their culture and language impact the regions they settled in—regions later known as the *Danelaw*?
  - B. Secondly, why did the Danes who settled in England fail to establish some type of kingdom or state comparable to Normandy in France?
- II. We shall begin with the nature of the Danish settlement in England.
  - A. In 874–875, Halfdane, commanding the northern column of the Great Army, partitioned property in the old southern regions of the kingdom of Northumbria to endow many of the older warriors with lands that they could settle with their families.
  - B. A second settlement was carried out by Guthrun in the 890s, that portioned northern sections of the kingdom of Mercia, the Five Boroughs (Derby, Nottingham, Stamford, Lincoln and Leicester) and portions of East Anglia.
  - C. The Danes tended to occupy areas that were not already settled. The number of settlers is still a matter of debate; in 878, there might have been 100,000–150,000 in northern England, and over the course of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, an additional 20,000–30,000 Danes there.
  - D. The Danes might have represented at least 20–25 percent of the population of northern England, because they had an impact there that they did not have in Normandy or Ireland.
    1. A significant number of Danish words passed into what became standard English. Modern English today has at least 600 basic words that are of Danish origin, including such common words as *husband, fellow, law, outlaw, knife, egg, race, thrift, window, etc.*
    2. The meanings of many Anglo-Saxon words were modified by analogy to Danish words, as for example *dream*, which acquired its modern meaning as a result of analogy to a Danish cognate.
    3. The third-person plural pronouns in English, *they, them, and theirs*, were adopted from Danish forms.
    4. In addition, many place names in northern England show Danish origins, especially names ending in *-thorpe* and *-by*.
  - E. Danish influence on administrative and legal institutions in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-century England was also significant. The region the Danes settled retained customary Danish law, later known as the *Danelaw*.

1. A feature of Danish law was the jury. The earliest reference to a “jury of presentment,” similar to a grand jury, is found in the Wantage Code issued by King Aethelred II in 997; it is a feature of the legal system associated with the Five Boroughs.
  2. In Mercia and Wessex, areas of English control, counties were known as *hundreds*; in areas of Danish control, such units were known as *wapentakes*, an English adaptation of a Norse word meaning “weapon-taking.” This term probably referred to the type of elections that took place in Scandinavian assemblies, when weapons were beat against shields as a sign of approval.
  3. Large counties, such as Yorkshire, were divided into *ridings*, an Anglo-Saxon translation of the Norse word for “third.”
- F. In two or three generations, Anglo-Danish settlers, because of their numbers and the amount of property they owned, brought significant linguistic and cultural changes to their new homeland. They developed into tough, wealthy, landed ruling elites. As Alfred the Great’s successors discovered, the only way to control East Anglia, the Five Boroughs, and York was to co-opt these Anglo-Danish elites.
- III. The initial Viking attacks in 866–867 had been destructive, but the Danish also brought certain advantages to their new settlements after 878.
- A. For example, the Danes were responsible for relocating the city of York back to its Roman core and adapting Roman street patterns.
  - B. As a Scandinavian town, York boomed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps peaking at a population of 10,000 in the year 1000.
    1. York, at the western terminus of the Scandinavians’ northern trade arc, became a major center for exporting grain and other foodstuffs to Scandinavian and Irish markets and importing silks, silver, spices, and glassware from Eastern markets.
    2. York also linked northern England into the revitalized trade network of the Carolingian Empire.
  - C. Vikings who settled in northern England introduced the standard hammered silver coins, *pennies* and *deniers*, that were current in southern England and the Carolingian Empire. Such coins were not used in northern England before the Vikings arrived. Images on Viking pennies show both pagan and Christian symbols, indicating that the Danes were willing to respect the powerful figures in their new homeland without abandoning the gods of their forefathers.
- IV. The history of the Danelaw is a remarkable success story in many ways. Few of the Scandinavian settlements had such a profound influence on their new homelands, yet the irony is that the Danes, descendants of great warriors, failed to forge an effective kingdom.
- A. In part, this failure can be attributed to the fact that after 925, no significant numbers of reinforcements arrived in England from Denmark or Norway. Scandinavian immigration shifted toward Ireland and Iceland. Further, some Scandinavian sea kings began to keep parts of their fleets at home to help establish their kingdoms.
  - B. The Danes’ failure to forge an effective kingdom is related to Alfred’s success in creating Wessex as the center of English political power.
    1. Alfred was succeeded by a brilliant son and grandson, Edward the Elder (r. 899–924) and Aethelstan (r. 924–939). Together, these two rulers brought the Danish regions back under English control.
    2. Edward the Elder overran East Anglia with little opposition. The Five Boroughs agreed to submit to English control but could retain their local customs and laws. In 920, after Edward was acknowledged as the overlord of a Viking king ruling in York, he could legitimately claim to be “king of all Britain.”
  - C. In the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, it looked as if the Danes in Yorkshire might join up with their kinsmen in Dublin to form an effective Viking state in the British Isles.
    1. York and Dublin were connected on the northern trade arc. Further, the Norse kings ruling in Dublin, starting from 917 on, commanded a powerful fleet that dominated the Irish Sea.
    2. In 917, the ruling king in Dublin, Sigtrygg, was ousted by his brother Guthfrith (r. 920–934). Sigtrygg, with warrior forces, took control of York, and ruled as king, but he acknowledged the authority of the English king at the time, Edward the Elder.

3. Sigtrygg died in 927 and York went to Edward's successor, Aethelstan. The brief rule of a Norse king from Dublin gave later Hiberno-Norse kings a claim of legitimacy over Yorkshire.
  4. From 927 to 954, the Norse kings of Dublin made several attempts to take over the northern sections of the Danelaw and fuse them into a Norse kingdom straddling the Irish Sea. Such attempts included those by Olaf Guthfrithsson in 939–940 and Erik the Bloodaxe, son of the Norwegian king Harald Finehair.
- D.** In this complicated political situation, several factors became clear.
1. The Yorkshire Danes regarded the Irish Norse more as foes than kinsmen. The Anglo-Danes had begun to accept Christianity and had formed a settled landed class; they saw a Christian English king as preferable to a restless Hiberno-Norse sea king.
  2. In the end, the reason that the efforts to establish a Hiberno-Norse kingdom failed was that the Danish settlers realized that their political, legal, and religious interests were aligned with those of the successors of Alfred the Great.
- E.** By 954, all the Danes had come to recognize the English king, now Eadred (r. 946–954), as their lord, and the kingdom of England had emerged—a stunning political achievement attained in less than three generations.

**Further Reading:**

John Haywood. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

E. Rosedahl. *The Vikings*. Rev. ed. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1988.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. In what ways did the Danish settlers revive prosperity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century? How did the Danes adapt to their new homeland? Why did the Anglo-Danish landed classes dominate local life?
2. What accounted for the success of the heirs of Alfred the Great in forging a kingdom of England? Why did the Danes fail to cooperate with the Hiberno-Norse kings of Dublin?

## Lecture Seventeen

### Viking Assault on Ireland

**Scope:** On the eve of the Viking Age, Ireland was divided into petty tribal kingdoms that had changed little since the Iron Age. Rival kings clashed over matters of personal honor and the title of high king. Cultural life and prosperity rested in the monasteries, for the conversion of Ireland had proved one of the great successes of the Western Church. When Norwegian Vikings sacked the monasteries, they disrupted the only institutions that gave unity to the island. The Vikings, with their superior ships and arms, raided at will the coasts and valley of the Shannon in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Norse sea king Turgeis, c. 838–847, welded the Norse into an effective army based at Dublin. The Vikings exploited the local clashes among Irish warlords to obtain slaves for the markets of Muslim Spain. Other Norse ports arose at Limerick, Cork, Waterford, and Wexford. In 848–851, a Danish fleet challenged the Norwegians' right to loot Ireland, but in 851, Olaf the White arrived with a huge fleet from Norway and imposed his authority over all the Vikings of Ireland. Norse settlers quickly came to terms and intermarried with the Celtic population. Olaf and his heirs dominated politics and trade in Ireland until 902.

### Outline

- I. With this lecture, we begin a discussion of the Viking impact on Ireland and its associated areas, including Scotland, parts of Wales, and the various islands of northern Britain.
  - A. It is somewhat difficult to identify how long the Viking Age lasted in Ireland; the date 1170 is usually taken to mark a new departure in Irish history, with the arrival of the English when the new distinction of Celtic versus Anglo-Irish emerged.
  - B. In Ireland, the Vikings, largely Norwegians, were no longer the dominant political and military force after the Battle of Tara in 980.
  - C. In this lecture and the next, we shall look at the first century of Viking attacks and settlement in Ireland, particularly in Dublin, Cork, Wexford, Waterford, and Limerick, as well as the importance of the Viking kingdom in Dublin in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
- II. We begin with a look at Ireland on the eve of the Viking Age.
  - A. Western Europeans had two differing opinions about Ireland in the two centuries before the Viking Age: it was seen as a remote island at the edge of the civilized world, inhabited by a rather barbarous race and noted for timber, Irish wolfhounds, slaves, and beef exports; it was also seen as a remarkable island dotted with monasteries and home to many fine scholars. Both views had a certain basis in reality.
  - B. Ireland was divided into petty kingships. Most Irish society was based on the *sept*, a grouping of related families and clans. Descent was extremely important, as attested by the genealogies of Irish legends.
  - C. Various dynasts struggled for supremacy in five regions that can be identified using Anglicized names: Ulster (the core of northern Ireland), Connaught (in the west), Meath (north-central area), Leinster (south), and Munster (southwest).
    1. Those who could claim kinship with the legendary Hy Neill family, kings of the ancient religious seat of Tara. In turn, the king of Tara was acknowledged as the high king (*andri*) of Ireland, which was largely an honorific position.
    2. In general, Irish kingship meant imposing one's lordship over lesser rivals, who paid various types of token tribute (*boruma*).
  - D. Since Ireland had not been conquered by the Romans, it had no cities, roads, political or administrative institutions. It made contact with Roman civilization through Christianity, beginning in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.
    1. This contact is associated with the activities of St. Patrick (389–461), the son of a Roman decurion. He was captured in an Irish raid on Britain and enslaved in Ireland for a number of years before escaping back to Britain. He was eventually ordained by Bishop Germanus (St. Germain) as the apostle to the Irish.
    2. In the 430s, he arrived in Ulster and was allowed to begin the conversion of the Irish. In 444, he established the church and monastery at Armagh, which became the primate of Ireland.

3. Within the next century, St. Columba (521–597) organized Irish Christianity along monastic lines. The Irish adapted Christianity to their social structure. Monasteries became extensions of clan groups, taken over by leading figures of the *sept*. As organizing bodies for Irish Christianity because there were no towns, monasteries were the main agents of cultural change and progress.
4. They were *the* centers of learning. Monks translated the Irish tradition of travel among the elite classes into missionary work. Many went to Gaul, where they converted Frankish kings in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, and they were responsible for conversions in central Germany, Scotland, and northern England.
5. The Vikings' destruction of the Irish monasteries, the only institutions that cut across political boundaries, undermined the cultural and economic basis of the island.

**III.** What was the attraction of raiding Ireland for the Vikings, and what was the Viking impact on Ireland in the 9<sup>th</sup> century?

- A. Norwegians were undoubtedly trading with Ireland by the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The trade routes that led them to attack northern England were the same routes that led them into the Irish Sea. The Norwegian attacks stemmed from Trondelag (Trondheim) and from western region of Norway. The North Atlantic islands of the Hebrides, Orkney, and the Shetlands served as Norwegian bases in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- B. The 790s saw the first attacks, starting a 50-year period of raiding along the Ireland's eastern and southern shores and up the Shannon River. The Irish had no political organization beyond their Iron Age kingships, and the Scandinavians seriously outclassed their military.
  1. The Irish did not have the warships or weapons possessed by the Norwegians, who had complete strategic mobility; their ships could penetrate crucial Irish river systems, including the Boyne, leading into Ulster, and the Shannon, which bisects Ireland.
  2. Between 790–840, almost every major monastery in Ireland was sacked several times. Armagh was sacked at least 3 times in the first generation of raiding and might have been sacked as many as 10 times in the course of the Viking Age.
- C. The raids were deplored in the Irish chronicles written by monks who also deplored the number of apostate Irish, that is, Irish who had gone over to the Vikings, known as the *Gaell-Gaidail* ("Foreign Gaels"), in contrast to the *Finnngail* ("White Foreigners"), the Norse.
- D. Within a generation of the attacks, the Vikings settled into military encampments at the mouths of all the critical rivers and established bases that would become the cities of Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, Cork, and Dublin. In these towns, the Vikings took native wives and spawned a mixed population. These Gall-Gaidills turned out to be even more ruthless and destructive than the Vikings themselves.

**IV.** Sometime around 838–839, there was a change in the nature of the Norse attacks corresponding to the situation in the Carolingian Empire.

- A. The sea king Turgeis (ON: Thorgils) arrived at this time with a large fleet from Norway and began to organize the Norse in Ireland into an effective military force. His principal base was at Dublin, where he established a Hiberno-Norse kingdom.
- B. Turgeis imposed discipline and order on the Norse settlers and made marriage alliances and other political arrangements with Irish rulers. Turgeis was also apparently responsible for organizing attacks into the Carolingian Empire, including one into Muslim Spain in 844–845.
- C. In 848–850, a second Scandinavian fleet appeared, primarily Danes.
  1. A remarkable conflict was then fought between the Danes and Norwegians over who should have the rights to plunder Ireland.
  2. The climax came at a naval battle at Carlingford Lough in 851, won by the Danes, who had called on St. Patrick for assistance.
- D. The Danish position in Ireland was brief. In 852, Olaf the White (r. 852–871) arrived with a Norwegian fleet, brought the Danes to heel and sealed matrimonial alliances with the Irish royal family of Meath.
  1. Under Olaf, the Norse developed their military camps into fortified ports and markets and engaged in a brisk slave trade.
  2. Olaf and his brother Ivar (r. 871–873) consolidated an effective Scandinavian kingdom at Dublin lasting until 902, when the Norse were temporarily expelled from Dublin by Irish forces.

3. Based on control of the trade routes in the Irish Sea and North Atlantic, the Norse kingdom had little interest in penetrating inland. The Irish were adept at fighting in forests and bogs and a venture inland posed risks for the Norse.
4. Norse towns assumed the role of conduits for the export of Irish goods, such as slaves, hides, and salted meat, and the import of finished goods, such as better weapons.
5. The Norse in Dublin extended the range of their control, not inland, but across the Irish Sea and through much of the wider Celtic world. They settled the Isle of Man and the islands and northern shores of Scotland. Ultimately, the Norse kingdom in Dublin served as a lynchpin in the trade with Scotland, northern Wales, and England, rather than aspiring to control the Irish.

**Further Reading:**

Nora Chadwick. *The Celts*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Sean Duff. *Ireland in the Middle Ages*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1997.

Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How had political, military, and social conditions in Ireland changed since the Iron Age? How did these conditions contribute to the success of Viking attacks in the 9<sup>th</sup> century? Why did Irish high kings and warlords fail to contain Viking raids?
2. How did Christianity and monasteries define Irish civilization before the Viking Age? What was the impact of the Viking raids on Irish cultural life? What are the value and limitations of Irish chronicles as a source on the Vikings in Ireland?

## Lecture Eighteen

### Norse Kings of Dublin and Ireland

**Scope:** In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Hiberno-Norse kings of Dublin sought to extend their sway over the lands around the Irish Sea. Norwegians had settled among the island chains of the Shetlands, Orkney, and Hebrides; on the Isle of Man; in Galloway; and in northern Wales. The Hiberno-Norse kings, however, failed to extend their sway over York. Olaf Kvaran (r. 945-980), reigned as king three times in York but could not weld an effective North Sea kingdom and, ultimately, retired to rule from Dublin. In 980, Olaf suffered a decisive defeat at Tara at the hands of King Mael Sechlainn II of Meath (r. 980–1022). Thereafter, Norse kings in Dublin reigned as vassals of the Irish high king. The Vikings were accepted as the Ostmen, “Easterners,” who controlled the slave trade and furnished fleets to their Irish overlords. Brian Bóruma (r. 976–1014), king of Munster, imposed himself as high king by drawing on the resources of his Ostmen allies. Brian’s victory and death at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 did not end Viking power in Ireland, but marked another clash in the struggle among the royal houses of Munster, Leinster, and Meath for the high kingship. The Ostmen remained down to the Anglo-Norman conquest of 1169–1170.

### Outline

- I. This lecture deals with the Norse kingdom of Dublin in the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period often seen as the height of Viking power.
  - A. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Norse had the opportunity to construct a political and economic order that could, if not unify the Irish kingships, at least play an important role in the future development of Ireland, but this kingdom did not come to fruition.
  - B. In Irish national mythology, Brian Bóruma (r. 976–1014) is credited with ending the threat of a Viking conquest in Ireland at the Battle of Clontarf (1014). In reality, Norse power was broken at the Battle of Tara in 980, ending Dublin’s role as Ireland’s leading political force.
  - C. To understand these developments in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, we shall look first at the nature of the Viking settlement in Ireland and make some comparisons to the settlements in England and the Carolingian Empire. We shall then trace events in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and take a new look at the Battle of Clontarf.
- II. As mentioned in the previous lecture, the Norse quickly developed market towns in Ireland. Most of the major ports today, including Waterford, Wexford, Cork, Limerick, and Dublin, trace their ancestry and their names to Norse settlement.
  - A. In all of these towns, the Norse were only part of the population and, in some instances, may have been a minority. Several pieces of evidence tell us that only a limited number of Scandinavian women traveled with Viking companies, and most Norsemen took Irish women as their wives or concubines.
    1. Graves excavated in Ireland, particularly in Dublin, show a mixed material culture.
    2. Further, the Scandinavian words that passed into Gaelic are similar to the types of words that passed into French in Normandy, that is, specialized terms related to commerce, navigation, and fishing.
    3. The Norwegians quickly learned to respect the Irish as warriors. Although the Norse enjoyed naval superiority and could defeat the Irish in a pitched battle, they would not venture into the hinterland of Ireland. The interior was broken up into a complicated set of petty kingdoms and was marked by forests and bogs that invited ambush.
    4. The Norse also carried out matrimonial alliances with leading warrior and royal families in Ireland. Indeed, the last great Norse king of Dublin, Sigtrygg Silkbeard (r. 989–1036), could claim royal Celtic ancestry.
  - B. Starting in the later 9<sup>th</sup> century, with the discovery of Iceland (870), the number of Norwegian reinforcements arriving from Scandinavia dwindled. At the same time, King Harald Finehair was keeping the Viking fleets at home to aid in uniting Norway into a kingdom.
  - C. Throughout the late 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Norwegians in Ireland were largely on their own. This situation allowed the Irish kings in Meath and Leinster to reorganize their forces, counterattack, and restrict Norse movements. In 902, the Norse were temporarily driven out of Dublin.

- III.** In 914–915, another great Norwegian fleet set sail, commanded by several sea kings, including Sigtrygg II. This fleet arrived off the shores of Ireland about 15 years after the Norse had been defeated in 902 and they reoccupied the old ports and settlements.
- A.** In 917, Sigtrygg defeated the Irish high king Niall in a major battle, took Dublin, and reestablished the Norse kingdom there. Sigtrygg also conquered Dublin’s hinterland, the area that would later form the core of the English Pale.
  - B.** In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a powerful succession of kings reigned from Dublin, with wide-ranging aspirations.
    - 1.** As mentioned in a previous lecture, the Norse kings in Dublin saw a connection to their kinsmen in York and northern England and made a concerted effort in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to bring the islands and northern shores of Scotland under Norwegian control.
    - 2.** There was also extensive settlement in northern Wales, in Cumberland and Lancashire in England, in Galloway, and in Scotland.
    - 3.** These diverse areas were tied together by trade connections, especially by the profits of the slave trade, and by the Scandinavian tradition of naval supremacy.
    - 4.** The Norse kings had a sense of themselves as descendants of the heroes of old. Icelandic poets were always welcome at the courts of Dublin to relate the ancient Norse legends. The connections among the Norse kings in Dublin, the colonies in the Atlantic islands, and ultimately, Norway were quite powerful.
  - C.** The first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century saw a series of abortive attempts to conquer the Danelaw in northern England, but in the end, the attempts failed.
    - 1.** The efforts failed in part because the Anglo-Danish landed classes in northern England saw the Hiberno-Norse as outsiders; the Anglo-Danish realized that their interests lay in alignment with a Christian English king.
    - 2.** Further, the Hiberno-Norse did not have the resources or the sophistication to control the kingdom of York. The inhabitants of the Danelaw had come to appreciate the institutions of England, which traced back to Roman origins, and no such institutions had ever existed in Ireland. The Hiberno-Norse had no understanding of this kind of political or administrative order.
    - 3.** When the efforts to conquer the Danelaw failed, the then-reigning Norse king, Olaf Kvaran (r. 945–980), son of Sigtrygg II, returned to Dublin to rule and lost interest in further conquest of York.
- IV.** Olaf experienced success throughout his long reign, which exemplifies some of the changes that were beginning to take place in Ireland.
- A.** After turning his back on the possibility of an expanded Hiberno-Norse kingdom in Dublin and York, Olaf realized that the Norwegians would have to depend on political alliances in Ireland itself. Starting in the 940s–950s, Olaf was forced to seek alliances among the increasingly better armed and better organized Irish kings, especially the kings of Meath and Ulster.
  - B.** One figure in particular that concerned Olaf was Mael Sechlainn II (r. 980–1022). In 980, Mael delivered a decisive defeat to Olaf at the Battle of Tara. This battle marked the beginning of the end for the Hiberno-Norse as the dominant power in Ireland.
    - 1.** After 980, the Hiberno-Norse began to refer to themselves as the Ostmen (“Easterners”). They continued to reside in Dublin and the surrounding towns, and they came to depend on alliances with the leading Irish kings; in some instances, they even paid tribute to the Irish kings.
    - 2.** In other words, the Norse settlements were being integrated into a wider political and economic order in Ireland.
    - 3.** The Irish viewed the Ostmen as outsiders but accepted them as a *sept* and were able to accommodate them within the political order. The Irish kings saw the Norse towns as sources of allies, mercenaries, and money; above all, the Norse controlled the ports that exported slaves and goods, enabling the import of weapons and luxuries.
- V.** We now turn to the Battle of Clontarf (1014), which is usually used to mark the end of the Viking Age in Ireland.
- A.** The Viking raids had dictated political developments in Ireland, and the Hy Neills who ruled in Ulster were among the losers in this development. The kings of Meath, however, began to emerge as leaders. Mael Sechlainn II made Meath the dominant kingdom in Ireland and took the title of high king.

- B. Another region had also gained power during the Viking Age, Munster in the remote southwest. This was the homeland of Brian Bóruma, but the region had been insignificant in earlier Irish history. The rulers were the Dal cais family, marcher lords who gained importance by fighting the Vikings in Limerick in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
- C. Despite their status as second-rate rulers, the Dal cais family was responsible for defeating the Vikings in Limerick and ending Viking raids in western Ireland at the same time that the kings in Meath were pushing back the Norse in Dublin.
- D. This rather minor kingdom of Munster emerged as a well-armed and important Irish state, and in 976, Brian Bóruma was declared king. Most of his early career was spent mopping up the remains of Viking resistance and imposing his authority over southern and eastern Ireland.
- E. By 997, Brian had emerged as such a powerful figure in southern Ireland that the reigning high king, Mael Sechlainn, agreed to divide authority on the island. Brian was recognized as almost the equal of Mael Sechlainn.
- F. In 1000, Brian took Mael Sechlainn's title of high king, which of course, angered the former high king. This political situation set in motion a series of intrigues and rebellions to bring down Brian Bóruma and his upstart dynasty.
  1. Plans were hatched in Dublin by the then-reigning Norse king, Sigtrygg Silkbeard III, and his Irish mother, Gormflaith, who came from a royal family of Leinster and was the former wife of Mael Sechlainn.
  2. The alliance to overthrow the power of Brian Bóruma climaxed in 1014 but failed. As a charismatic and pious Christian king, Brian could call on many allies from the west and south.
  3. Sigtrygg bolted before any battle could be fought; Mael Sechlainn, in turn, detached himself from the action. Meanwhile, various Irish warlords from the east who resented Brian's rule summoned in large numbers of Viking allies.
  4. On Good Friday 1014, the great battle took place at a narrow bridge just west of Dublin. Brian's forces carried the day, but the Norse king of the Isle of Man, Bodir, cut his way through the battle lines and mortally wounded Brian.
  5. In the end, the real victor was Mael Sechlainn, who reasserted his control as high king of Ireland after the death of Brian Bóruma in battle.
- G. The Norse remained in Ireland, controlling the ports, acting as the conduits to the wider world, and profiting from the slave trade. In contrast to the situation in the Carolingian Empire and England, however, no Scandinavian political order emerged in Ireland, primarily because there had been no Roman conquest of those lands. After the collapse of Norse power at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Irish politics continued as it had before the Vikings had come on the scene.

**Further Reading:**

Sean Duff. *Ireland in the Middle Ages*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1997.

Brian O. Cuiv, ed. *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples, c. 800–1100 A.D.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1987.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why did the Hiberno-Norse kings of the 10<sup>th</sup> century fail to forge an effective monarchy around the Irish Sea? Why did the Battle of Tara end Norse political power?
2. What institutions were lacking in Ireland for the construction of an effective monarchy by either Norse or Celtic kings? Why did Viking attacks fail to produce in Ireland the unity they did in England?

## Lecture Nineteen

### The Settlement of Iceland

**Scope:** In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, Norwegians discovered and settled the Shetland and Faeroes Islands as bases for their voyages to the British Isles. In c. 870, the Swedish merchant Gardar Svavarrrsson was driven off course en route to the Faeroes and discovered Iceland. Gardar, followed by two other early explorers, the Viking Naddod and Raven Floki Vilgerdason, reported free land for the taking, along with abundant fish, sea mammals, and birds. Within 50 years (from 870–930), 5,000–15,000 settlers, mostly from western Norway and the Norse colonies in the British Isles, settled the vast island. Ari the Learned (r. 1067–1148) records the names of 430 leading settlers in his *Landnamabok* (“*Book of Settlements*”). On this distant island just below the Arctic Circle, the Norse exploited the land for stock-raising and founded isolated farmsteads. They created the first overseas European colonial society governed by customary law and adjudication in local *things*, or assemblies. Hence, later Icelanders claimed that their ancestors had immigrated to escape the tyranny of King Harald Finehair (r. c. 880–930). In 930, the leading chieftains, known as *godar*, established a national *Althing*, which met each summer. This free republic proved a remarkable success in self-government.

### Outline

- I. This lecture is the first of four dealing with the Norse experience in the North Atlantic, centering on Iceland but also including the Faeroes, the Shetlands, and the Norse settlements in Greenland and Vinland.
  - A. This topic constitutes one of the most exciting and remarkable adventures in the Viking Age.
  - B. The Viking settlement in Iceland left us a great literary legacy. Indeed, Iceland’s importance in European literature of the Middle Ages is out of all proportion to its size and remoteness.
- II. The Norwegians of the 9<sup>th</sup> century who sailed to Iceland were truly at the remote reaches of the world for most Europeans. The region is at the fringe of human habitation.
  - A. Iceland is just below the Arctic Circle, but its climate is moderated by the mid-Atlantic drift (Gulf Stream). Iceland’s pastures and sheltered valleys and fjords are primarily on the western side of the island, the so-called *Breidafjord* (“Wide Fjord”).
  - B. Icebergs prevented sailing for much of the year, as reported by such early explorers as Gardar Svavarrrsson, who is credited with the discovery of Iceland.
  - C. Iceland is essentially a vast plateau that is built up by volcanoes, snowfields, and glaciers. Travel across the interior is, in some places, impossible. The island encompasses almost 40,000 square miles and is about 300 miles across, yet only about 15 percent of it is inhabitable, and this area is largely along the shores, particularly the western shores moderated by the Gulf Stream.
  - D. The greatest glacier in Iceland is Vatnajokull, which with its associated snowfield, covers nearly 3,000 square miles. Such glaciers are hundreds of feet deep and are permanent features of the landscape. Iceland also has a number of active volcanoes; of course, lava flows from these volcanoes can melt the glaciers and cause great destruction.
    1. For early settlers, the ash of erupting volcanoes caused sickness in grazing animals.
    2. In 1783, for example, Mount Laki erupted and destroyed about 55 percent of all cattle, 80 percent of all sheep, and 75 percent of all horses. As a result, perhaps one-fourth to one-third of the human population starved in the following two or three years.
  - E. Iceland is virtually treeless and offers a good deal of pastureland. Settlers raised cattle, sheep, and horses, which had no natural predators on the island. Sea creatures were also available for food, but the ability to grow fruits, vegetables, or grains was limited. From the start, Iceland would have to depend on imported foodstuffs.
  - F. The sailing distances to Iceland were daunting. It is probably about 600 statute miles from Bergen, today the main port of Norway, to the eastern shores of Iceland. A cargo ship sailing at an average speed of 4 knots might make the voyage in 7–10 days, island-hopping from the Shetlands, to the Faeroes, and then to

Iceland. Changing colors in the water, driftwood, and the flight of birds told the Norwegian sailors that land was in reach.

1. Even after the sea routes were worked out, the voyage was still dangerous. Fogs were frequent, and the Scandinavians, who reckoned latitude by the sun, could easily end up sailing in the wrong direction.
2. *Laxdaela Saga* relates a story of Olaf the Peacock, whose ship encountered mists and got lost on a trip from Norway to Iceland in around 960. When the mists lifted, the crew still did not know in which direction to sail and decided to vote on the matter. Olaf refused to abide by the majority vote and, instead, consulted the navigator, remarking, “I want only the shrewdest one to decide because in my opinion, the counsel of fools is all the more dangerous the more of them there are.”

**III.** The discovery of Iceland was assisted by the fact that the Norse had already established bases along the way. They had settled the Shetland Islands at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and had set up a society there that would mimic the one later established in Iceland.

- A.** A farmstead at Jarlshof has been excavated in the Shetlands and can be viewed on a website maintained by Professor Christopher Fee at the University of Gettysburg. The site is a typical Norwegian colony.
- B.** Sometime toward the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the group of islands known as the Faeroes was discovered. These are 17 treeless islands midway between the Shetlands and Iceland. Both the Faeroes and the Shetlands were important way stations for sailing into the North Atlantic and to Ireland and the British Isles.
- C.** The Scandinavians’ voyages to the Shetlands and the Faeroes led to the accidental discovery of Iceland.
  1. Before the Norse arrived in Iceland, it was inhabited by Celtic monks (*papar*), who probably arrived there by *curragh* in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century.
  2. The first Scandinavian arrival in Iceland was a Swedish merchant named Gardar, who had been heading for the Faeroes but was driven off course and landed on the east coast of Iceland, probably around 870. Gardar noted that the land was an island and that it seemed to be uninhabited.
  3. A famous Viking raider of Ireland, Naddod, also stumbled upon Iceland by mistake, sometime in the early 870s. He found no signs of habitation and named the island “Snowland” before departing for the Faeroes.
  4. Finally, a Norwegian named Raven Floki headed an expedition to bring cattle and settlers to this new island. He sailed to Breidafjord and established a farmstead, but he had not brought enough hay, and his animals died over the winter. Ultimately, Floki decided that settling in Iceland was a hopeless venture and returned to Norway.
  5. Floki’s crew members, however, saw opportunities in the available pastureland of Iceland, and they, along with other Norwegians, decided to settle there in the 870s and 880s. From 870–930, Iceland filled up with settlers from Norway.
- D.** The Icelanders were conscious of genealogy and left some remarkable records, based on oral tradition, of the settlers who lived there.
  1. Ari Thorgilsson, “the Learned” (r. 1067–1148), composed two works, the more important of which is the *Landnamabok* (“*Land-Taking Book*” or “*Book of Settlements*”). The book names more than 430 settlers, who would have brought their dependents and families, primarily from western or northern Norway, to Iceland during the period 870–930.
  2. From this book, scholars have deduced that 5,000–15,000 people crossed the North Atlantic in *knarrs* to set up farmsteads in Iceland.
  3. Several prominent people from western Norway are mentioned, including Unn the Deep-Minded, sister of Helgi the Lean. Unn claimed descent from Olaf the White, and we are told in two family sagas that she left Norway because she was dismayed by the unification of Norway under Harald Finehair. In addition to the lure of free land, many Norwegians may have made the trip to Iceland to escape Harald’s tyranny.
    - a.** Unn the Deep-Minded is an interesting figure. She sailed from Norway to the Orkneys, then traveled to the Shetlands and the Faeroes, marrying off her daughters along the way. She landed on eastern Iceland and settled in Breidafjord in the west.
    - b.** Her voyage to Iceland, probably made about 915, was significant in that the ship was wrecked, but none of the passengers or cargo was lost.

- E. Icelanders had a sense of themselves as tough and rugged people who would not buckle under to kings. For this reason, the Icelanders were conscious about governing themselves under the ancient Germanic assembly known as the *thing*.
  1. Eventually, Iceland would be divided into four quarters, each with its own assembly; after 930, each assembly would send representatives to a national *Althing*.
  2. The *Althing* settled disputes among Icelanders and handled occasional foreign or national policy issues, such as the ratification of treaties. The conversion of Iceland to Christianity was ratified by the *Althing* in 1000.
- F. Iceland had no cities or towns; the settlements were isolated farmsteads. A leading figure, such as Unn the Deep-Minded or Helgi the Lean, built a large farm, usually overlooking a fjord and adjacent to pastureland. Such farmsteads might have family units of, perhaps, several hundred people.
- G. The society was made up of such independent farmsteads, governed in the *things* and dominated by a chieftain, or *god*, who acted as the mediator among the landholders. The political institutions brought from Scandinavia devolved into a much simpler pattern of government in Iceland.
- H. The *Althing* was the major social institution that kept Icelanders together. Both marriages and business contracts were sealed at these legislative meetings.
  1. The *Althing* had no formal structure. The “law-speaker,” elected for a three-year term, stood on the Law Rock and recited the law from memory, one-third of it for each year of his term. Major disputes and settlements among citizens were also announced at the Law Rock.
  2. The social, political, and economic life of Icelanders revolved around these assemblies; otherwise, the society was remarkably self-regulating.
- I. For this reason, the Icelanders saw no real need to establish an army or a fleet.
  1. Ironically, by 930, Iceland had come increasingly to depend on trade with Norway. As in the case of the Danes who settled in England, the Norwegians who traveled to Iceland were primarily interested in setting up their own farms and acquiring property.
  2. In so doing, they transformed themselves from Vikings and seamen into farmers, losing their skills in navigation and marooning themselves on their new homeland. Without the import of timber and foodstuffs from Norway, Iceland could not survive.

**Further Reading:**

Jesse Byock. *Viking Age Iceland*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

M. Magnusson and H. Palsson, trans. *Laxdaela Saga*. New York: Penguin Books, 1969.

Robert Cook, trans. *Njal's Saga*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How daunting were the Norse voyages of discovery and settlement in the North Atlantic? Why was the settlement of the Shetlands and Faeroes a first step in the discovery and settlement of Iceland?
2. What made the Icelandic legal system and *Althing* work? What were the roles expected of the *godar* in administering law and settling disputes? What were the factors promoting a national consensus among Icelanders?

## Lecture Twenty

### Iceland—A Frontier Republic

**Scope:** In 1000, the population of Iceland peaked at perhaps 70,000 residents, who lived on farmsteads overlooking fjords and pursued a mix of farming and stock-raising, along with hunting and fishing. Intensive exploitation of Iceland's limited arable and dwarf forests eroded the land from the 11<sup>th</sup> century on; thus, Icelanders depended on imports and ships from Norway. Despite harsh conditions, Icelanders displayed genius in law and literature. Seventy 13<sup>th</sup>-century family sagas report the loves and disputes of ordinary Viking Age men and women and preserve a wealth of details of how Icelanders evolved legal means to limit blood feud and govern themselves without the apparatus of government. By ties of kinship and hospitality rather than hereditary right, *Godar* ("chieftains") acted as arbiters for their dependants and neighbors. For over three centuries, *godar* balanced the demands of honor, kinship, and the need for compromise to limit violence. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, great families amassed wealth by exploiting Christian institutions and carved out territorial principalities. Clashes among regional dynasts led most Icelanders to vote the Norwegian king as their lord in 1262–1264. King Magnus VI (r. 1263–1280) issued them their first code based on the customary laws of the Viking Age.

### Outline

- I. This lecture examines Viking Age Iceland as a frontier society, and looks at both the social and economic conditions that led to the type of settlement patterns described earlier and at the way this society governed itself.
  - A. The Icelandic society that emerged in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, while Scandinavian in origin, had a distinct culture that responded to the unusual conditions of its landscape.
  - B. Iceland has been illuminated for us by some remarkable sources, particularly the family sagas, most of which were written from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries but refer to figures who were involved in the original settlement in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.
    1. Such sources are somewhat controversial; scholars have debated whether they constitute accurate records of the families they describe or are more in the genre of historical novels.
    2. A more balanced view evaluates the sagas in tandem with archaeological evidence. This is the approach taken by Professor Jesse Byock, who has written a groundbreaking book on Viking Age Iceland and maintains a website related to his archaeological excavations.
    3. Byock shows how the sagas can be used to illuminate social and economic conditions, and his excavations have revealed a great deal of information on the Icelanders' diet, weapons, and so forth.
    4. The Icelandic sagas were never meant to be historical documents, but events remembered by the Icelanders, such as the discovery of Iceland around 870 and the formation of the *Althing* in 930, fit into the family framework of the sagas quite accurately.
    5. The sagas afford descriptions of daily life, legal actions, blood feud settlements, etc. and show consistency with existing customs.
- II. What do the excavations and sagas tell us about conditions in Iceland that led to the development of a frontier society?
  - A. Norwegians came to Iceland and established independent farmsteads. Usually, such settlers were prominent people who built core farms and acted as jarls in the farm communities. Such farmsteads were often erected after a religious ritual involving two pillars seen as sacred to Thor that would become the focus of a central hall in the settlement.
  - B. As a landowner, the *godi* possessed security and wealth that would have put him in a high class in homeland Scandinavia. Norwegian kings were astonished at the prosperity of Icelandic farmers.
  - C. By 1100, however, Iceland was experiencing ecological problems.
    1. Icelandic farmers needed to extend the pastureland to accommodate horses, sheep, and cattle. The dwarf trees were methodically cut down and used for construction and fuel.
    2. Destruction of forests led to erosion of the uplands, reducing land available for grazing and pushing settlement toward the coast.

3. By 1200, Iceland was experiencing serious economic and demographic problems resulting from the erosion of the uplands.
- D. Icelandic society required all family members to cooperate.
1. Men raised stock, hunted and fished, activities that took them away from their farmsteads for long periods. They sheltered in the *shieling*, a residence located between summer and winter pastures. Also important was fishing and hunting sea mammals and birds.
  2. Given the long absences of the men, running the Icelandic household was left to women, who were expected to perform important tasks in food preparation and weaving. The sagas also relate many instances in which women handled initial negotiations in law disputes and similar matters.
  3. Stressful environmental conditions fostered increased rights and power for women, as seen in the so-called “Grey Goose Laws” (*Gragas*, c. 1115). Women could administer property and even wield the power of a chieftainship through male delegates. Marriages could also be dissolved through divorce.
  4. The sagas often depict women “egging on” blood feuds. The blood feud in *Njal’s Saga* is between two leading women, Hallgerd and Bergthora, whose husbands do everything in their power to settle the dispute. It is notable that the sagas also describe just as many instances where women counsel caution to their male relatives.
  5. In a society that accounted for wealth in homespun cloth, women were constantly spinning and weaving. Food preparation and preservation were also ongoing tasks. No animal parts were wasted; meat had to be wind-dried because no salt was available.
- E. Given their ability to manage resources, the Icelanders’ population rose and probably peaked at 70,000 people in 1000. After the Viking Age, it did not return to this level until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- F. Icelanders were always economically dependent on Norway. The sagas are filled with references to Icelanders who take passage on Norwegian ships; many became poets at the courts of Norway. The Danish author Saxo Grammaticus tells us that the Icelanders turned their poverty into genius through their skills in storytelling.
- III. The society that grew out of early Icelandic settlement was remarkable. An analogy to the American West can be both deceptive and useful.
- A. Given the patterns of Icelandic settlement, there was no national government. Order in society was achieved by the *god*, a district leader who, by his reputation, his knowledge of the law, and his generosity to family and neighbors, was known as a figure to whom others could appeal to settle disputes, mediate blood feuds, and so on.
- B. The *god* knew customary law and attended the *things* and the *Althing*. The position of *god* could be shared simultaneously among several men and was not hereditary. If a *god* performed inadequately, he could lose his dependents and *thingmenn*. Hence, he had to be vigilant in imposing the law equitably and maintaining order in the society.
- C. Often Icelandic sagas show a *god* torn between pursuing a blood feud for family honor and fulfilling his social duty to prevent the feud.
1. In the *Laxdaela Saga*, this is the position of Olaf the Peacock. Olaf’s son Kjartan is involved in a dangerous love triangle and is killed by his first cousin and foster brother, Bolli. To maintain his family’s honor, Olaf’s obligation would be to order Bolli killed to avenge the death of Kjartan.
  2. Instead, Olaf avoids the blood feud and seeks compensation for the death of Kjartan. Such dilemmas are the essence of the family sagas and tell us much about how privatized justice functioned.
  3. One of the most prized qualities in Icelandic society was the ability to maintain honor yet work out a compromise under the most difficult of circumstances. In some instances, the threat of a blood feud may have been used as a negotiating device to this end.
- D. Some have noted a similar system of privatized justice in the American West. Here, however, it was assumed that the system was temporary; eventually, more regulated procedures would be put in place. In contrast, the Icelandic system operated throughout the Viking Age and even after the Icelanders passed under Norwegian rule.
- E. The transition to Norwegian rule took place after a series of votes in the quarter *things* between 1262 and 1264. This action was consistent with the Icelanders’ ability to compromise in the face of difficulties.

1. The deteriorating ecological conditions in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries led to the emergence of powerful men in Iceland who could consolidate hereditary power in a way that the traditional *god* could not. Such men included Snorri Sturluson, whose family, the Sturlungs, had carved out a *riki*, a mini-kingdom.
2. By the 1260s, five leading families had emerged, and the danger of civil war among their leaders was real. They fought for control of the Christian institutions and tried to manipulate the *Althing*.
3. Most Icelanders found this unacceptable. They invited the Norwegian king to become their overlord and end the situation.
4. The two Norwegian kings involved, Hakon IV (r. 1217–1263) and his son Magnus VI (r. 1263–1280), understood the situation and ruled through local institutions and respect for customary laws. Thus, the tradition of mediation and compromise in Icelandic society long continued under Norwegian kings.

**Further Reading:**

Jesse Byock. *Viking Age Iceland*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

M. Magnusson and H. Palsson, trans. *Laxdaela Saga*. New York: Penguin Books, 1969.

Robert Cook, trans. *Njal's Saga*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did economic and climactic conditions shape the society of Viking Age Iceland? What were the conditions of daily life? How well do the family sagas reflect these conditions? Why did Iceland grow dependent on trade with Norway?
2. How did Icelanders govern themselves? What accounted for the success of the Icelandic Republic between the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries? What were the powers of the *Althing*? How important were *godar* in ensuring the rule of law? What were the qualifications needed for a *god*?

## Lecture Twenty-One

### Skaldic Poetry and Sagas

**Scope:** The unique frontier society of Viking Age Iceland offered ideal conditions for the recording and transmitting of the Norse literary heritage. Since the conversion to Christianity in 1000 was accomplished by an act of the *Althing*, it was not accompanied by violent destruction of pagan shrines, yet the *godar* and farmers of Iceland took pride in their pagan ancestors and traditions. Icelanders focused their genius on recitation of poetry and storytelling—skills prized for entertainment during the long winters. The Icelanders, as the Danish clerical historian Saxo Grammaticus noted, turned poverty to their advantage by becoming expert poets and storytellers. The ancient Eddaic poems, composed in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, were preserved in an Icelandic manuscript. Snorri Sturluson (1179–1242) composed his *Prose Edda* to instruct Icelandic poets in the sophisticated skaldic meters that had arisen from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Skaldic poems were replete with kennings and subtle metaphors alluding to Norse myths and legends and were composed in an array of alliterative verses. Christian kings of Scandinavia long patronized accomplished Icelandic poets. Between the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Icelanders composed the family sagas, veritable historical novels set in the Viking Age. These prose narratives still stand among the finest vernacular literature of Europe. On the remote island of Iceland, truly the greatest victories of the Viking Age were won on the vellums.

### Outline

- I. This lecture looks at the conditions that gave rise to skaldic poetry and the Icelandic sagas. This literature includes the family sagas that describe Icelanders of the Viking Age down through the conversion to Christianity in 1000; the sagas of times past, such as the *Volsungs*; and sagas that are, essentially, translations of general European literature.
  - A. Much of this literature comes to us from Icelandic manuscripts of the 13<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Why was Iceland the source of this literature?
  - B. Icelandic literature is often hailed as one of the miracles of the Middle Ages. The literature that was produced in Iceland is still read today and inspired later Scandinavian authors. Indeed, numerous studies point to the connections between Icelandic literature and the modern novel or drama as we know it in Scandinavia today.
  - C. The body of literature of the Viking Age that survives outside of Iceland, in Scandinavia, is not nearly of the same size and diversity as that in Iceland. What is primarily available are Latin chronicles written in Denmark or Norse works by Icelandic authors.
- II. Several peculiar conditions account for the creation of skaldic poetry and sagas in Iceland.
  - A. One of these, obviously, is that Icelanders were colonists living in scattered settlements on a remote island that experienced long, harsh winters. In these conditions, there was a need for both hospitality and entertainment.
    1. The family sagas, in particular, reveal an appreciation for poets who could recount stories of the old heroes, ancient gods, and figures who were well known to the Icelanders in the early Christian Age. Thus, the living conditions alone extended the tradition of storytelling that was already evident in Scandinavia.
    2. As colonists, the Icelanders were, in some ways, more conscious of their origins than those who were living in the Scandinavian homeland. They proudly pointed to noble ancestors in Norway or Denmark.
  - B. As noted in the last lecture, the Icelanders also governed themselves in a peculiar way. All Germanic societies are believed to have been based on an assembly, or *thing*. The Icelanders applied this method of governance on a greater scale than was seen in the Scandinavian homeland.
    1. In Iceland, the quarter *things* or national *Althing* served, in effect, as a court of last resort and had greater importance than they did in Scandinavia. In the assembly was a law-speaker, whose job it was to reconcile disputes and act as an arbiter. The law-speaker was required to recite, from memory, one-third of the Icelandic customary law each year.

2. Between the establishment of the *Althing* in 930 and the conversion to Christianity and the advent of writing in 1000, we know of only five men who held the office of law-speaker. On average, these individuals served 18 years each, or six consecutive 3-year terms. They were reelected because they were considered wise and because they had the ability to memorize and recite.
  3. The whole of Icelandic society emphasized memorization, recitation, and the abilities to explain and to use ornate and beautiful language. Recitation involved the use of strict poetic forms and certain techniques that also applied to religious or legal language. Studies have shown that legal language was essentially religious language recast; that is, the laws were repeated in much the same way that traditional invocations were spoken to the gods.
- C. The act of conversion in Iceland also differed from the experience in the Scandinavian homeland.
1. In the year 1000, the Icelanders voted for Christianity as the religion of all. This act of conversion was, essentially, a compromise. The pagan majority agreed to accept Christianity as the official religion of the republic, in part to dissuade the king of Norway from suspending trade if the conversion was not carried out.
  2. Because the act of conversion was achieved politically, the types of zealous actions that are often associated with conversion in other areas in the Middle Ages were not carried out. There was no destruction of temples or statues and no violence against religious leaders.
  3. It should also be noted that Icelandic law had no means to impose the general decision to convert to Christianity. Officially, Iceland was Christian, but Icelanders were free to practice the old rites on their private property. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, many Icelanders conformed to Christianity publicly at the quarterly *things* and the *Althing* but continued to worship the old gods privately in their homes.
  4. The transition to Christianity was gradual, and the Icelanders continued to revere the stories of the past and their pagan ancestors. Excavations in the Mosfell Valley, led by Professor Jesse Byock, reveal that, in many instances, Christian Icelanders dug up the bodies of their pagan ancestors and reburied them in Christian cemeteries.
- III. Without the great literary achievements that come down to us from Iceland, we would not have our current understanding of the old Germanic gods.
- A. The Icelanders settled their new homeland at an important point in the literary development of Norse. The Viking Age had given a new surge to poetic activity in Scandinavia. New poetic forms were coming into use, and Norse had developed an incredibly rich vocabulary. *Kennings*, that is, extended metaphors, such as the image of a ship as the “sea’s steed,” also enlivened the poetic forms.
- B. At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, we begin to learn the names of poets, or *skalds*. The earliest poet we know of was a Norwegian named Bragi the Old (c. 850–900). Bragi composed *Ragnarsdrapa* (“The Shield of Ragnar”), which describes the mythological symbols on Ragnar Lodbrok’s shield.
1. As the first of the skaldic poems, this work marks an important transition from the earlier heroic poetry.
  2. Skaldic poems were composed in a much more complicated verse and filled with kennings and allusions to earlier myths. These poems were also the first to be associated with contemporary individuals.
- C. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Icelanders were regarded as the premier skalds in the northern lands. Starting at this time, we begin to learn the names of various other poets, whose works are often cited in family and other sagas of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. In one manual of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, 146 different skalds are named, all of them Icelanders; many of their poems are also listed.
- D. Once Icelanders converted to Christianity in 1000, they continued their enthusiastic composition of poetry and received the benefit of writing with the Latin alphabet. The adoption of writing was gradual, but by 1100, it was probably widespread among the wealthier classes in Iceland.
1. Bishop Gizur Isleifsson (1082–1106) recorded the first census of Iceland for the collection of tithes in 1096.
  2. At the same time, Icelanders also began to elect law-speakers for shorter terms, because memorization was not as necessary.
  3. Finally, around 1115–1116, the customary laws of Iceland were written down in the *Gragas*, the “Grey Goose Laws.”

- E. At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, Icelanders started to adapt writing to their literary production. The origins and dates of early written poetry are still disputed. Such poems are written in an archaic language, show the oral techniques of recitation, and embody the complicated meters of the skalds. They give us a relatively faithful reflection of what poetry was like in the Viking Age.
  - F. This early written poetry became the basis for the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, written about 1220. The work was written in three parts, the second of which contains instructions on how to use kennings and how to master complicated verse forms.
  - G. Icelandic poetry was now appreciated at the courts of the kings of Norway and Denmark. The types of poems became more diverse, including poems to mark funerary occasions and to honor patrons. The third part of the *Prose Edda*, the *Hattatal*, is a panegyric to Snorri's patron at the Norwegian court.
  - H. As a result, the poetry not only preserves the myths and traditions of the past but also celebrates contemporary figures and events. The forms of Icelandic poetry were also applied, starting in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, to translations of general European and Christian works.
- IV. At the same time that the Icelanders' techniques in poetry were being preserved in writing, similar developments were taking place with their tradition of storytelling. This gave rise to one of the most remarkable forms of literature we have from the Middle Ages, the Icelandic prose saga.
- A. For readers of the modern age, the prose sagas of Iceland impress us as the equivalents of the historical novel.
  - B. The Icelandic prose sagas constitute a different genre from poetry, partially because they are premised on writing. The stories might be traditional, or they might deal with prominent Icelanders of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries who are caught up in a web of family intrigue and blood feuds.
  - C. Continuous prose narratives are the hallmark of a literate culture. We can surmise, obviously, that in Iceland, a large readership must have been available with an appetite for tales that involved the immediate ancestors of the republic. Many Icelanders would have been related to figures in the family sagas or would have known about them because they had some prominence.
  - D. The sagas also represent works that can be read silently and appreciated as a solitary pursuit. Thus, this literature was written for a different social setting than the culture of the great hall, which had been the basis for creating poetry in the Viking Age.
  - E. In this way, the sagas represent an important shift in the attitudes and expectations of Scandinavian society in general. Scandinavians were moving into the mainstream of European literature and thought, yet at the same time, they still relied on Icelandic storytelling techniques.
  - F. One class of sagas that deserves more study includes translations of Arthurian legends; Christian works, such as hagiography; French romances; and other works of European literature. The Icelandic translations render this literature into elegant, lean Norse prose, reflecting the integration and assimilation of Scandinavia into the wider literary culture of later medieval Europe.

**Further Reading:**

Kirsten Hastrup. *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

E. O. G. Turville-Petre. *Scaldic Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why did Icelanders excel in poetry and saga? How important was patronage by the kings of Denmark and Norway?
2. How was Norse poetry, Eddaic and skaldic, composed and recited? What accounted for the power of this verse? How did poetic composition influence the composition of later Icelandic sagas?

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### Western Voyages to Greenland and Vinland

**Scope:** The discovery of Greenland and North America is a testimony to Scandinavian ships and seamanship, but these far western voyages were virtually unknown outside of Scandinavia. In 983–984, Erik the Red acted on earlier sightings to explore the western shores of Greenland. In 985, he returned to found the Eastern Settlement near Brattahild. A second settlement, the Western Settlement, was founded as a base for hunting Arctic mammals. From the start, the Greenland colonists, numbering at most 4,000, lived precariously. They lacked timber and iron. Trade in whalebone, furs, and skins never attracted large-scale commerce. The isolated settlers endured a deteriorating climate and disease from the 14<sup>th</sup> century on and died off before 1500. The Greenland colonies might have prospered if the Norse had colonized Vinland. In 986, Bjarni Herjulfsson, blown off course en route to Greenland, discovered Vinland (Newfoundland), Markland (Labrador), and Helluland (Baffin Island). In 1001, Leif Eriksson, acting on Bjarni's reports, explored the new lands. Leif wintered at a site in Vinland, discovered at L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland. In 1004–1014, Leif's kinsmen made three unsuccessful attempts to establish a colony at the same site, but they clashed with Skraelingar, most likely Algonquins. The project was abandoned, yet this brief Norse settlement has inspired the popular imagination and a host of forgeries, from the Kensington Stone to the Vinland Map.

### Outline

- I. This lecture covers the Norse voyages to Greenland and Vinland and colonization in these regions. *Vinland* refers to the small fragment of North America that the Norse discovered that is essentially Newfoundland today.
  - A. The discovery of Greenland and the attempt to settle in North America from 1001–1014 represent the far reaches of the Vikings' geographic knowledge. These explorations had little historical significance, and knowledge of them was mostly restricted to Scandinavia.
  - B. Nonetheless, these voyages are certainly what most people in North America remember about the Vikings and have been the subject of popular culture and public frauds.
  - C. We get much of our knowledge of Greenland and Vinland from two family sagas composed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *The Saga of Erik the Red* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders*. Both of these family sagas are verified by other reports. For example, in 1170, Adam of Bremen makes reference to the fact that Danes, Norwegians, and Icelanders know of an island called Vinland in the "Western Ocean," that is, the Atlantic, at the extreme end of the known world.
- II. The discovery and settlement of Greenland was, in some ways, a replay of the discovery and settlement of Iceland. In the voyages between Norway to Iceland, there were several instances of skippers being driven off course and making sightings of islands, which were probably the eastern shores of Greenland.
  - A. By the 950s and 960s, the existence of a landmass to the northwest of Iceland was known, but it took a colorful adventurer, Erik the Red, to make the first expedition there. Erik had been outlawed from Norway for manslaughter, then outlawed for three years from Iceland.
  - B. Erik bought the *knarr* of a skipper who had earlier sighted Iceland and set off on a voyage of adventure in 983 or 984. He found the eastern shore of Greenland, followed it down to Cape Farewell, and sailed up the west coast. There, Erik found several fjords that could provide similar conditions for settlement as those found in Iceland. The most important of these was Eiriksfiord, which became the basis for the Eastern Settlement.
  - C. Greenland was attractive, among other reasons, because there were no natives, which meant that land was available for the taking. Erik returned to Iceland and played up his new discovery, naming the area Greenland. In 985, he assembled 500 settlers for a return trip.
  - D. The expedition left on the long journey in 25 ships, but only 18 arrived in Greenland. These settlers lacked iron and timber and had a far more restricted area in which to raise their animals than in Iceland. It was essential that they develop trade goods to maintain contact with Iceland and Norway. These goods included walrus ivory, sealskins, and furs, which were in high demand in the luxury markets in Europe.

- E. Erik set himself up as the leader of two settlements: the Eastern Settlement ultimately grew to about 4,000 residents; the Western Settlement was about half that size, and there was also a smaller collection of farms known as the Middle Settlement.
- III. The success of the settlement in Greenland depended on maintaining long-distance trade with Iceland and Norway. The settlement could also have been assured if the Norse had managed to settle North America to the west, which had been discovered shortly after Erik the Red established his settlement in Greenland.
- A. Once again, North America was sighted by accident. Bjarni Herjulfsson, son of one of the original settlers in Greenland and a long-distance trader, overshot Greenland on a voyage and made landfall on what was probably the Labrador coast, which he named *Markland*, meaning “Wood Land.” He sailed north and made a second landfall on what was probably Baffin Island.
- B. In 1000 or 1001, Erik the Red’s son Leif Eriksson, or Leif the Lucky, bought Bjarni’s ship, enrolled part of the same crew, and set off to find Bjarni’s discovery. Leif sailed Bjarni’s route in reverse, first arriving at Baffin Island, then sailing on to the Labrador coast.
- C. Leif made landfall in Newfoundland, which was dubbed *Vinland* because of the berries found there that could be brewed into wine. The settlement was known as *Leifsbudir* (“Leif’s Booths”) and was, essentially, a camp with a hall and facilities for ship repair. Archaeological evidence points to the location of this settlement at L’Anse aux Meadows. The land Leif’s crew found had game and timber and, again, seemed empty.
- D. Leif returned to Greenland and reported his discoveries to his father. He had plans to return, but that winter, Erik the Red died, and Leif took over running the colony in Greenland. Responsibility for the next expedition fell to one of Leif’s younger brothers, Thorvald.
- E. Thorvald recruited a crew, made the voyage, and used the same camp that Leif had established. His crew, however, encountered natives, probably Algonquins, whom they called the *Skraelingar* (“Screechers” or “Screamers”). Thorvald’s men killed all but two of the Skraelingar party. The next day, the Skraelingar returned and attacked the Greenlanders, mortally wounding Thorvald.
- F. The need for timber and other resources to support the colony of Greenland prompted a second effort at settlement, which set out in the summer of 1009. This expedition was headed by Thorfinn Karlsefni, who had married the wife of Thorvald. Thorfinn brought with him perhaps as many as 250 settlers, including a half-sister of Leif Eriksson, Freydis, and her husband, also named Thorvald.
1. The party moved into Leif’s Booths and proceeded to exploit the hunting and fishing opportunities in the surrounding area.
  2. The first winter was difficult, but even so, Thorfinn and his wife, Gudrid, gave birth to a daughter, the first European child born in North America.
  3. The next spring, the settlement was in danger of breaking up. One group sailed back to Greenland, and the rest of the settlers relocated to a new site.
  4. The Skraelingar appeared at the new site, and Thorfinn allowed trade with them, as long as the exchange was confined to cheese, milk, and cloth. For reasons unknown, possibly because they had been sickened by the dairy products, the Skraelingar attacked the settlement shortly after the initial contact.
  5. The settlers relocated again and endured another difficult winter in 1011–1012 before abandoning the effort and sailing back to Greenland.
- G. In 1013, Freydis, Leif Eriksson’s half-sister, recruited two Norwegian brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, and put together another expedition of settlers.
1. Freydis, her husband, Thorvald, and the others again established a settlement at Leif’s Booth, but in this case, it was not the Skraelingar who brought about the demise of the settlement—it was a classic Icelandic blood feud over who should get the larger hall.
  2. After the blood-letting, there were too few settlers to make a go of it. Freydis and her husband returned to Greenland, and the efforts at any kind of settlement in North America came to an end.
- H. The Greenlanders still visited Markland to harvest timber as late as 1347. In fact, a Norwegian coin of the 11<sup>th</sup> century has been found at a Native American archaeological site in Maine.

- IV. The failure of the settlements in Vinland essentially condemned Greenland to extinction once the climactic and political conditions changed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- A. The remaining Greenlanders in the Eastern and Western Settlements quickly became isolated. The colony's population was greatly reduced by deteriorating climactic conditions and the Black Death in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
  - B. The Western Settlement was abandoned sometime in the 1340s to 1360s. The archaeological evidence shows that the last Greenlanders probably died off sometime around 1500.
  - C. Eskimos, who were better adapted to the climactic conditions of the minor Ice Age, moved into Greenland.
  - D. In 1712, the Danish Crown sent a Protestant mission to Greenland to convert the Norse settlers that they vaguely remembered as living there, but when the missionary arrived, he found only Eskimos.
- V. The Viking venture in North America and Greenland had little historical significance, but it has spawned numerous frauds and hoaxes attesting to the Viking presence in the New World.
- A. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw numerous attempts to connect the Vikings to civilizations in North America or Mexico. For example, the legend of Quetzalcoatl, the great white god, was associated with the Vikings, who were credited with founding the Maya civilization.
  - B. In 1898, a Swedish immigrant named Olaf Ohman, a notorious jokester, "discovered" the Kensington Stone in Douglas County in Minnesota. Ohman claimed that he had dug up this 200-pound stone, which bore a runic inscription purportedly from the year 1362. The stone was transported to Rouen in 1911 by Hjalmar Holand, a cherry farmer who was convinced that it was legitimate, but the Scandinavian and German philologists there pronounced the stone a preposterous fraud.
  - C. An even more remarkable fraud was that of the Vinland Map, which was supposedly dated before 1440. In 1965, the map was purchased by Yale University for more than \$250,000 from a book dealer in New Haven, who had, in turn, purchased it from a source in Barcelona. In 1974, the map was shown to be a fraud; Greenland and Vinland had been drawn in using modern ink, and Greenland was depicted as an island, even though it had been shown as a peninsula on maps dating as late as 1650.
  - D. These frauds illustrate the typical desire of a frontier society, such as America still thinks of itself, for noteworthy ties with the past.

**Further Reading:**

H. and A. S. Ingstad. *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland*. New York: Checkmark Books, 2001.

M. Magnusson and H. Palsson. *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What factors led Icelanders to follow Erik the Red to the Greenland colonies? In 985, what were the prospects for success of the settlements in Greenland? How did conditions differ from those in Iceland?
2. Why did the Greenlanders fail to colonize Vinland? Why did these voyages of discovery fail to excite attention, even in Scandinavia?

## Lecture Twenty-Three

### Swedes in the Baltic Sea and Russia

**Scope:** Swedes had long settled the Aland Islands and along the shores of southern Finland, and they had traded with the Finns and Baltic peoples. In about 750, Swedish merchants and warriors from Birka founded a settlement at Aldeigjuborg as a fortified market for trading in slaves and Arctic and timber products. The site offered easy portage to the tributaries of the Volga River so that the Rus, as Swedish Vikings were called, developed a lucrative trade with the Turkomen Bulgars and Khazars dwelling along the Volga. Slaves, weapons, and raw materials, destined for the cities of Islam, were exchanged for silk, silver, and prestige goods. The Arabic geographer Ibn Fadlan, writing in 921–922, recorded the customs and trade practices of these Rus on the Volga. The Rus, who operated by permission of Bulgar or Khazar *khans*, came under Turkomen influence. However, the Vikings found their political and cultural destinies, not on the Volga, but on the Dneiper. The Rus had long obtained their slaves by raids among the Slavic tribes dwelling in the forest heartland of Russia. In about 860, a Viking adventurer founded a new market at Holmgard (Novgorod) and, thus, directed Rus efforts south. In this way, the Rus were drawn to Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire and the greatest city of Christendom.

### Outline

- I. This lecture is the first in a series of three that deals with the Vikings, primarily Swedes, in Eastern Europe. These peoples were known as the Rus, a term of obscure origins, and later, Varangians, meaning “men of the pledge.” The latter term was generally reserved for Scandinavians of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the service of the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople.
  - A. For centuries, the Swedes had ties with people on the eastern shores of the Baltic and the southern shores of Finland. Starting from about 750 A.D., they were drawn into the river systems of Russia.
  - B. This lecture will explain the geography in which these Swedes operated, as well as the types of people that the Swedes encountered. Here, the experience differed from that of the Danish and Norwegians operating in Western Europe, because the Swedes came into contact with a great variety of people on different levels of civilization.
  - C. Finally, we shall look at the trade routes exploited by the Swedes in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and why the axis of Swedish trade changed in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century.
- II. Archaeological evidence from Birka, the great port on Lake Mälaren, reveals contact between the Swedes and the peoples of the Russian forest zones starting around 750 A.D.
  - A. A good deal of our evidence for Swedish Viking activity in this period comes from archaeology. Our literary sources are almost exclusively non-Scandinavian; these include Arab geographies, Byzantine accounts, and the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (1115).
  - B. There have been excavations of several important market towns in Russia, including one at Aldeigjuborg on Lake Ladoga, which was ideally stationed for trade coming out of the Gulf of Finland, making portage to the upper Volga, and sailing down the Volga to the Caspian Sea. Another town, Novgorod, was positioned on the Volkhov River and Lake Ilmen; traveling south by a series of portages would lead to the Dneiper and the Black Sea.
  - C. The Swedes who were attracted to these regions were merchant princes and slavers. Swedes obtained slaves by raiding the peoples of Eastern Europe and were engaged in exporting Arctic products and products of the forest. In return, silver and commodities of the Islamic world were brought back to Swedish market towns.
- III. What types of people did the Swedes encounter on the river systems of the Dneiper and the Volga? The best and easiest way to classify these peoples may be linguistically.
  - A. The first category consists of those who spoke different Finno-Ugrian languages. This is an agglutinative language structure, remotely related to the Altaic Turkish languages. Such speakers would include Finns, Lapps, Karelians, and others living in the northern zones. As we’ve said, the Scandinavians had been in

long contact with the Finns and Lapps, who were Arctic nomads and provided the furs and pelts necessary for trade.

- B. Also speaking a Finno-Ugrian language were the Magyars, ancestors of the modern Hungarians. These were nomads of the southwestern steppes, herders of sheep and horses, who were similar in their customs to the Turkomen. As these groups of Finno-Ugrian speakers show, customs and lifestyle were often more important in determining identity than language.
- C. The next important language group consisted of Turkic speakers; three groups of these people figured prominently in the Viking experience in Eastern Europe.
  - 1. The Bulgars were Turkomen, nomadic steppe people, operating along the upper Volga. They were in close association with the Islamic world, and over the course of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of them converted to Islam.
  - 2. Just south of the Bulgars, on the lower Volga, was a related Turkomen people known as the Khazars. Their great market town was at Atil, at the mouth of the Volga River, just as it entered the Caspian Sea.
  - 3. The Bulgars and Khazars controlled the river route of the Volga and were the first trading partners that the Swedes came into contact with, starting in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. Excavations have shown that as trade increased, these Turkomen tribes actually manufactured Islamic products themselves for export to Scandinavia. Such products included silver coins, furniture, aromatics, ceramics, and textiles. This trade connection proved extremely powerful down to about 975.
  - 4. Other Turkomen tribes roamed the southeastern steppes of modern-day Russia. Starting in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, a new people, known as the Pechenegs, emerged in this region. The “eight hordes” of the Pechenegs were reputed to be the most deadly horsemen on the Russian steppes during the 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Swedes attempting to make portage anywhere in the steppe zones were in danger of being attacked by Pechenegs.
- D. The final important language group consisted of Indo-Europeans, who lived in the forests of Central Europe. Along the eastern and southern shores of the Baltic, the people spoke highly inflected, very archaic languages, known as Baltic languages. There were also those who spoke Slavic languages, whose origins are obscure.
  - 1. Around the year 600, the Slavic population had expanded considerably. Many of them had moved west, as far as the Elbe River; others pushed into the Balkans and spread across Eastern Europe.
  - 2. In the forest zones, which would become the heartland of Russia, were largely Slavic-speaking people. In these areas, the Swedes raided and carried off large numbers of Slavs to the slave markets in the Islamic world.
  - 3. Also in these regions, the Swedes moved in and built fortifications, developing similar market towns to those seen in Ireland.
- E. Along the Volga River system were impressive *khanates*, ruled by Turkish warlords, or *khans*, who had a mixed population under their control, including many settled people and agriculturalists. In these towns and tent cities of the Volga were also numerous Muslims. Thus, when the Swedes moved into this region, an organized political structure was in existence, and their presence as merchants and mercenaries was with the permission of those already in power.
- F. Arab geographers capture this relationship quite well. Ibn Fadlan, writing in 921–922, observed these Rus on the lower Volga and illuminates the associations. For instance, Fadlan describes a ceremony presided over by a Rus merchant prince that was quite similar to ceremonies held by *khans* of the Turkomen tribes and, later, by Mongols. We see that the Rus readily adapted some of the rituals and structures already in existence in the regions they occupied.
  - 1. Fadlan also tells us how trade was carried out. The Rus invoked their divinities to ensure good market and were extremely eager to acquire silks and silver to denote rank among themselves.
  - 2. All the Muslim geographic writers also stress that slaves were the biggest commodity for the Rus.
  - 3. Thus, the river system of the middle and lower Volga consisted of organized Turkomen states, in which the Rus were able to move around by permission as agents to the Khazar *kagans* and the Bulgar *khans*.

4. We have very few reports of the type of Viking raiding activity in this region that we saw in Western Europe, although there were some Viking raids on the Caspian Sea. These raids, on Muslim towns, were launched from the Khazar capital, Atil, and carried out with permission of the Khazar *kagan*.
  5. The Rus were not able to operate independently, as their kinsmen had done in Western Europe.
- G. The Pechenegs were the Turkomen populations dwelling to the west and south of the great kaganates and khanates of the Volga and immediately south of the forest zones. These people were organized in tribal and clan structures and owed allegiance to no one but themselves. Any Viking ship coming down the Dneiper would have to deal with these peoples; thus, the development of the trade route along the Dneiper came later and would require a different approach.
- IV. The 9<sup>th</sup> century saw a distinct shift from the Volga trade route to a western route based on the Dneiper.
- A. This shift in axis has only been noted in recent scholarship as a result of excavations and intensive study in Russia and the Ukraine.
  - B. The shift can be dated fairly accurately from literary sources and archaeological evidence, but why did it take place?
    1. The Volga was convenient, and the bases along its reaches had been established early.
    2. In contrast, the route along the Dneiper was not governed by organized states and was plagued by the Pechenegs. Further, the lower Dneiper has a series of 12 dangerous rapids that required removing ships from the water and risking confrontation. Upon reaching the Black Sea, the journey is still 350 miles before Constantinople is reached. Yet this route became the preferred one from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century.
  - C. In 838–839, we have our first reference to Rus in a Byzantine account. Apparently a group of envoys had been sent by the Khazar *kagan* to the Byzantine Empire, and in that group was a troop of Rus, who were trying to return to their homeland. Their wish was to accompany a Byzantine mission to Western Europe; ultimately, they met up with Louis the Pious in the Carolingian Empire and were arrested but eventually found their way home.
    1. These Rus were representative of others in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century who had decided that getting to Constantinople was worth the effort in order to eliminate the Turkomen middlemen in trade.
    2. The Rus at that time had adopted the organization of the Turkomen political structure of the kaganate.
  - D. Of course, the other advantage of shifting from the Volga to the Dneiper was to eliminate the need to act as allies to the Turkomen. Thus, the Rus would have free reign to develop the trade route for themselves and gain direct access to the greatest city in the world, Constantinople.

**Further Reading:**

Johannes Bronsted. *The Vikings*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.

S. Franklin and J. Shepard. *The Emergence of the Rus, 750–1200*. London: Longman, 1996.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What were the primary trade routes across Eastern Europe? Why were Scandinavian ships so well adapted for navigating these rivers? What were the main commodities exchanged? Why were slaves the most important commodity?
2. What was the relationship of the Swedish Rus with various peoples of Eastern Europe? Why was the Khazar kaganate such an important trading partner?

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### The Road to Byzantium

**Scope:** In the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Swedish Rus developed a new primary trade route from Novgorod to Kiev on the Dneiper and, thence, to the Black Sea and Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire. This route required far more organization than that on the Volga. South of Kiev, Turkomen Pechenegs dominated the steppes. The Rus risked attack by Pecheneg horse archers when they took ships and cargo overland to avoid rapids on the lower Dneiper. The Rus coveted Constantinople (ON: *Miklagard*, “Great City,”), the seat of a powerful Macedonian bureaucratic state, as the source of silks and gold. In 860, the jarls Askold and Dir launched the first Viking attack on Constantinople. Their fleet of 200 ships was driven off by the imperial navy, equipped with Greek fire. Prince Oleg, who moved his capital from Novgorod to Kiev, led a more successful attack in 907, gaining a commercial treaty from the emperor in 911. His successor, Igor, launched Viking fleets against Constantinople, winning his own treaty in 945. Trade and mercenary service was far more common. In the Byzantine emperors, the Rus found employers who paid well. From the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century on, Varangians arrived from Scandinavia to serve in imperial armies. Most important for Russian history was Prince Vladimir’s conversion to Orthodox Christianity in 988–989.

### Outline

- I. The creation of the Rus state eventually gave rise to Orthodox Russia.
  - A. The shift in the axis of trade from the Volga to the Dneiper in 840–860 was of major historical consequence. Increasingly, Scandinavians in Russia would direct their interests toward Constantinople.
  - B. Along the Volga River route, the Rus had come into contact with Muslims and probably coveted Muslim jewelry and decorative objects. Such contact might have led the Scandinavian world into closer alignment with the Islamic world and, perhaps, to conversion to Islam. Instead, by 975, the Volga trade route had declined to secondary importance, and the Rus had redirected their interests to the Dneiper
  - C. As a result, the Rus, or Varangians, would come into greater contact with Orthodox Christianity, instead of Islam. This would be a decisive factor in Russia’s development and the course of European history.
  - D. This lecture traces the first century of Rus contact with the Byzantine world. The next lecture traces the transformation of the Rus into Slavic Orthodox Christians.
- II. The shift in trade routes is attested by archaeological evidence and Byzantine accounts. It is also borne out by a very peculiar source, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (c. 1115).
  - A. This document was penned by a monk outside Kiev and written in a literary Slavic language, Old Church Slavonic. It records a good deal of information about Rus princes from a Slavic viewpoint. It contains some exaggerations but also preserves the treaties negotiated by the Rus princes with the government of Constantinople.
  - B. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* tells us that the Rus had been living among the Slavs from at least the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In c. 860, the Slavic tribes were warring among themselves and appealed to a Rus leader, Rurik (ON: Erik), to rule over them according to customary law.
  - C. The Rus established a capital at Novgorod, and Rurik sent two of his *boyars*, Dir (ON: Dyr) and Askold (ON: Höskuld) to establish a position at Kiev. They built a fortified post, equipped a 200-ship fleet, sailed down the Dneiper to the Black Sea, and attacked Constantinople. Byzantine accounts back up the description of this activity in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.
  - D. The attack frightened the Byzantines. As Emperor Michael III (r. 842–867) was fighting on the eastern frontier, the patriarch, Photius (r. 858–867 and 878–886) took it upon himself to organize the city’s defense. The imperial fleet sailed out and routed the Vikings.
    1. This was the Vikings’ first experience of significant naval power.
    2. The imperial fleet’s secret weapon was *Greek fire*, a petroleum incendiary the Byzantines sprayed from siphons onto enemy ships.
    3. Despite the Vikings’ defeat, the imperial government was impressed by their unexpected attack. Michael III forged an agreement to forestall future raids and probably bestowed certain trade

considerations. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Rus, or Varangians passed into imperial service as sailors and marines.

- E. In his *De Administrando Imperio* (“*On the Governing of the Empire*”), a handbook for dealing with barbarians, Constantine VII (r. 913-957) notes that the lower Dneiper rapids were given Norse names, indicating that the Norse were likely the first to negotiate them.

### III. Constantinople was a great walled city, seen by the Rus as a challenge.

- A. The prince who followed Rurik, Oleg (ON: Helgi, r. c. 879–913), relocated his capital from Novgorod to Kiev. Henceforth, leading Rus princes looked directly toward the Black Sea and Constantinople.
- B. Oleg reportedly launched his own attack in 907. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* exaggerates his forces to 2,000 ships and 80,000 warriors.
  - 1. Oleg cleverly avoided the imperial fleet, landed north of the Golden Horn, and tried to move his forces against the vulnerable northeastern sections of Constantinople.
  - 2. This attack was countered and the Rus pulled back, but a treaty between Oleg and the imperial government established the Rus as favored residents and merchants in Constantinople.
  - 3. Terms were also established to encourage the Rus to convert to Orthodox Christianity and to join the emperor’s military service.
- C. The contact with Constantinople was important to the Rus, who were living far from Roman civilization. As a result of their exploitation of trade routes, they encountered the government of Constantinople and brought Byzantine political organization and institutions to Russia.
- D. After concluding the treaty, Oleg returned to Kiev and imposed his authority across the forest zones of Russia. He is remembered in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* as the builder of many fortified posts and founder of later Russian cities. At the same time, Scandinavian sources speak of Russia as *Gardariki*, “the kingdom of fortified posts.”
- E. Oleg’s successor was Igor (ON: Ingvar, r. 913–945), who claimed to be a son or grandson of Rurik. He launched two attacks against Constantinople to pressure the imperial government into giving him a more favorable treaty. In 945, a second treaty was concluded, which expanded advantages for the Rus operating in Constantinople.
  - 1. The 911 treaty witnesses on the Rus side were all Scandinavian; In 945, many of the Rus side treaty witnesses seem to be Slavic.
  - 2. 10<sup>th</sup>-century Scandinavians became assimilated in Russia as a colonial population, similar to the Hiberno-Norse in Ireland.
  - 3. The description we have of Igor’s son Sviatoslav by a Byzantine monk also reveals this assimilation. Sviatoslav seems to have resembled a Khazar *kagan* more than a Viking sea king.
- F. The 945 treaty resulted in the arrival in Constantinople of more Rus from Russia and more Vikings from the Scandinavian homeland. In about 957, for example, Queen Olga (ON: Helga), Sviatoslav’s mother, made a great state visit to Constantinople, attended a mass at Hagia Sophia, and converted to Orthodox Christianity.
- G. Sviatoslav saw Constantinople as a challenge, just as his father and grandfather had, and he carried out the last of the serious attacks on the Byzantine Empire.
  - 1. In 965–966, hostilities erupted between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire. In 967, the Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus II Phocas, convinced Sviatoslav to attack the Bulgarians as a Byzantine ally.
  - 2. Sviatoslav, who had just crushed the power of the Khazar khanate on the lower Volga, obliged. He invaded and defeated Bulgaria, then proceeded to attack imperial territory with the goal of taking Constantinople.
  - 3. This action precipitated a crisis in the imperial government. Nicephorus was murdered by his nephew John Tzimisce, who took over as emperor and opened a counteroffensive in 971. John drove back the Rus and defeated Sviatoslav in a siege at a Roman military fortress at Durostorum on the Danube.
- H. This invasion by Sviatoslav marked an important departure in Rus-Byzantine relations.
  - 1. The imperial government was stunned by the size and organization of the campaigns.
  - 2. To carry out these campaigns, Sviatoslav must have tapped into the great reservoir of manpower among his Slavic subjects.

- I. Sviatoslav finally agreed to pull out of Bulgaria and, on his return, he and his army were massacred by Pechenegs along the rapids of the lower Dneiper in the spring of 972. His death plunged the Rus state at Kiev into a succession crisis and civil war.
  1. The network of fortified towns was in danger of breaking up. Many of the princes who were related to the royal family attempted to assert their authority.
  2. The eventual victor in the civil war was Vladimir (ON: Valdemar, r. 980-1014), who would reunite the realm of Rurik and impose his control.
  3. In the process, Vladimir learned that it was far more beneficial to play the role of an Orthodox prince and ally of Byzantium, rather than a Viking sea king. He would embrace Orthodox Christianity around 988–989 and, in so doing, laid the foundation for the creation of Russia and the transformation of Scandinavians into Slavic Orthodox Christians.

**Further Reading:**

S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*. Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1973.

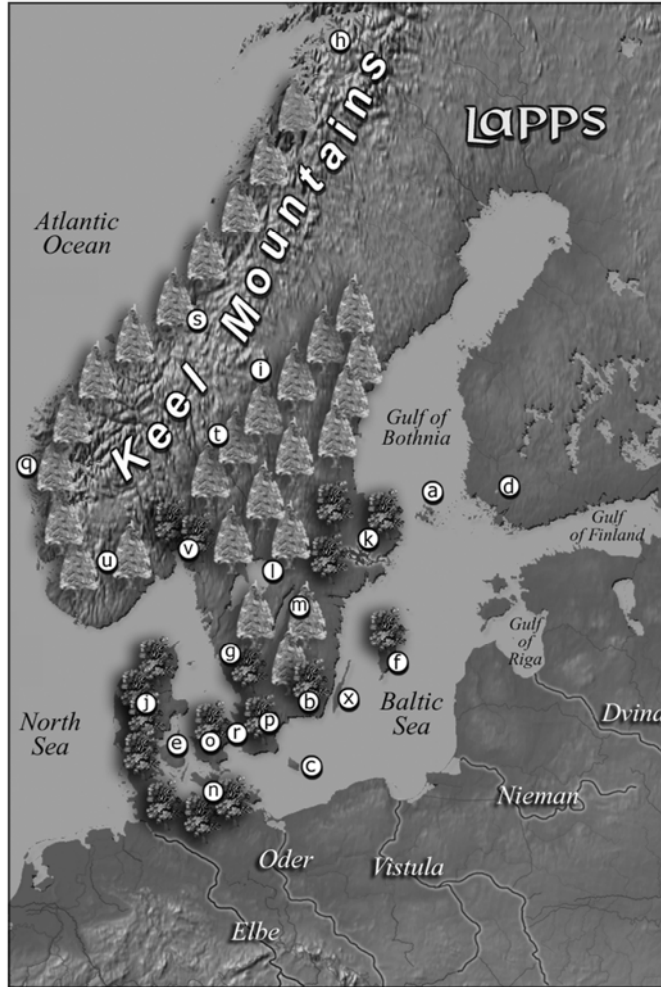
Mark Whittow. *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the sources for the founding of the Rus settlements of Novgorod and Kiev? What accounted for the shift of Rus activity from the Volga to the Dneiper in the 9<sup>th</sup> century?
2. Why did Constantinople impress the Rus? How did audacious Rus attacks force the Macedonian emperors to come to terms with the princes of Kiev? Why were treaties so important to Rus princes? How did the Rus regard Orthodox Christianity?

## Maps

# Guide to the Scandinavian Landscape



# Key

Aland Islands	a
Blekinge	b
Bornholm	c
Finland	d
Fyn	e
Gotland	f
Halland	g
Halogaland	h
Jamtland	i
Jutland	j
Lake Malaren	k
Lake Vanern	l
Lake Vattern	m
Lolland & Falster	n
Oland	x
Sjaelland	o
Skane	p
Sogne Fjord	q
Sund	r
Trondelag	s
Upplands	t
Vestfold	u
Viken & Oslo Fjord area	v



coniferous  
forest, e.g.  
pine



deciduous  
forest, e.g.  
oak

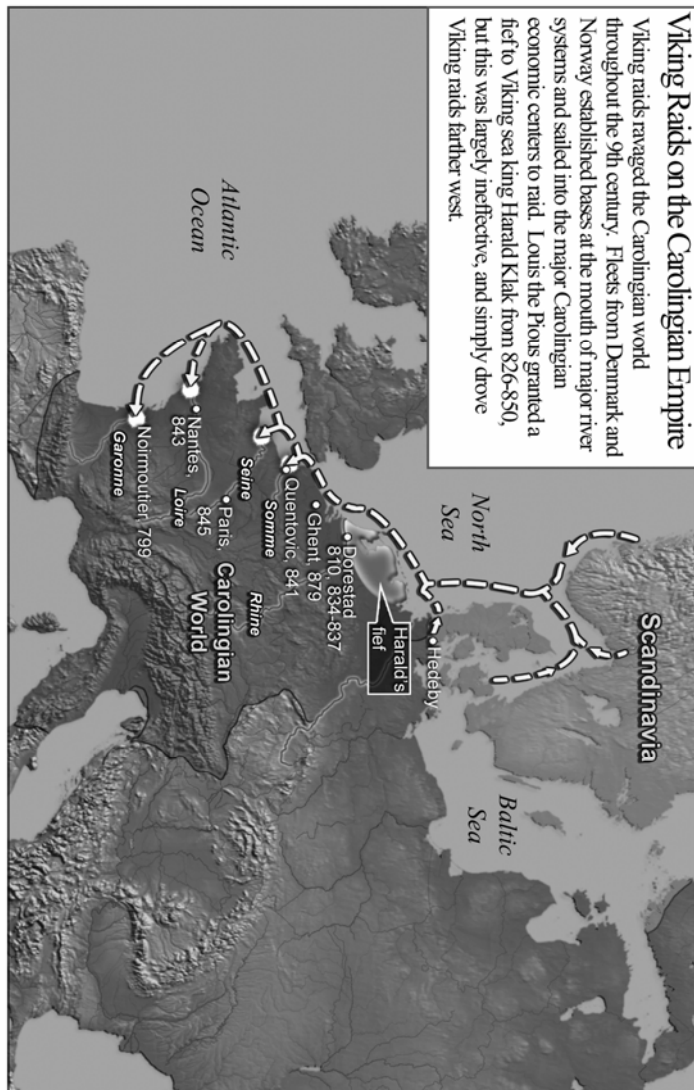


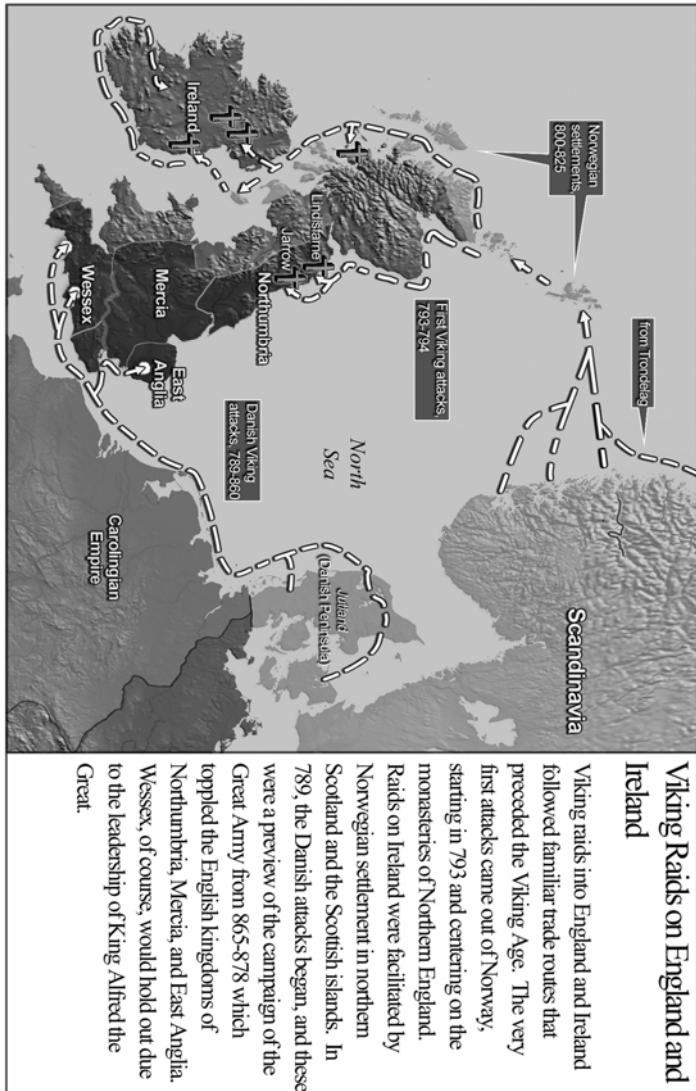
## Heroic Scandinavia, 475-600

The Heroic Age in Scandinavia precedes the period of true territorial states. The boundaries shown here reflect not political borders, but areas inhabited by the peoples (Danes, Gotar, Swedes) that would form the basis for the kingdoms that emerged by 1100. Kingdoms in this period centered around great halls such as Hleidr, the home of the legendary figure Hrolf Kraki, and Uppsala, the seat of his Swedish rival Adils. Note also that in this period, Danish power was concentrated on the island of Sjaelland, not the Jutland peninsula.

### Viking Raids on the Carolingian Empire

Viking raids ravaged the Carolingian world throughout the 9th century. Fleets from Denmark and Norway established bases at the mouth of major river systems and sailed into the major Carolingian economic centers to raid. Louis the Pious granted a fief to Viking sea king Harald Klak from 826-850, but this was largely ineffective, and simply drove Viking raids farther west.





## Viking Raids on England and Ireland

Viking raids into England and Ireland followed familiar trade routes that preceded the Viking Age. The very first attacks came out of Norway, starting in 793 and centering on the monasteries of Northern England. Raids on Ireland were facilitated by Norwegian settlement in northern Scotland and the Scottish islands. In 789, the Danish attacks began, and these were a preview of the campaign of the Great Army from 865-878 which toppled the English kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia. Wessex, of course, would hold out due to the leadership of King Alfred the Great.



### Scandinavian Kingdoms, 1100-1300

Shown here are the three kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway as they existed from 1100-1300. These newly Christianized kingdoms established primates in Uppsala, Lund, and Nidaros, and became integrated into Europe. Their primacy receded during this period, however, as Denmark's influence was checked by the Holy Roman Empire to the south, and Sweden was challenged by Russia to the east.

## Biographical Notes

**Absalon**, born c. 1128; bishop of Roskilde, 1158–1178; archbishop of Lund, 1178–1201. Cousin and counselor to King Valdemar I of Denmark, Absalon directed the conquest and conversion of the Wends in 1158–1170 and advanced ecclesiastical and royal institutions.

**Adam of Bremen**, fl. c. 1070–1080. A German cleric, Adam composed in Latin the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*; he obtained his information on Scandinavia at the court of King Svein Estrithson of Denmark.

**Adils** (OE: Eadgils), Yngling king of Uppsala, r. c. 550–575. Adils was the rival of Danish king Hrolf Kraki (OE: Hrothluf) and married to Hrolf's mother, Yrsa. In *Beowulf*, Eadgils regained the throne of Uppsala and slew his uncle Onela (ON: Ali) with the aid of Beowulf.

**Aelfifu** (ON: Alfifa) of Northampton. King Cnut married her as his first wife around 1015. She was mother to Cnut's sons, Svein, king of Norway (r. 1030–1035), and Harold I Harefoot, king of England (r. 1037–1040).

**Aelle II**, king of Northumbria, r. 862–867. Aelle usurped the throne and, thus, ignited a civil war. He, along with rival Osbert, was defeated and slain by the Great Army at York in 867. In Norse legend, Aelle captured and threw Ragnar Lodbrok into a snake pit. Ragnar's sons, Halfdane and Ivar, avenged Ragnar by carving a blood eagle on the back of Aelle.

**Aethelred I**, king of Wessex, r. 865–871. Aethelred was the son of King Aethewulf (r. 839–858), and he supported his brother-in-law, King Burgred of Mercia, against the Great Army. In 870–871, he campaigned against the Great Army based at Reading, but he died prematurely and was succeeded by his brother Alfred the Great.

**Aethelred II the Unready**, born c. 968, r. 978–1016. Son of King Edgar (r. 974–978), who was nicknamed “*unraed*,” that is, lacking in counsel. Aethelred II failed to control Viking raids from 991. In 1002, he provoked the Danish invasions by ordering the St. Brice's Day Massacre. He was driven from England by Svein Forkbeard in 1013–1014 and returned with his son Edmund Ironside but died in 1016. In 1002, he married as his second wife, Emma, sister of Duke Richard II of Normandy and mother of Edward the Confessor.

**Aethelstan**, king of England, r. 924–939. Aethelstan imposed direct rule over Viking York after the death of Sigtrygg in 927 and defeated a Scottish-Norse army at Brunanburh in 937; thus, he was hailed king of all Britain. He issued law codes and advanced royal administration. He was godfather to the future King Hakon the Good of Norway.

**Alcuin of York** (OE: Ealhwine), 735–804. Of a distinguished Northumbrian family, this monk and scholar revived learning at the court of Charlemagne from 781.

**Alfred the Great**, king of Wessex, born c. 849, r. c. 871–899. Alfred succeeded his brother Aethelred I and secured the withdrawal of Guthrum and the Great Army by payment of *danegeld*. In 878, after the victory of Eddington, Alfred imposed a treaty on the Danes and secured the future of Wessex. By his reforms, he turned Wessex into an effective kingdom and revived spiritual and intellectual life.

**Ammianus Marcellinus**, c. A.D. 330–395 Roman soldier and historian, Ammianus wrote a Roman history from Trajan (98–117) to Valens (364–378) that contains information on the Germans and Huns.

**Anskar, St.** (or Ansgar), 801–865. Apostle to the north, Anskar was trained at the monastery of Corbie and led the first missions to Denmark (826–828) and Sweden (829–831). He led a second mission to Hedeby and Birka in 850–852. Anskar, archbishop of Hamburg in 831, was granted the joint see of Hamburg-Bremen in 845, which he made the primate of Scandinavia.

**Anund Jakob**, king of Sweden, r. 1022–1050. Anund was the second Christian king to rule from Sigtuna, and he intrigued to end Danish overlordship. In 1030, he backed St. Olaf's desperate return, then supported Svein Estrithson against Magnus the Good and Harald Hardardi.

**Ari Thorgilsson the Learned**, 1067–1148. Based on oral accounts, Ari, a *godi* and scholar, composed the *Islendingabok* (*Book of Icelanders*) and *Landnamabok* (*Book of Settlements*) on the discovery and settlement of Iceland.

**Arnulf the Bastard**, king of Germany, born 850, r. 887–899. Arnulf was elected by the Eastern Frankish nobility to succeed his uncle Charles the Fat. In 891, he defeated a Viking force at the Battle of the Dyle, but the Vikings withdrew the England.

**Attila** (ON: Atli), king of the Huns, born c. 406, r. 433–452. Attila forged a great barbarian empire in Central and Eastern Europe and invaded the western Roman Empire in 451 and 452. His empire collapsed upon his death. In the Volsung legend, Attila was remembered as Atli, an avaricious king who lures Gunnar and his kin to their destruction.

**Basil II Bulgaroctenus**, Byzantine emperor, born 958, r. 978–1025. The greatest warrior emperor of the Macedonian dynasty, Basil II conquered Bulgaria and crushed rebel Anatolian families. In 988–989, he formed the Varangian Guard and cemented a matrimonial alliance with Prince Vladimir of Kiev.

**Bede the Venerable**, 673–735. Northumbrian monk and scholar at Jarrow, he penned the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*—the first English history.

**Beowulf**, legendary king of Gotar (OE: Geatas), r. c. 535–550. The hero celebrated in the Old English epic, composed c. 675–700.

**Bjarki, Bodvar**. A Norwegian hero, he fought in the shape of a bear and was the greatest champion of Danish king Hrolf Kraki. Bjarki is considered a Norse recasting of Beowulf. The *Bjarkamal* (“lay of Bjarki”) is an exchange between Bjarki and his companion Hjalti at the final battle of Hleidr. The lay was sung by warriors of St. Olaf at Stiklestad in 1030.

**Bjarni Herjulfsson**. In 986, this Icelandic merchant, en route to join the Greenland colony, was driven off course and arrived off the coasts of Markland (Labrador). He sailed northeast to Greenland, also discovering Helluland (Baffin Island). His report inspired the voyage by Leif Eriksson in 1001.

**Bjorn**, king of Birka, c. 825–850. Bjorn, likely a vassal to the Swedish king of Uppsala, received St. Anskar in 829–831.

**Bjorn Ironside**, Viking sea king, c. 850–862. Bjorn, operating from a base on the island of Oissel at the mouth of the Somme, raided the Carolingian Empire. Charles the Bald engaged the Viking Weland to eliminate Bjorn. Bjorn, however, paid off Weland and joined the Viking expedition into the Mediterranean in 859–862.

**Bragi Boddason the Old**, Norwegian skald, c. A.D. 850–900. Bragi composed the first known skaldic poem, *Ragnarsdrapa*, in which he describes the images on the shield of Ragnar Lodbrok.

**Brian Bóruma**, mac Cennetig, king in Munster, born c. 941, r. 976–1014. Brian turned his ancestral marcher lordship of Thomond into the leading Irish kingdom. In 1002, he was recognized as high king (*andri*). In 1014, he fell in his victory over Norse and Irish foes at the Battle of Clontarf, and thereafter, his kingdom fragmented.

**Brodir**, Viking sea king of the Isle of Man, died 1014. Summoned by Sigtrygg III Silkbeard, Brodir fell at the Battle of Clontarf after he had cut down Brian Bóruma.

**Brynhild**. Sister of Atli in the Volsung legend, Brynhild was punished by Odin, who put her into a sleep ringed by a wall of fire. Sigurd awakened her and pledged his love. But Sigurd was later bewitched into marrying Gudrun, sister of Gunnar, and then, by deception, Sigurd won Brynhild for Gunnar. The clash of Brynhild and Gudrun led to Sigurd’s death. Brynhild joined Sigurd on his funeral pyre and entered Valhalla as a Valkyrie. Brynhild is loosely based on Bruechildis (died 613), wife of Sigeibert I, Frankish king of Austrasia (r. 561–575).

**Burgred**, king of Mercia, r. 852–874. Burgred was the ally and brother-in-law of Aethelred I of Wessex. In 868, he paid *danegeld* to the Great Army. Failing to check the Danes in 873–874, Burgred abdicated and retired to Rome.

**Charlemagne, Charles the Great**, king of the Franks, r. 768–814. This Carolingian ruler was crowned Roman emperor in 800, thus founding the Holy Roman Empire. He built the first effective state in Western Europe since the end of Roman power. By his conquest and conversion of the Saxons in 772–806, Charlemagne provoked Danish raids along the shores of Frisia.

**Charles the Bald**, king of the Western Franks, r. 840–877. The youngest son of Louis the Pious, Charles obtained France as his realm at the Treaty of Verdun (843). He failed to check Viking attacks and, thus, undermined royal finances and credibility.

**Charles the Fat**, Holy Roman Emperor, r. 881–888. The son of Louis the German, Charles ruled as king of Italy from 879 and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 881. He reunited the Carolingian Empire in 884. His indifferent leadership led to his deposition and retirement into a monastery.

**Charles III the Simple**, king of France, r. 897–922. Charles, posthumous son of Louis II, was twice passed over for the succession and came to the throne in a weak position. In 911, he invested Hrolf (Rollo) with the fief of Normandy. In 922–923, Charles was overthrown in a baronial revolt and died imprisoned in 929.

**Clovis**, king of the Franks, born c. 466, r. 481–511. Clovis made the Franks and his family, the Merovingians, the paramount power in Gaul and southern Germany. Around 496, he converted to Catholic Christianity and assured Frankish political dominance in Western Christendom.

**Cnut** (or Canute or Knut), king of Denmark, born c. 995, r. 1014–1035. The son of Svein Forkbeard and Queen Gunnhild, Cnut was hailed king by the Danish army in England upon his father's death. In 1014–1016, Cnut conquered England, and in 1019, he was hailed as sole king in Denmark. In 1028, he was acclaimed king of Norway at the Trondelag *thing*. Cnut ruled as a great Christian king, but he drew on Scandinavian traditions to maintain his far-flung realm.

**Cnut IV, St.**, king of Denmark, r. 1080–1086. The second son of Svein Estrithson, Cnut was murdered at Odense by rebellious crews who refused to sail against England. In 1101, Cnut was canonized as a royal saint.

**Cnut VI**, king of Denmark, r. 1182–1202. The elder son of Valdemar I, Cnut VI imposed Danish hegemony over the pagan Pomeranians and subjected Holstein.

**Columba, St.**, 521–597. A scion of the Hy Neil, Columba (Irish: Comcille) organized Irish monastic life and, in 563, founded Iona, the greatest Celtic monastery in the British Isles.

**Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus**, Byzantine emperor, r. 913–957. This scholar-emperor wrote *De Administrando Imperio* (“*On the Government of the Empire*”), which contains a wealth of information on the Rus, Slavs, and Turkomen tribes.

**Cyril, St.** (Constantine), 827–869, and **St. Methodius**, 826–886. The Greek brothers were hailed as the apostles to the Slavs for their efforts to convert the Czechs, Serbs, and Bulgarians. Cyril devised the “Cyrillic” alphabet for the translation of the Bible into Slavic.

**Dunstan, St.**, archbishop of Canterbury, born 909, r. 961–978. Dunstan reformed English monastic and cultural life, disrupted by the Viking attacks, and worked for the conversion of all Danes in England.

**Eadred**, king of England, born 923, r. 946–954. The son of Edward the Elder, Eadred exploited the turbulent wars between the Hiberno-Norse and Danes to impose English control over York.

**Edgar**, king of England, born c. 942, r. 959–975. The son of King Edmund, Edgar effected the formal unification of England at his accession. He sponsored administrative, legal, and monetary reforms and assisted St. Dunstan in spiritual reforms.

**Edmund**, king of East Anglia, r. 855–869. Edmund was coerced to grant the Great Army a base at Thetford in 865. In 869, he fell fighting the Danes. Edmund was captured and martyred, and the Danes of East Anglia minted memorial pennies in his name circa 900–915.

**Edmund**, king of England, born c. 921, r. 946–954. Edmund succeeded his brother Eadred and battled the Hiberno-Norse kings of York.

**Edmund Ironside**, king of England, born c. 990, r. 1016. The son of Aethelred II and Aelfgifu, Edmund mounted a recovery of southern England from Cnut in 1015–1016. His sudden death on November 30, 1016, left Cnut sole king of England.

**Edward the Confessor**, king of England, born c. 1004, r. 1042–1066. The son of Aethelred II and Emma, Edward was reared as an exile at the Norman court until invited to ascend the English throne in 1042. A Norman in speech and outlook, Edward clashed with Earl Godwin and his sons. Edward's death precipitated a succession crisis in 1066.

**Edward the Elder**, king of Wessex, born c. 871, r. 899–924. The son and heir of Alfred the Great, he consolidated his father’s reforms, conquered East Anglia and the Five Boroughs, and imposed his hegemony on Danish York.

**Edward the Martyr**, king of England, born 962, r. 975–978. The elder son of King Edgar, the young king was a protégé of St. Dunstan. His murder, on orders of his stepmother, Aelfrida, resulted in the accession of the infant Aethelred II.

**Emma**, queen of England, c. 986–1052. The daughter of Richard I of Normandy, Emma married King Aethelred II in 1002; then, in 1017, she married Cnut. Her son by Cnut, Harthacnut, succeeded as king of Denmark and England in 1035. In 1037, Emma was exiled by her stepson, Harold I Harefoot when he seized the throne. She was restored to favor and returned to England, when her son Edward the Confessor was acclaimed king in 1042.

**Emund the Old**, king of Sweden, r. 1050–1060. The half-brother of Anund Jakob, he was the last king of the family of Erik the Victorious. With his death, the Svear and Gotar elected kings from among leading families.

**Erik of Pomerania**, king of Norway, r. 1389–1442; king of Denmark and Sweden, r. 1396–1439; died 1459. Erik was the great-nephew and adopted son of Queen Margaret, who succeeded to all three kingdoms under the Union of Kalmar. His favoritism to German and Danish courtiers lost him support, and he was ultimately deposed and succeeded by his nephew Christopher of Bavaria.

**Erik the Bloodax**, king of Norway, r. 930–936. He succeeded to his father, Harald Finehair, who retired, and pursued ruthless blood feuds against his kin that earned him his nickname. Driven from Norway by his half-brother Hakon, Erik was twice hailed as king of York (r. 948; 952–954). He was expelled by his Danish subjects and fell at the Battle of Stainmore in 954. His wife, Gunnhild, “mother of kings,” and their sons pursued a feud against King Hakon of Norway.

**Erik the Red**, c. 950–1002. A restless Viking who was outlawed first from Norway, then from Iceland in 982. In 983–985, Erik explored and founded the Norse colony in Greenland.

**Erik the Victorious**, king of Sweden, r. 980–995. With the favor of Odin, Erik ruled from Sigtuna and battled and drove into exile his rival king, Svein Forkbeard of Denmark.

**Erik IX, St.**, king of Sweden, born c. 1120, r. 1156–1160. A Swedish nobleman, he had been a rival to King Sverker I. He was elected by the Swedish *thing*, but he was murdered at Uppsala. He was canonized a royal saint, and his Finnish expedition of 1156 was later presented as a crusade.

**Estrith**. Daughter of King Svein Forkbeard and an uncertain wife. In about 1015, she married Jarl Ulf, and she was the mother of King Svein Estrithson.

**Floki Vilgerdarsen**, Raven Floki. In c. 875, this Norwegian Viking explored southern Iceland and attempted a settlement on Vatnsfjord. He departed after the first winter, naming the island Iceland.

**Freydis**. Illegitimate daughter of Erik the Red. She and her husband, Thorvald, participated in the settlement of Vinland led by Thorfinn Karlsefni in 1009–1012. The couple led their own abortive settlement in 1013–1014

**Gardar Svavarsson**. A Swedish merchant who was blown off course and discovered Iceland in c. 870.

**Gizur Isleifsson**, bishop of Iceland, r. 1082–1106. In 1096, he levied the first tithe in Iceland and, thus, recorded the first census of households.

**Guthfrith** (also known as Godfred; ON Guthfrid), king of Jutland, r. c. 800–810. Guthfrith clashed with Charlemagne along the Eider frontier, attacked Frankish Slavic allies, and raided Frisia. He was murdered and succeeded by Hemming (r. 810–812).

**Godwin**, earl of Wessex, c. 1016–1053. The leading English earl of royal descent, Godwin accepted Cnut in 1016 and was rewarded with the earldom of Wessex. He acted as the king-maker in the succession crises of 1035–1042, and in 1042, he secured the accession of Edward the Confessor. In 1051–1052, he was driven into exile by Edward, but he was restored to favor. In 1018, he married Gyda, daughter of Jarl Thorkell the Tall.

**Gorm the Old**, king of Denmark, born c. 910, r. 936–958. A Viking sea king, Gorm united Jutland into a Danish kingdom and ended German influence. A staunch pagan, Gorm built a great hall at Jelling and raised two tumuli and memorial rune stones for himself and his wife, Queen Thyri.

**Gudrun.** Sister of Gunnar and wife of Sigurd in the cycle of the Volsung. Her quarrel with Brynhild led to the treacherous death of Sigurd. Gudrun, who was then married to Atli, king of the Huns, avenged the deaths of her kinsmen by burning Atli in his hall. She egged on her sons Hamdir and Sorli (by her third marriage to Jonak) to avenge their sister by slaying the tyrant Jormunrek, king of the Goths.

**Gunnar,** king of the Burgundians in the Volsung cycle. Gunnar marries Brynhild with the aid of Sigurd. He is convinced to have Sigurd slain by Hogni and the spiteful Brynhild and, thus, acquires the Niflung treasure. He and his brothers are lured to their deaths at the hall of Atli, king of the Huns, and are avenged by their sister Gudrun.

**Gunnhild,** daughter of Gorm of the Old and wife of Erik the Bloodax, (r. 930–936). Dubbed the “mother of kings,” Gunnhild is portrayed by hostile sources as a sorceress and schemer who intrigued to overthrow Hakon the Good and restore her sons to Norway.

**Guthfrith,** king of Dublin, r. 921–934; king of York, r. 927. Guthfrith expelled his brother Sigtrygg II from Dublin and briefly asserted his domination over York.

**Guthrum,** Viking sea king, c. 870–890. Guthrum commanded the campaign of the Great Army to conquer Wessex in 874–878. Defeated at Eddington by Alfred the Great, Guthrum submitted to baptism, agreed to the treaty of Wedmore, and withdrew to rule in East Anglia.

**Hakon the Good,** king of Norway, r. c. 936–960. The son of Harald Finehair, Hakon was fostered by King Aethelstan of England. He expelled his unpopular half-brother Erik the Bloodax and ruled according to customary law. A Christian, Hakon also paid respects to the ancestral gods. He was mortally wounded in the naval Battle of Sorth and succeeded by his nephew Harald Greycloak.

**Hakon IV,** king of Norway, born 1204, r. 1217–1263. Hakon was one of Norway’s greatest kings, securing a hereditary monarchy and advancing royal justice. Hakon restored Norway after a ruinous civil war between Birkebeiner (Birchlegs) and Baglar (Croziars). Hakon initiated the incorporation of Iceland and died while on expedition to the Hebrides.

**Hakon Sigurdsson the Great,** jarl of Trondelag, r. 970–995. A staunch pagan, Hakon was exiled by Harald Greycloak and later assisted in Greycloak’s murder. Hakon ruled over northern Norway as a Danish vassal, and in about 988, he defeated the Danes and Jomsviking at Hjorungavag. In 995, the unpopular jarl was overthrown by the sea king Olaf Tryggvason.

**Halfdane Ragnarsson,** r. 865–877. With his brother Ivar, Halfdane commanded the Great Army in England in 985–872. He conducted the partition of lands among Vikings in Yorkshire, and in 877, he fell in a Scottish campaign.

**Harald Bluetooth,** king of Denmark, r. 958–986. The second Jelling king, Harald converted to Christianity in 960–965. He secured the Danish islands and Skane, built a new capital at Roskilde, extended the Danevirke, constructed military camps, and raised his own memorial rune stone and church at Jelling.

**Harald Finehair,** king of Norway, born c. 845, r. c. 880–930. A petty king in Uppland, Harald mobilized Viking fleets to royal service. At the Battle of Hafrsfjord (c. 875–880), he defeated the kings of Vestlandet and henceforth reigned as king of Norway. Harald ruled by customary law, matrimonial alliances, and personal loyalty of jarls and *lendirmenn*. Later authors anachronistically attributed many royal institutions to Harald. In about 930, he retired in favor of his son Erik the Bloodax and died about 933.

**Harald Greycloak,** king of Norway, r. 960–970. The son of Erik the Bloodax and Queen Gunnhild, Harald Greycloak succeeded Hakon the Good. He and his brothers, the Erikssons, proved tyrannical Christian lords. Harald was lured to his death at Roskilde by Harald Bluetooth and Jarl Hakon the Great.

**Harald Klak,** Viking sea king, r. 826–850. Exiled from Denmark by rivals, Harald Klak submitted to baptism and received a fief in Frisia from Louis the Pious. In 841, Harald received the island of Walachern.

**Harald Kyrri the Quiet,** king of Norway, r. 1066–1093. He restored peace and prosperity to Norway, founding the port of Bergen and promoting episcopal organization.

**Harald Sigurdsson Hardardi the Ruthless,** king of Norway, born c. 1015, r. 1046–1066. The half-brother of St. Olaf, Harald escaped from Stiklestad to the court of Kiev. In 1034–1043, Harald distinguished himself in the

Varangian Guard so that he returned to Scandinavia with veterans and wealth. He allied first with Svein Estrithson in 1045, then agreed to share the Norwegian kingship with his nephew Magnus the Good. In 1047–1064, as sole Norwegian king, he failed to conquer Denmark. He fell at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in a bid to conquer England in 1066.

**Harold II Godwinson**, king of England, born 1022, r. 1066. The son of Godwin, Harold succeeded to the earldom of Wessex in 1053. He claimed the right of succession by virtue of a final wish of his failing brother-in-law Edward the Confessor. He was defeated and slain by William I at the Battle of Hastings.

**Harold I Harefoot**, king of England, r. 1037–1040. The younger son of Cnut and Aelfgifu, he resented his half-brother King Harthacnut. Harold usurped the English throne in 1037. Because Harold died prematurely, Harthacnut was received as king in England.

**Harthacnut** (Cnut III), king of Denmark and England, r. 1035–1042. The son of Cnut and Emma, Harthacnut succeeded as king in Denmark and England, but in 1037, Harold I usurped the throne of England. In 1038, Harthacnut concluded a fateful agreement with rival Magnus the Good so that he was free to invade England. In 1040, Harthacnut was received in England after Harold's death. Harthacnut died without heirs.

**Hastein** (ON: Hadding), Viking sea king, c. 855–895. He raided the Carolingian Empire and, in 859–862, commanded with Bjorn Ironside the raid into the Mediterranean. In 882–894, he led the Viking attacks into Wessex.

**Helgi the Lean**, Norwegian Viking of Hordaland. Around 915–930, Helgi departed Norway and settled in Iceland, reputedly in protest of the tyranny of King Harald Finehair. He invoked Christ as a personal protector, but he also worshiped the ancestral Norse gods.

**Henry I the Fowler**, king of Germany, r. 919–936. Duke of Saxony, Henry was elected king of Germany by the nobility and founded the Saxon Dynasty. In 934, he campaigned in Jutland, thus provoking the emergence of a Danish kingdom.

**Herigar** (ON: Hergeir), c. 800–845. The “prefect,” perhaps a jarl, of King Bjorn of Birka, he was patron to St. Anskar in 829–831 and built the first church in Sweden.

**Hogni**. Half-brother of Gunnar in the Volsung cycle. He is depicted as a suspicious advisor to his brother, but he endured a heroic death at the hall of Atli.

**Horic** (ON: Erik) **the Elder**, king in Denmark, r. 813–854. The Danish king of Hedeby and southern Jutland who received St. Anskar, and permitted the construction of the first church. He was a rival to Harald Klak, the vassal of Louis the Pious.

**Hrolf** (Rollo), count of Rouen, r. 911–925. Hrolf was a Danish sea king who operated along the Seine from 895. In 911, he received the fief of Normandy from Charles the Simple and transformed his Vikings into landed Christian knights.

**Hrolf Kraki** (OE: Hrothluf), Skjöldung king of Sjaelland, c. A.D. 550–580 Hrolf ruled from Hleidr as the favorite of Odin and was served by the greatest warriors of Scandinavia. He clashed with rival king Adils of Uppsala. On his famous ride to Uppsala, Hrolf lost Odin's favor, and he and his champions fell in an epic battle at the hall of Adils.

**Hugh Capet**, king of France, r. 987–996. He was elected king by the Frankish nobility and, thus, established the Capetian dynasty with his capital at Paris.

**Hygelac** (ON: Huggleik), king of West Gautar (OE: Geatas), c. 490–528. Hygelac was the lord of *Beowulf* and fell in a raid on Frisia. His kingdom included the coastal lands of Sweden north of the Gota River (Västergötland) and around Lake Vaenir.

**Ibn Fadlan**, Ahmad ibn al-Abbas Rashid ibn Hammad, Arabic geographer. Sent as envoy of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir to the Bulgars in 921–922. He gave an eyewitness account of the Rus on the Volga.

**Igor** (ON: Ingvar), prince of Kiev, r. 913–945. The son of Rurik, he launched two naval attacks against Constantinople in 943 and 944 and, thus, obtained a favorable commercial treaty from Byzantine emperor Constantine VII.

**Ivar**, Viking sea king, c. 914–968. In 914, Ivar arrived in Ireland from Norway and reoccupied Limerick in 919–920. His raids along the Shannon provoked Cennetig (r. 938–954) of the Dal cais family and ruler of Thomond to destroy the Viking base and expel Ivar.

**Ivar Ragnarsson the Boneless**, Viking sea king, c. 795–873. He and his brother Halfdane, sons of Ragnar, commanded the Great Army that invaded England in 865. Ivar has been identified by some scholars with his namesake, the Norse king of Dublin.

**John I Tzimisces**, Byzantine emperor, r. 969–976. John overthrew his uncle Nicephorus II for mishandling the invasion of Prince Sviatoslav. In 971, John defeated Sviatoslav at Durostorum and compelled the withdrawal of the Rus from the Balkans.

**Julius Caesar**, Gaius, 101–44 B.C. Roman senator, dictator, and author. In his commentaries on the conquest of Gaul (*De Bello Gallico*), Caesar provides the earliest description of Germanic society.

**Leif Eriksson the Lucky**, 982–1025. On orders of Olaf Tryggvason, Leif brought Christianity to the Greenland colonies. In c. 1001, he sailed west along the North American shores, discovering Vinland (Newfoundland). When he succeeded to the leadership of Greenland, his brothers took the initiative of settling Vinland.

**Leofric**, earl of Mercia, born 968, r. 1016–1057. A leading English noble, Leofric took service with Cnut and gained an earldom. An opponent of Earl Godwin, Leofric is best remembered as the husband of Godgifu, Lady Godiva.

**Lothar**, Holy Roman Emperor, r. 840–855. Lothar, the eldest son of Louis the Pious, was crowned joint emperor in 817. From 829, he warred with his father and brothers over the succession. At the Treaty of Verdun, he received the Middle Kingdom, the imperial title, and the capitals Aachen and Rome.

**Louis III the Stammerer**, king of France r. 879–882. This Carolingian king intercepted and defeated a Viking raiding column at the Battle of Sancourt in 881. The event was celebrated in the Old High German epic *Ludwigsleid*.

**Louis the German**, r. 840–876. The third son of Louis the Pious, he received Eastern Francia by the Treaty of Verdun. He acted as the patron of St. Anskar.

**Louis the Pious**, Holy Roman Emperor, r. 814–840. The son of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious proved unequal to the task of ruling the Carolingian Empire. From 829, his sons warred over the succession, and Louis proved unable to check Viking attacks.

**Mael Sechlainn II**, king of Meath, r. 980–1022. He ended Norse military power by defeating Olaf Kvaran at the Battle of Tara (980) and was hailed high king (*andri*) of Ireland. He battled Brian Bóruma successfully in 982–997 and, in 1002, was forced to recognize Brian as high king. In 1014, after Brian's death at the Battle of Clontarf, Mael Sechlainn regained the high kingship and political domination in Ireland.

**Magnus the Good**, king of Norway, born 1024, r. 1035–1047. The son of St. Olaf, Magnus was received as king after the Norwegians expelled Svein Alfivason. In 1043, he was elected king of Denmark, but he was soon opposed by Svein Estrithson. Magnus accepted as his co-king his uncle Harald Hardardi in 1046, but Magnus died soon afterward.

**Magnus III**, Barelegs, king of Norway, r. 1093–1103. The son of Harald Kyrri, Magnus revived royal expansion in the British Isles. He led three expeditions to secure the Orkney isles, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man in 1098 and 1102–1103.

**Magnus VI**, king of Norway, r. 1263–1280. The son of Hakon IV, Magnus is hailed as the law-mender (*lagabote*), because he codified law in Norway and Iceland. By the Treaty of Perth, he relinquished Norwegian claims to the Isle Man and the Hebrides.

**Margaret**, queen of Denmark and Norway, born 1353, r. 1375–1412. The daughter of King Valdemar IV, she was married to King Hakon VII of Norway in 1363. By the accidents of dynastic marriages and deaths, she had claims to all three Scandinavian kingdoms. She secured Norway for her great-nephew Eric of Pomerania in 1389. By the Union of Kalmar (1397), Eric succeeded to Margaret in Denmark and Sweden.

**Naddod**, Viking sea king. In about 865–870, he was credited with discovering Iceland when his ship was blown off course.

**Nicephorus II Phocas**, Byzantine emperor, r. 963–969. As Domestic of the East, he employed Varangian mercenaries in his reconquest of Crete in 957. As emperor, he precipitated the Rus invasion of the Balkans by directing Prince Sviatoslav to attack Bulgaria. The diplomatic fiasco led to the murder of Nicephorus by his nephew John Tzimisce.

**Njal Thorgeirsson**, 935–1010. The *god* and protagonist of *Njal's Saga*, he is depicted as sagacious. He and his friend Gunnar Hamundarson (945–992) negotiated repeatedly out of blood feuds provoked by their wives, Bergthora and Hallgerd. Njal and his family were burned in their farmstead by rivals led by Flosi Thoradsson.

**Odo** (Eudes), count of Paris, r. 860–888; king of France, r. 888–897. Odo defended Paris against the Vikings in 885–886 and, thus, was elected by the West Frankish nobility as the first king not of the Carolingian house.

**Offa**, king of Mercia, r. 757–796. A brilliant king, Offa imposed Mercian hegemony over the English kingdoms south of the Humber and fostered religious and cultural life. He constructed Offa's Dyke, an earth wall to mark off the Welsh frontier. He introduced penny coinage to England.

**Ohthere** (ON: Ottar), c. 890–894. A Norwegian merchant prince, he reported to the court of King Alfred his trading activities and voyage from the Arctic Circle to Kaupang. The account was included in the Old English translation of Orosius.

**Olaf**, Norse king of Dublin, r. 852–871. He is often identified with his namesake, Olaf the White, in Icelandic saga. In 852, Olaf arrived with a Norwegian fleet and ended Danish rule over Dublin. He and his brother Ivar (r. 871–873) founded the Hiberno-Norse kingdom.

**Olaf Guthfrithson**, king of Dublin, r. 934–941; king of York, r. 939–941. In 937, Olaf was defeated in his first bid for the throne of York by King Aethelstan at Brunanburh. In 939, Olaf seized York and, in 940, secured the Five Boroughs. His premature death led to the collapse of a Viking kingdom of Dublin and York.

**Olaf Haraldsson the Stout**, St. Olaf, king of Norway, born c. 995, r. 1015–1030, A Viking sea king, Olaf raided in the Baltic and served under Thorkell the Tall in 1009–1013. In 1013, he entered the service of Aethelred II and embraced Christianity. In 1015, he sailed to Norway. By his victory at Nesjar (1016), he ended the regime of jarls Svein and Erik (sons of Hakon the Great) and was proclaimed king. Olaf alienated his pagan subjects by his assault on the cults, and he clashed with King Cnut. In 1026, he suffered a strategic defeat at the Battle of the Holy Rive, and in 1028, he was driven from Norway. His desperate gamble to retake Norway ended in his defeat and death at the Battle of Stiklestad. Within a year of his death, miracles were proclaimed at his tomb, and Olaf was hailed as the national saint of Norway.

**Olaf Hoskuldsson the Peacock**, c. 938–1006. The model *god* in *Laxdaela Saga*, who refused to avenge the death of his son Kjartan at the hands of Kjartan's foster brother Bolli. He could not prevent the blood feud promoted by Gudrun, wife of Bolli and jilted fiancé of Kjartan, and Olaf's wife, Thorgerd.

**Olaf Kvaran Sigtyrgegson**, king of York, r. 941–943, 949–952; king of Dublin, r. 945–980. Twice hailed as Norse king of Dublin, Olaf retired to Dublin. He based his power on his navy, the revenues of the slave trade, and alliances with Irish rulers. He was decisively defeated by Mael Sechlainn at the Battle of Tara in 980.

**Olaf Tryggvason**, king of Norway, born c. 970, r. 995–1000. A sea king, Olaf raided in the Baltic and the British Isles, where he converted to Christianity. He married Gyda, sister of Olaf Kvaran. In 995, he arrived with a veteran fleet to overthrow Jarl Hakon the Great and was acclaimed king of Norway. Olaf violated customary laws and imposed Christianity on his subjects. At the Battle of Svold (1000), Svein Forkbeard the Norwegian exiles defeated Olaf, who leaped from his flagship, *Long Serpent*, into the sea.

**Olof Skötkonung**, king of Sweden, r. 995–1022. The son of Erik the Victorious, Olof embraced and ruled from Sigtuna. He was compelled to recognize a Danish overlordship, but he adapted royal institutions of King Cnut the Great.

**Oleg** (ON: Helgi), prince of Kiev, r. 879–913. Successor to Rurik, Oleg relocated his capital from Novgorod to Kiev. In 907, he launched the second Rus attack on Constantinople and, thus, negotiated a favorable commercial treaty with the emperor Leo VI.

**Olga** (ON: Helga), queen of Kiev. The wife of Igor, she acted as regent for her son Sviatoslav in 945–964. According to Constantine VII, Olga converted to Christianity upon a state visit to Constantinople (dated to either c. 945 or 957).

**Ongendus** (ON: Angantyr). A Danish king in Jutland, he rejected the missionary efforts of St. Willibrord in about 700–710. This ruler might have ordered the first phase of construction of the Danevirke.

**Ota** (ON: Aud; Arabic: Nodd), Norse queen of Dublin, c. 838–847. Wife of Turgeis, Ota acted as *völva* and received al-Ghazal, Umyyad envoy to Majus (Vikings) in 845.

**Otto I**, king of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, r. 936–973. The second Saxon king, Otto was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 962. In about 965, Otto I invaded Jutland to extend Christianity and German influence. Harald Bluetooth, however, converted to Christianity and sought to create his own national church.

**Patrick, St.**, 389–461. The son of a Roman decurion, he was enslaved by Irish pirates at age 16, but he escaped to Gaul and entered the monastery of Lerins. Commissioned apostle to the Irish, Patrick sailed to Ireland circa 432–433 and preached in Ulster, establishing a church at Armagh.

**Pepin the Short**, king of the Franks, r. 751–768. Pepin founded the Carolingian dynasty. In 756, he endowed the papacy with lands in central Italy (the *Donation of Pepin*), thereby founding the Papal States.

**Pytheas of Massilia**, Greek explorer and scholar, c. 380–310 B.C. Around 325–315 B.C., Pytheas traveled to Britain and Thule, the latter likely northern Norway. In *On Oceans*, he first described the aurora borealis, the midnight sun, and living conditions north of the Arctic Circle.

**Ragnar Lodbrok**, Viking sea king, c. 845–865. A legendary Danish Viking, Ragnar was credited with many adventures in the Carolingian world and the attack on Paris in 845. In about 865, he was perhaps captured and executed by King Aelle II of Northumbria.

**Richard II**, duke of Normandy, r. 996–1026. Richard pursued an alliance with the Capetian monarchy and Aethelred II of England. In 1006, he was elevated to duke and a peer of France. An energetic ruler, Richard dominated northern France and promoted monastic reform.

**Rimbert**, archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, r. 865–888. A disciple of St. Anskar, Rimbert penned the *Vita Anskarii* to celebrate his master and advance the see's claims as primate of Scandinavia.

**Rognvald**, Viking sea king, c. 919–937. Rognvald seized Nantes as a Viking base and raided the lower Loire and Brittany. Rognvald and his Vikings were decisively defeated by Count Alain Barbetorte of Brittany (r. 936–952), who captured Nantes and ended the Viking menace.

**Rurik** (ON: Erik), Rus prince of Novgorod, c. 860–879. A Viking sea king, Rurik was invited by the warring Slavic tribes to rule over them. Rurik refounded the Rus town Holmgard (Novgorod), and his jarls Dir (ON: Dyr) and Askold (ON: Hoskuld) established another settlement at Kiev. His descendants ruled in Russia down to 1612.

**Saxo Grammaticus**, 1150–1216. Danish cleric and protégé of Archbishop Absalon, he wrote in Latin *Gesta Danorum*, a history of the Danish kings in 16 books from the legendary Skjold to Valdemar II.

**Siegfried** (ON: Sigurd), Viking sea king, c. 880–891. This sea king besieged Paris in 885–886 and extorted *danegeld* from Charles the Fat. He was slain at the Battle of the Dyle.

**Sigtrygg II**, king of Dublin, r. 917–921; king of York, r. 921–927. In 914, this Viking sea king arrived off Ireland and secured Dublin; he defeated high king Niall Glundub in 919. Sigtrygg was driven out of Dublin by his brother Guthfrid and seized Danish York, where he ruled as a vassal of King Aethelstan.

**Sigtrygg III Silkbeard**, king of Dublin, r. 989–1036. Sigtrygg, son of Olaf Kvaran and Princess Gormflaith of Leinster, forged the alliance against Brian Bóruma at Clontarf. Sigtrygg maintained a brilliant court, minted the first coins in Ireland, and promoted Christianity.

**Sigurd.** The son of Sigmund, Sigurd was the hero of the epic cycle of the Volsungs and the favorite of Odin. He slew the dragon Fafnir and gained the treasure of the Niflungs. He burst through the ring of fire to awaken and win Brynhild, but he was duped into marrying Gudrud. He then won, by deception, Brynhild for Gunnar. The wronged Brynhild connived in Sigurd's death, but she joined him on his pyre to enter Valhalla. Sigurd is loosely based on Sigebert, a Frankish king of Austrasia (r. 561–575).

**Sigurd Jorsafar,** king of Norway, r. 1103–1130. The son of Magnus Barelegs, Sigurd ruled jointly with his brothers Olaf and Eystein. In 1107–1110, Sigurd went on crusade and, in this way, raised the international standing of the Norwegian crown.

**Sigurd the Stout,** jarl of Orkney, r. 985–1014. A restless Viking sea king, this Sigurd built a powerful jarldom in the British Isles. He fell fighting against Brian Bóruma at the Battle of Clontarf.

**Snorri Sturluson,** Icelandic writer, poet, and politician, 1179–1242. Snorri composed the *Prose Edda* and the *Heimskringlasaga* and is considered the author of *Egil's Saga*. Twice law-speaker of the *Althing*, he dominated Icelandic politics and gained powerful patrons at the Norwegian court during his visit in 1217–1218. He was murdered by rivals on grounds of treason to King Hakon IV.

**Svein Alfivason,** king of Norway, r. 1030–1035. The elder son of King Cnut and Aelfgifu (ON: Alfifa), Svein alienated his Norwegian subjects, who drove him into exile and invited Magnus the Good to assume the Norwegian throne. Svein died an exile at Roskilde.

**Svein Estrithson,** king of Denmark, born c. 1018, r. 1046–1074. The son of Jarl Ulf and Estrith, half-sister of Cnut, Svein warred for Denmark with Magnus the Good and Harald Hardardi (r. 1044–1064). In 1066, he was undisputed king in Denmark, and he consolidated the royal institutions of his uncle, King Cnut.

**Svein Forkbeard,** king of Denmark, r. 986–1014. The illegitimate son of Harald Bluetooth, Svein overthrew his father. Around 988, his Danish and Jomsviking allies were defeated at Hjorungavag so that Svein faced attacks by his rivals Erik the Victorious and Olaf Tryggvason. From 1003 on, Svein directed attacks on England, and in 1013–1014, he campaigned for the conquest of the island. After his sudden death in 1014, his son Cnut was hailed as king by the Danish army.

**Sverker I,** king of Sweden, r. 1130–1150. Sverker seized power in a civil war and founded the rival royal line to the family of St. Erik IX. His troubled reign was contested from 1150, and ended completely with his murder in 1156.

**Sviatoslav** (ON: Sveinheld), prince of Kiev, r. 964–972. The son of Prince Igor, Sviatoslav smashed the Khazar kaganate in about 965. He was defeated by Byzantine emperor John I in an effort to conquer the Balkans (967–971). His death at the hands of the Pechenegs plunged the Rus state into civil war.

**Tacitus, Cornelius,** c. A.D. 56–115 Roman senator and historian. He composed *Germania* (c. A.D. 98), which is an invaluable source, despite its moralizing bias, for early Germanic society

**Thorfinn Karlsefni.** He and his wife, Gudrid (widow of Thorvald Eriksson), led Norse settlers who sought to colonize Vinland in 1009–1012.

**Thorkell the Tall,** Jomsviking and jarl. In about 988, Thorkell commanded the Danish-Jomsviking fleet at Hjorungvag. He led the forces of Svein Forkbeard against England in 1009–1011, but he defected to Aethelred II in 1012–1014. Reconciled to Cnut, he received an earldom in East Anglia in 1017. His sister Gyda married Earl Godwin. Thorkell acted as regent in England from 1019–1020. He was banished by Cnut in 1021 but was restored to favor in Denmark in 1027.

**Thorvald Eriksson,** died 1005. Younger brother of Leif the Lucky, Thorvald led an expedition to Vinland in 1004–1005. He was mortally wounded in a clash with the Skraelingar.

**Thyri,** queen of Denmark; see **Gorm the Old.**

**Tostig,** earl of Northumbria, r. 1055–1065. Son of Earl Godwin, Tostig was expelled from York by his outraged subjects. Morcar, brother of Earl Edwin of Mercia, succeeded in Northumbria. When his brother Harold II refused to restore his earldom, Tostig turned to King Harald Hardardi of Norway. Tostig fell at the Battle of Stamford Bridge.

**Turgeis** (ON: Thorgils), Norse king of Dublin, r. 838–847. A Viking sea king, Turgeis organized the Norse companies and sacked Armagh, where he performed rites to Thor. He was captured and drowned by King Mael Sechlainn I of Meath.

**Ulf Thorkilsson**, born c. 995, jarl in Denmark, 1019–1026. Ulf married Estrith, half-sister of Cnut. He ruled Denmark as the deputy of Cnut, but he was executed on grounds of treason at Christmas 1026. His son was King Svein Estrithson.

**Unn** (or Aud) **the Deep-Minded**. Norwegian lady of Hordaland, she emigrated to Iceland around 915–930, reputedly to escape the rule of Harald Finehair. Unn was remembered in saga as a formidable ancestress of leading families.

**Valdemar**, king of Sweden, r. 1250–1275. The adolescent son of Earl Birger and Princess Ingeborg, Valdemar was elected king and, thus, founded the Folkung dynasty (1250–1363).

**Valdemar I the Great**, king of Denmark, r. 1157–1182. Valdemar and his counselor, Absalon, restored royal authority and waged crusades against the Wends. Valdemar forged royal fiscal and legal institutions and patronized arts and letters; thus, his reign is considered the zenith of medieval Denmark.

**Valdemar II**, king of Denmark, r. 1202–1241. The younger son of Valdemar I, he succeeded his brother, Cnut; continued expansion in the Baltic; and advanced royal justice. He led three crusades against the Estonians in 1210–1219, but he was forced to relinquish all Danish conquests, save Rugen and Estonia, after his defeat at the hands of his German vassals at the Battle of Bornhöved in 1227.

**Valdemar IV**, king of Denmark, r. 1340–1375. He restored royal power within Denmark and recaptured Scania and Gotland in 1361, but he failed to curb the privileges of the Hanseatic League. His daughter Queen Margaret realized Valdemar's plans of uniting the three Scandinavian realms under one crown.

**Vladimir** (ON: Valdemar), prince of Kiev, r. 980–1015. The son of Sviatoslav, Vladimir reunited the Rus principalities and converted to Orthodox Christianity in 988 or 989. He laid the foundations of the Slavic Russian state.

**Weland** (ON: Volund), Viking sea king, c. 858–862. Weland raided along the Somme Valley. In 858, Charles the Bald contracted with Weland to attack the Viking base at Oissel. Weland, who embraced Christianity, permitted the Vikings of Oissel to depart on payment of ransom. He was killed in a private quarrel with a pagan follower.

**Widukind**, died c. 808. Widukind led the Saxon rebellion against Charlemagne in 777–778 and received assistance from the Danes. In 785, he submitted to Charlemagne and received baptism and a fief.

**William I the Conqueror**, king of England, born c. 1028, r. 1066–1087. The illegitimate son of Duke Robert I and Herleva, William was acclaimed duke in 1035. He matured into a brilliant ruler. In 1066, he conquered England and forged an Anglo-Norman monarchy.

**Willibrord, St.**, c. 657–738. A Northumbrian monk, Willibrord was commissioned apostle to the Frisians in 695 and ordained as the first bishop of Utrecht. In around 700–710, he led the first mission to Jutland but failed to convert King Onegendus.

**Yaroslav the Wise**, prince of Kiev, r. 1019–1054. A son of Vladimir, Yaroslav defeated his rival brother, Svyatopolk (r. 1015–1019), and united the Russian principalities. He forged an Orthodox Slavic kingdom, but he also hosted Scandinavian visitors and exiles and maintained his own Varangian Guard.

**The Vikings**  
**Part III**  
**Professor Kenneth W. Harl**



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## The Vikings

### Scope:

The Vikings have long conjured up images either of ruthless pirates ravaging the coasts of Europe or of heroic pagan warriors dedicated to Odin, god of ecstasy, poetry, and battle. These images, well attested in the medieval sources, are only part of the story of the impact of the Scandinavians on early medieval civilization. The first 12 lectures of this course deal with the evolution of a distinct civilization in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) on the eve of the Viking Age (790–1100). In 790, Scandinavians still worshiped the ancient Germanic gods and, thus, were divided from their kin in Germany or the former Roman provinces of Gaul and Britain, who had adopted Christianity and Roman institutions. Breakthroughs in shipbuilding and the emergence of a warrior ethos celebrated in Eddaic and later skaldic verse turned Scandinavians from merchants into Vikings at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The second set of 12 lectures deals with the course and impact of the Viking raids between the late 8<sup>th</sup> through the early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Danish and Norwegian raiders profoundly altered the political balance of Western Europe. Danes conquered and settled eastern and northern England, a region known as the *Danelaw*. They compelled King Alfred the Great of Wessex (r. 870–899) and his successors to forge an effective monarchy. In France, Vikings under Rollo embraced Christianity and settled the fief of Normandy in 911, thereby founding one of the most formidable feudal states of Europe. Norwegian Vikings settled in the main towns of Ireland and braved the North Atlantic, settling the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland, as well as an ephemeral colony at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. In Eastern Europe, Swedes developed a major trade route from the Baltic to the Caspian, laying the foundations for the Russian principalities.

The last 12 lectures explain the passing of the Viking Age. Over two centuries of overseas raids, trade, and settlement altered Scandinavian civilization. Scandinavians accepted Christianity and gained the high culture of Latin Christendom. Christian Danish and Norwegian kings in the 10<sup>th</sup> century first harnessed the Viking spirit to establish monarchies. Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035), king of Denmark, England, and Norway, briefly turned the North Sea into a Scandinavian lake. His institutions and example inspired the formation of Christian kingdoms in Scandinavia and turned Vikings into Crusaders. Yet perhaps the most enduring of achievements of the Viking Age were the sagas and verse of Iceland that immortalized pagan heroes and Christian kings, Norse gods and indomitable settlers of the remote island.

## Lecture Twenty-Five

### From Varangians into Russians

**Scope:** In 989, Prince Vladimir (r. 980–1015) converted to Orthodox Christianity and, thus, laid the foundations for the future Russian state. The Norse tongue, without a written form, gave way to the prestigious literary Slavic associated with the new royal faith. In many ways, Vladimir and his son Yaroslav (r. 1019–1054) ruled in the fashion of Viking warlords: They received hospitably exiled Scandinavian kings, such as Harald Hardardi, bound for Byzantium. The Kievan princes, however, adapted Byzantine institutions to advance royal power, saw their Slavic dependants as subjects, and came to view the Muslim Turkomen khans as foes rather than trading partners. In so doing, the Swedish Rus were transformed into Russians of the Orthodox Christian faith.

### Outline

- I. We conclude our discussion of the Viking impact in Eastern Europe, which culminated with the creation of Slavic-speaking Orthodox Russia.
  - A. The Scandinavians who arrived in Russia starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century had slowly become assimilated with their Slavic subjects. Prince Vladimir's conversion to Orthodox Christianity in 988–989 propelled the creation of a new civilization, Slavic in its language, Orthodox in its faith, and Byzantine in its political and legal institutions.
  - B. The new civilization retained a memory of Viking heritage. For example, two princes of Kiev, Vladimir (r. 980–1015) and his son Yaroslav (r. 1019–1054), had sentimental connections to Scandinavia and continued to host visiting or exiled Viking sea kings and warriors. Nonetheless, by 1100, Kiev and Novgorod were Russian cities.
- II. How did the transformation of the Rus-Slavic towns to an Orthodox Russian civilization take place?
  - A. Since the start of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the forest zones of Russia bristled with fortified market towns where any prince who had gained wealth through trade with Constantinople and had a retinue of warriors could assert himself as an independent ruler. With Sviatoslav's death in 972, some of these princes were candidates for the Kiev throne and others threatened to carve out their own autonomous states.
  - B. Prince Vladimir, Sviatoslav's son and successor, spent the first 10 years of his reign bringing these areas under control. In doing so, he was conscious of his need for legitimacy and for institutions to make his rule effective.
  - C. Vladimir drew some important lessons from his ancestors. Sviatoslav's invasion of the Balkans revealed that the state at Kiev lacked the literate bureaucratic institutions necessary to sustain warfare. Vladimir concluded that it was much better for the prince of Kiev to rule as an ally of Constantinople than as a Viking sea king launching attacks against Constantinople. That decision became the cornerstone of later diplomacy between Kiev and Constantinople; they became related Orthodox civilizations, much more in alliance than in competition.
  - D. As Vladimir's state became more organized, as more Rus converted to Orthodox Christianity, and as the advantages of belonging to the Orthodox commonwealth became clearer, the Rus became estranged from the Turkomen of Eastern Europe. This was already evident in the reign of Sviatoslav, who had launched a campaign against the Khazars of the lower Volga and crushed the Khazar kaganate.
  - E. Vladimir, an extremely adroit diplomat, exploited a civil war in the Byzantine Empire that allowed him to convert to Christianity under the most favorable of terms.
    1. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* tells us part of this story, but we also have information from various Byzantine historians.
    2. In considering conversion, Vladimir consulted with leaders from the major Eastern European religions. He rejected Islam as presented by the Bulgars, Turkomen of the middle Volga, because he was not interested in circumcision or in giving up alcohol. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, he said, "Vodka is the joy of the Russians. We cannot exist without this pleasure."

3. Vladimir also rejected Latin Christian missionaries from Western Europe and a Jewish mission. The Jewish mission failed because the Jews had no homeland, a fact that Vladimir interpreted to mean that the God of the Jews was not powerful.
  4. Vladimir was convinced by the Byzantine missionary, who brought tapestries or iconic depictions of the tortures of hell, the plagues of Egypt, and other Old Testament images. The prince and his nobles were impressed by the power of the Lord of Hosts.
- F. Vladimir's conversion was also dictated by imperial political events.
1. In 988–989, Basil II (r. 978–1025) faced a rebellion in Asia Minor. Bardas Phocas, nephew of the previous emperor Nicephorus II Phocas, had raised the eastern armies, carried Asia Minor, and was threatening to cross over and capture Constantinople.
  2. Basil arranged a treaty with Vladimir, in which Vladimir gave him 6,000 Varangians, probably recent arrivals from Scandinavia, not Rus living in Kiev.
  3. In April of 989, Basil transferred these forces to Asia Minor and defeated the rebel army at Abydus.
  4. As part of the agreement, Anna, Basil's sister, was married to Vladimir, and he became a Christian ruler.
- III. Vladimir's conversion had powerful repercussions in Scandinavia, Russia, and the Byzantine world.
- A. Vladimir's conversion opened the door to Byzantine recruitment in Scandinavia. From the late 10<sup>th</sup> century to 1204, every Byzantine emperor maintained a Varangian Guard—Scandinavians and, after 1066, some Anglo-Saxons—that fought in the classic Viking shield wall and became the elite guard of the imperial army. Many important figures in Scandinavian history, including Harald Hardardi (r. 1046–1066), future king of Norway, fought in the Varangian Guard.
- B. Scandinavians also reaped rewards from the relationship with Constantinople. Icelandic sagas are replete with reports of Scandinavians traveling to the “Great City” to join the Varangian Guard or become merchant princes. For this reason, many Scandinavian monarchs of the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries were able to follow the model of Constantinople in forging their own kingdoms.
- C. The most dramatic impact was not on Scandinavia or the Byzantine world but on the developing Russian state. Between 1050 and 1100, a Russian cultural identity emerged.
1. The conversion to Christianity brought both the institutions of Christianity and the Slavic language to the Rus state. This literary language was created in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by St. Cyril (Gr: Constantine, 827–869, the apostle to the Slavs) and adopted by the Rus, who had no written language.
  2. Once the Rus adopted this language, called *Old Church Slavonic*, the literary culture of Constantinople was opened to them.
  3. Yaroslav the Wise (r. 1019–1054), one of Vladimir's successors, issued the first coherent law code in Kiev in the Slavic language.
  4. Both Yaroslav and Vladimir sponsored translations of biblical stories, saints' lives, and the *Russian Primary Chronicle* by Christian authors. At the same time, they stopped supporting the skalds who recited the traditional poems in Norse.
  5. These rulers felt a sentimental connection to Scandinavia, but the relationship was not a major feature in defining the new civilization. Indeed, by the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, Novgorod had broken away from Kiev, established itself as an independent merchant republic, and viewed Sweden as a rival in the fur trade.
- IV. Other significant changes were at work in driving the transformation of the Varangians into Slavic-speaking Orthodox Russians.
- A. The fact that Vladimir had become an Orthodox prince meant that he required a capital, complete with cathedrals. He imported Byzantine workmen to construct freestanding masonry architecture. The first such project in Kiev was a church dedicated to Mary Theotokos. In Novgorod, a church was dedicated to Hagia Sophia (“sacred wisdom”). In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, every major town in Russia built similar freestanding masonry churches, as well as palaces and city gates.
- B. By 1200, Kiev and Novgorod had populations of 50,000–80,000. Slavic subjects were attracted to activity related to the Church, courts, and trade. No such urbanization existed in Scandinavia.

- C. Rus merchant princes no longer raided the Slavic populations to profit from the slave trade but came to see these people as their subjects and encouraged them to extend arable areas. From 1100–1300, Russian peasants converted forest to agriculture to support the cities.
- D. Once the Slavs were no longer available as potential slaves, tensions arose between the Turkomen and the Rus. Former Turkomen trading partners began raiding Slavic villages for slaves. Many Turkomen tribes had converted to Islam, and so saw Christian Rus as foes.
- E. The efforts of the Slavic peoples of the forest zone to control the Turkomen of the steppes became a major theme in Russian history. In combating the Turkomen, the Rus princes grew closer to their Christian counterparts. They adopted cavalry and maintained retinues of warriors (*druzhina*), who were mounted, armored, and armed with the composite bow; they were skilled in raiding and stealth.
- F. By 1100, the military and political institutions in Russia were quite different from what they had been in 1000. These changes resulted in the emergence of classic Russian civilization, heavily influenced in the process by the Byzantine world.

**Further Reading:**

H. Paszkiewicz. *The Origin of Russia*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1954.

S. Franklin and J. Shepard. *The Emergence of the Rus, 750–1200*. London: Longman, 1996.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What led Vladimir to embrace Orthodox Christianity in 988–989? How reliable is the account of his conversion in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*? What long-term factors inclined the Swedish Rus to adopt Orthodox Christianity?
2. How did the conversion of Vladimir lead to the rapid transformation of Swedish Rus into Slavic Russians? Why was the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet and literary Slavic so important? How did institutional Christianity lead to economic, social, and political change in the 11<sup>th</sup> century?

## Lecture Twenty-Six

### Transformation of Scandinavian Society

**Scope:** Two centuries of Viking raids and settlement overseas profoundly transformed Scandinavian society by the opening of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The influx of wealth and slaves fed the market towns, notably Hedeby and Ribe in Jutland and Birka on Lake Mälaren. Henceforth, towns in Scandinavia were linked with overseas towns as trading partners across northern Europe and Russia. Markets were monetized; population and prosperity rose. From the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, kings aspiring to rule over Denmark or Norway asserted their control over market towns for revenues and turned Viking fleets into royal navies for overseas conquests. As we'll see in the last third of this course, the sea kings Harald Finehair (r. 880–930) and Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995–1000) unified Norway, and Svein Forkbeard (r. 986–1014) and Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035) forged a Danish monarchy. Territorial kings sought to impose institutional Christianity and initiated a transformation of mores and faith. The changing relationship among classes and between the sexes can be detected in later royal laws promulgated just after the Viking Age. Ultimately, the Viking experience transformed Scandinavians into Europeans.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we shall look at the transformation of the Scandinavian homeland during the Viking Age. We shall examine changes in economic life, society, and political and religious institutions.
  - A. The influx of booty, often in the form of silver, and the profits of the slave trade clearly brought significant changes to Scandinavian society.
  - B. The changes in economic and social patterns in Scandinavia also led to conditions that favored the emergence of Christianity in the territorial kingdoms.
  - C. This lecture serves as a transition between the first two-thirds of this course to the final set of lectures, which concentrates on religious and political changes in Scandinavia that transformed the Scandinavians into Western Europeans.
    1. In the last 12–13 lectures, we have stressed the wide-ranging activities of Scandinavians overseas, including their conquests in Western Europe, the British Isles, and the Carolingian Empire and their colonial settlements in Iceland, the North Atlantic islands, Vinland, Greenland, and Russia. In all these regions, the Scandinavians showed themselves quite adaptable to local customs and institutions.
    2. In this lecture, we shall see how these experiences culminated at the end of the Viking Age with the creation of Christian European kingdoms.
- II. The most important force transforming Scandinavia in the Viking Age was the vast amount of wealth coming into the region in the form of silver, bullion, plunder, and slaves.
  - A. In studying this subject, we must deal with qualitative, rather than quantitative, evidence or hard statistics. Of course, this situation has led to a debate among scholars concerning the impact of the activities of the Viking Age on the Scandinavian homeland.
  - B. The scale of change brought about by trade seems to be geometric compared with what occurred in the Age of Migrations or in the Roman or Celtic Ages.
    1. We have some sense of the amount of silver coin taken in *danegeld* payments from England and the Carolingian Empire. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, calculations of those payments recorded in Frankish sources lead us to conclude that 40,000–45,000 pounds of silver was paid out. Many scholars estimate that this amount is only one-third to one-half of the total that was taken by Vikings.
    2. Similar conclusions can be drawn about *danegeld* payments made in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in England to Svein Forkbeard and King Cnut (r. 1014–1035). King Aethelred II paid out 180,000 pounds of silver, or well over 40 million English pennies.
  - C. We also gain a sense of the amount of wealth flowing into Scandinavia from the enormous numbers of coins secreted in hoards.
  - D. Rune stones erected in central Sweden between 1000–1100 tell us that many Swedes were paid money by Cnut or by the jarls of Svein Forkbeard in the conquest of England.

- E. Further, coin hoards discovered overseas are also clearly associated with the Vikings. These include vast numbers of finds of Arabic coins in Russia, obviously a result of Rus trade connections, and a famous coin hoard found in England, the Cuerdale Hoard (r. c. 905–910), which contains almost 7,000 coins.
  - F. Therefore, we know that silver was available in great amounts, and it obviously changed habits in Scandinavia.
    - 1. Increasingly, Scandinavians came to reckon sums of value and transactions in coined money; this system had a number of advantages over trades of commodities or exchanges in kind.
    - 2. The use of coins resulted in the development of market towns and changes in both shopping and trading habits throughout Scandinavia.
  - G. The Scandinavians themselves began to strike coins, known as *bracteates*, during the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in Birka and Hedeby. Later, King Cnut would bring English-style coinage to Scandinavia and transform the monetary and economic patterns ever after.
- III. As mentioned in past lectures, most of the specie coming into Scandinavia was put into ornamentation.
- A. Before 1000, much of the wealth obtained in Viking raids and from trade was not invested in public institutions but in personal adornment and in the material life of Scandinavians in general.
  - B. The most dramatic evidence of this kind of spending is found in the increase in ship burials, such as the Oseberg (834) or Gokstad (c. 900) burials. The objects placed in these ship burials were quite opulent.
  - C. We also see the proliferation of different jewelry styles.
    - 1. At the start of the Viking Age, the most common styles were the Oseberg/Borre styles (c. 750–975), which were similar to the stocky styles seen in the Age of Migration.
    - 2. Over the course of the Viking Age, the decorative styles become increasingly ostentatious and diverse. The Jellinge style (c. 875–975), for example, shows elongated and sinuous figures and fantastic animals.
    - 3. Later styles, including the Mammen (c. 975–1050), which borrowed floral motifs from the Carolingian world, and the Urnes (980–1200), which influenced early Christian work, are premised on the fact that an enormous amount of gold and silver was available for making jewelry.
  - D. Scandinavian society in its material culture was greatly enriched over the course of the Viking Age. In the market towns, such as Hedeby, Birka, and others, archaeologists have found a vast array of imported goods, including tableware, glassware, tapestries, silk clothing, and wine, as well as grain and other types of foodstuffs.
  - E. We have very little information on the other major commodity that came into Scandinavia, slaves. We assume that most slaves brought into Scandinavia did not stay there, but we do have reports of thralls, mostly of Celtic origins, brought to Iceland in the first wave of settlement there from 870–930.
    - 1. Male slaves in Iceland were employed in stock-raising, while women were involved with weaving. Eventually, many of the children of these slaves were freed.
    - 2. We have information that Unn the Deep-Minded endowed some of her slaves with land, and they were eventually assimilated into the Icelandic population.
    - 3. We know from the story of Olaf the Peacock's mother in *Laxdaela Saga* that some female slaves were also kept as concubines.
    - 4. The overall demographic effect of the slave population in Scandinavia was minimal. Most were assimilated into the Scandinavian population within two or three generations.
- IV. Social changes can be traced using both Icelandic sagas and Christian laws; among the topics of interest in this area of study is the position of women.
- A. In some ways, the Viking Age resulted in elevating the position of women in Iceland, Norway, and other parts of Scandinavia.
  - B. For example, the grounds for divorce under Icelandic and Norwegian law were broader than those allowed under other European law. Further, the concubines in Norse society expected to receive property for themselves and their offspring.
  - C. Given the difficult living conditions in Scandinavia, women were never forced into a position of seclusion. Indeed, in the Viking Age, the constant movement of men overseas increased the roles that women played

in society. Again, we have the example of Unn the Deep-Minded, who established her own great hall in Iceland and served as the matriarch of an extended number of families in her community.

- D. We will also encounter Queen Thyri of Denmark, who was far more well-known and respected in the sagas than her husband, Gorm the Old, or her son, Harald Bluetooth. According to the saga of the Jomsvikings, she is credited with construction of the Danevirke.
  - E. Finally, we know of Queen Ota (ON: Aud), wife of the Hiberno-Norse sea king Turgeis (ON: Thorgils), who received an embassy from Cordoba and acted as a *völva* for the Viking kingdom that was set up in Dublin.
- V. We close with a brief look at changes in politics and religion brought about as a result of the Viking Age, which will also serve as the major themes in our lectures for the last third of this course.
- A. Political changes included the emergence of professional Viking companies, such as the Varangian Guard in Constantinople or contingents maintained by sea kings to fight in the Carolingian world or England. This was accompanied by changes in military technology, such as improvements in shipbuilding and the introduction of the double-headed axe. These professional companies formed the core of royal armies.
  - B. The monetization of markets, the increase in long-distance trade, and the use of coined money provided the basis for sustaining territorial monarchies.
  - C. Finally, the most important force in the transformation of Scandinavia in the Viking Age was the reception of Christianity. The exposure to Christian faith, both in the Carolingian Empire and Byzantium, would have profound consequences for the way that Scandinavians viewed the world and the way they would organize their kingdoms at home.

**Further Reading:**

Brigit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer. *Medieval Scandinavia from Conversion to the Reformation, circa 800–1500*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Peter Foote and David M. Wilson. *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What were the amounts and kinds of wealth that poured into Scandinavia during the Viking Age? How was silver and gold, in coin or plate, used in Scandinavia? How did the acquisition of so much wealth change patterns of life?
2. In what ways did the Viking Age reinforce traditional patterns of life? In what ways did the Viking Age result in changes of material culture and social mores? How do jewelry and decorative arts reflect wider changes in society?

## Lecture Twenty-Seven

### St. Anskar and the First Christian Missions

**Scope:** In 826, St. Anskar (801–865), a Benedictine monk of the royal monastery at Corby, was commissioned as apostle to the north to convert the pagan Scandinavians to Christianity. St. Anskar enjoyed royal favor and was received by Danes and Swedes as a representative of the Carolingian king Louis the Pious. Over the next 40 years, Anskar met with limited success, constructing modest churches in Hedeby and Birka. Through his efforts, Western Europeans first learned about the Scandinavians and their homeland. He established the Hamburg-Bremen archbishopric as the Scandinavian primate and founded monastic schools to train missionaries. He and his fellow missionaries impressed Scandinavians as holy men, but their message was little understood. His successors' achievements initially depended on the Holy Roman Emperors' power and patronage and, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, on that of the native Danish kings, for Scandinavians only embraced Christianity when convinced that it was a faith of victory.

### Outline

- I. This lecture looks at the reception of Christianity in Scandinavia starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This change in Scandinavian history is associated with the courageous missionary St. Anskar (801–865), the apostle to the north.
  - A. We shall concentrate on the activities of St. Anskar, using as our source the *Vita Anskarii*, a biography penned by Anskar's disciple and successor as bishop of Hamburg-Bremen, Rimbert.
  - B. We shall also look at the difficulties early Christian missionaries encountered in winning the northern peoples over to the new faith.
  - C. Finally, we'll explore why the old Norse gods persisted for so long and how, in some ways, the Viking Age reinforced belief in the old gods.
- II. St. Anskar was born in Picardy, probably around 801, and he died in 865. His life was closely tied to his missionary efforts and the monastic reforms taking place in Europe at the time.
  - A. Anskar was trained at the great monastery at Corby in France, which had pioneered monastic reform in the Carolingian Empire and was especially prominent at the time of Louis the Pious.
  - B. Rimbert's biography depicts Anskar as an extremely pious and courageous man, who tried to convert the Scandinavians by persuasion and preaching rather than with the more zealous approach involving destruction of cult objects and temples.
  - C. St. Anskar comes across in Rimbert's *Vita* as a savvy ecclesiastical politician. He understood the importance of royal patronage, from both Frankish and Scandinavian kings. He cultivated the patronage of Scandinavian kings in Hedeby and Birka in order to build the first churches in Scandinavia and attract potential converts.
  - D. Anskar understood the need to establish institutions and train clergy, who could then go and preach to Scandinavians in their own language, using arguments that would be effective to the potential converts.
    1. We see the virtue of this in comparison with his predecessor, St. Willibrord (c. 657–738), an English missionary commissioned to convert the Frisians. He became archbishop of Utrecht.
    2. Willibrord was successful in Frisia, partially because he spoke Old English, which would have been understandable to the Frisians. His excursion into Denmark and his encounter with King Ongendus (ON: Angantyr), however, were not so successful.
    3. Willibrord tried to buy boy slaves to train as clerics, but slaves could not have converted Scandinavian kings, princes, and warriors. Also, Scandinavians had developed a distinct Germanic language and would not have understood English or Frisian.
    4. St. Anskar, in contrast, found missionaries who could speak the native language and thus gain the attention of potential converts.
  - E. St. Anskar was commissioned as the apostle to the north by Louis the Pious, but he did not travel there alone.

1. In 826, the exiled Danish prince Harald Klak received a fief in Frisia. He hoped to obtain military aid from Louis the Pious to reestablish his position in Denmark. So he and 400 followers were baptized and he provided translators and guides for Anskar.
  2. Anskar arrived with a retinue in Hedeby, including his mentor, Autbert. He also came with the authority of Louis the Pious.
  3. In Hedeby were merchants from around the northern world, among whom might be hosts who were already Christians.
  4. Thus, Anskar enjoyed a certain amount of support in Hedeby and, from 826–828, made the first efforts at converting Danes there.
  5. Anskar won the patronage of King Horic (ON: Erik; 813–854), a rival of Harald Klak; Horic not only allowed services at the first church in Denmark, but he actually attended some. Anskar, however, likely misinterpreted Horic's actions to mean that he had been converted, when Horic was probably acting only out of good manners, because Scandinavians placed a premium on hospitality.
- F.** In 829, Anskar returned to the Frankish court and was sent on another mission, this time, to Birka, in Sweden. The king in Birka, Bjorn, was also polite to Anskar but had no interest in embracing the new faith. In contrast, Herigar, a royal counselor and agent of Bjorn, was quite interested in Christianity and allowed a church to be built on his property.
- G.** In 831, Anskar left Sweden and handed over the leadership of the churches in Hedeby and Birka to other monks. Anskar was then consecrated archbishop of Hamburg, which at the time was a far northern outpost of the Frankish world. He made an effort to train native clergy to preach the message in Scandinavia, and Hamburg thus became the primate of Scandinavia.
- H.** In this way, Anskar created an institutional basis in the Frankish world to commit the monarchy and the Western Church to the notion of converting the Scandinavians.
- III.** After St. Anskar left Scandinavia, the outcomes of later missions were far from assured. Indeed, when Anskar returned on a second Swedish mission, he encountered a hostile pagan population.
- A.** Two arguments were advanced for discounting the Christian faith: First, Birka had been prosperous during the time that the Christian church there was closed and, second, the deceased King Erik, now residing in Valhalla, should be worshiped as a new god in Sweden, rather than the Frankish God, Jesus Christ. The ancient culture of the Norse was a difficult barrier for Western Christians to overcome.
  - B.** In 845, a Danish fleet burned Hamburg to the ground. As a result, Louis the German proposed uniting Hamburg and Bremen into one archbishopric, which in turn, brought on a series of legal disputes. Anskar and Louis prevailed in these disputes, and Anskar was allowed to continue his work as archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen until his death in 865.
  - C.** Anskar's successors drew two important lessons from his activities. First was the absolute necessity of securing royal support in both the Carolingian world and Scandinavia. Second was the need to train clergy who could convince the Scandinavians in their native language to make the conversion to Christianity.
- IV.** What barriers did missionaries face in Scandinavia?
- A.** Obviously, a significant barrier was language. Only toward the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century could missionaries preach the message to the Scandinavians in their native language.
  - B.** Other aspects of Christianity were impressive and might transcend the language barrier, including the size of a missionary's retinue or the dignity of the church service. These trappings attracted attention, but Scandinavians would have required proof of the new God's power.
  - C.** Many Scandinavian conversions achieved by Western churchmen were tentative. As mentioned in an earlier lecture, at the Battle of Carlington Lough (851), the Danes embraced the power of St. Patrick only because they believed he would bring victory.
  - D.** Further, the Scandinavians had a well-founded belief that their ancestral gods had enabled them to prosper and to raid, trade, and settle at will. Throughout the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Western missionaries would have had a difficult time countering this belief.
    1. Our evidence tells us that Odin was originally a minor god in the Germanic pantheon, but he was transformed into the primary war god and venerated by the Scandinavians.

2. Missionaries had difficulty convincing Scandinavians that such gods were demons and that they should accept the power of the new Christian God instead. Nothing less than a miracle would carry this argument.
  3. For example, in 960–965, King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark was finally convinced by a Germany missionary, St. Poppo, undergoing the ordeal of fire.
  4. Around 995–1000, a Norwegian monarch, Olaf Trygvason, was impressed by the prophetic powers of a hermit in England, leading Olaf to embrace Christ and dedicate his victories to the new god.
- E. Such kings who were won over would, in turn, take stern measures to break the power of the pagan cults and ensure true conversions.

**Further Reading:**

Adam of Bremen. *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. Translated by F. J. Tschan. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Turville-Petre, G. *The Heroic Age of Scandinavia*. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What were the motives of Louis the Pious and Louis the German in supporting the missions of St. Anskar? What was the extent of success of the missions at Hedeby and Birka? What barriers did Christian missionaries in Scandinavia face during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries?
2. What were the attractions of the ancestral Scandinavian cults? Why did Scandinavians persist in adhering to the worship of their ancestral gods? How was this faith also linked to reverence of the ancestors?

## Lecture Twenty-Eight

### Formation of the Kingdom of Denmark

**Scope:** During the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Danish kings in Jutland constructed the ramparts and palisade known as the Danevirke, between Hedeby and the Eider River, to guard against Carolingian attack. Hence, Carolingian emperors and, later, Ottonian kings of Germany compelled the Danes to organize. In 934, King Henry the Fowler of Germany invaded Jutland and compelled King Gnupe at Hedeby to submit to baptism and render tribute. In response, Gorm the Old (r. c. 936–958) and Harald Bluetooth (r. c. 958–986) forged the kingdom of Denmark. In opposing the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I, Gorm the Old extended his authority from his seat at Jelling in southern Jutland over the Danish islands and Skane. His son Harald Bluetooth converted to Christianity and, thus, gained legitimacy and institutions to create a monarchy. He welded Viking warriors and fleets into a royal force and constructed great military camps throughout his kingdom. In c. 970, he overthrew the unpopular King Harald Greycloak of Norway, and imposed Danish rule over Vestfold and the Upplands, while Jarl Hakon ruled Trondheim as Harald's ally. Harald Bluetooth died an exile, but his son Svein Forkbeard sent the royal Viking fleet to conquer England in 1002–1014.

### Outline

- I. This lecture deals with the formation of the kingdom of Denmark, perhaps the most impressive of the three Scandinavian kingdoms that emerged in the Viking Age.
  - A. Norway was unified earlier than Denmark, by King Harald Finehair, at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century; Denmark emerged about a half a generation later, partly as a result of the activities of Gorm the Old.
  - B. Denmark reveals some important features that the other Scandinavia nations do not, especially its interplay with the Holy Roman Empire. It became the basis for a Scandinavian conquest of England and a brief unification of Scandinavia during the reign of King Cnut.
  - C. We begin by looking at the pressures exerted on Denmark, followed by an examination of the emergence of the Danish kingdom, which was, in some ways, a surprise. We shall close by stressing the importance of the activities of three kings, Gorm the Old (r. c. 936–958), his son Harald Bluetooth (r. c. 958–986), and his grandson Svein Forkbeard (r. 986–1014); each of these Viking sea kings made significant contributions to the emergence of the Danish kingdom.
- II. What forces led to the formation of the Danish kingdom, first in Jutland, then across the region?
  - A. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish kings were under a threat that the other Scandinavian kings did not face: the threat from Germany.
    1. The Holy Roman Empire saw a change of dynasty with the election of King Henry the Fowler of Germany (r. 919–936). Henry and his successors saw themselves as the heirs to the Carolingian tradition of expanding the Christian world through conquest and conversion, and Denmark was in their sights.
    2. The German kings were also the patrons to the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen and felt a strong impetus to promote the faith.
    3. These factors forced the Danish kings to organize in a way that their Norwegian and Swedish counterparts did not experience.
  - B. We have excellent sources on Denmark compared to the other two kingdoms: Latin chronicles, including the account of Saxo Grammaticus; the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Icelandic *Saga of the Jomsvikings* about a group of warriors operating in the Baltic Sea and associated with Harald Bluetooth and Svein Forkbeard; a late saga about King Cnut; and German accounts from the Holy Roman Empire.
  - C. At the onset of the Viking Age, there were many kings in Denmark, but no king of Denmark. Based on archaeology and legend, it would be expected that political power in Denmark would have emerged on the island of Sjaelland, home of the Skjöldungar dynasty.
    1. This region—the Belts, southern Sweden, and Skane—was the heart of the Danish kingdom, while Jutland was loosely attached to Sjaelland and divided among many competing kings.
    2. Two important changes resulted from the unexpected emergence of the Danish monarchy on Jutland rather than Sjaelland. After King Hrolf Kraki died in battle in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, we have little

- information about a continuous line of kings. In the Viking Age, the development of Hedeby and trade with the Carolingian Empire shifted the axis of wealth and population to Jutland.
3. Competing sea kings emerged in Jutland in the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Archaeology indicates that Jutland profited greatly in the early Viking Age, when the Danevirke, for example, was built by a king ruling in Hedeby who wanted to protect his southern frontier from Carolingian kings. Later Danish kings of the Jelling dynasty extended those fortifications in a major building program.
- D. The political power centered in Jutland coalesced into the kingdom of Denmark in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century for two reasons.
    1. First, King Harald Finehair set an example by unifying the kingdom of Norway through sea power. Harald's success spurred Danish sea kings to re-create in Denmark what Harald had accomplished in Norway.
    2. Second, in 934, Emperor Henry I breached the Danevirke, marched into Jutland, and tried to impose German authority in the peninsula. A number of kings submitted, including Gnupa, king of Hedeby. This invasion galvanized a successful sea king, Gorm the Old, to move into Jutland and eliminate German influence.
  - E. Gorm deposed Gnupa and so ruled in Hedeby and throughout Jutland. Gorm was ardently pagan and attempted to root out any German missionary influence in his realm. He established a royal capital at Jelling, raided along the frontiers, and created the first effective kingdom in Denmark. Although Gorm ruled Jutland, he looked to the legendary kings of Sjaelland as his models.
  - F. Gorm's son and the second king of the Jelling dynasty, Harald Bluetooth, had converted to Christianity in the early 960s and understood the institutional power of his new faith. He knew that Christian institutions would provide the staff necessary to build a monarchy and also gain Denmark legitimacy as a Christian kingdom, and so free of German attacks.
  - G. Shortly after his conversion, Harald imposed his authority in the Danish islands and southern Sweden. By the time of Harald's death, the territorial kingdom of Denmark had come into existence.
  - H. Harald had inherited the ancestral capital at Jelling, where Gorm and his queen Thyri were buried in two great *tumuli* (mounds) with accompanying rune stones. Harald built a church between the two mounds and erected his own rune stone, announcing that he had made the Danes Christian.
  - I. Harald also established a new capital at Roskilde on the island of Sjaelland, partly to lay claim to the legacy of Hrolf Kraki. He was responsible for part of the construction of the Danevirke and the military camps at Trelleborg, Fyrkat, Aggersborg, and Nonnebakken, each of which could accommodate 2,000 to 3,000 warriors.
- III. Harald Bluetooth was accepted as king by the Danes of Jutland, but he saw the Norwegian kings as threats, particularly the second son of King Harald Finehair, King Hakon the Good (r. c. 936–960).
    - A. Hakon had been a successful king in Norway and had aroused the envy of Harald Bluetooth and his sister, Gunnhild, who had been married to Hakon's half-brother, Erik the Bloodax.
    - B. The hostility peaked in a Danish attack on Norway in 960. Hakon was mortally wounded in a naval battle, although the fighting went against the Danes. A new king came to power in Norway, Harald Greycloak (r. c. 960–970), oldest son of Erik the Bloodax. Harald was thus related to the ruling family in Denmark, which allowed the Danish king to rule southern Norway through a client arrangement.
    - C. Harald Greycloak resented being a client king and was overthrown in 970. From that point on, southern Norway, that is, the areas around Vestfold and the Oslo fjord, was incorporated into the Danish kingdom. The northern and western districts were ruled by Jarl Hakon the Great as a vassal to Harald Bluetooth.
    - D. Harald Bluetooth's one surviving son, Svein Forkbeard, dethroned the king in a civil war in 986–987. Svein came to the throne at a critical time; although his father and grandfather had laid the foundations of the Danish kingdom, success still depended on the king's personality, and Svein was not the warrior that his forebears had been.
    - E. Svein convinced the Jomsvikings to combine their fleets with the Danish forces and attack Norway, largely because Jarl Hakon had ceased to rule under the direction of the Danish king. Around 988, a Jomsvikings fleet blundered into an enormous Norwegian fleet and was defeated in the great battle of Hjorungavag in western Norway.

- F. Defeat put Svein at a disadvantage early in his reign. He was forced to battle Erik the Victorious of Sweden (r. 980–995) and Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995–1000) in Norway. After 1000, with the death of Olaf, Svein finally had the opportunity to consolidate his position in Denmark.
- G. On St. Brice's Day 1002, in England, King Aethelred II (r. 978–1016), the Unready, unleashed a second Viking invasion by ordering the execution of all Danes in England. Among the slain was Gunnhild, sister of Svein Forkbeard. Svein swore revenge, mobilized the Viking fleets, and launched a raid that resulted in the conquest of England.

**Further Reading:**

Ian Howard *Svein Forkbeard's Invasion and the Danish Conquest of England, 991–1017*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003.

G. Turville-Petre. *The Heroic Age of Scandinavia*. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did conditions in the Viking Age lead to the formation of the kingdom of Denmark in the 10<sup>th</sup> century? How important were threats by Carolingian and German monarchs? Why did the dynasty of Jelling succeed in forging the kingdom of Denmark?
2. By what means did Gorm the Old and Harald Bluetooth rule Denmark? Why were the Norwegian kings perceived as rivals? How important was the use of Christian institutions? How did Christianity give royal legitimacy?

## Lecture Twenty-Nine

### Cnut the Great

**Scope:** In 1014, on the death of Svein Forkbeard, the veteran Danish warriors in England acclaimed Cnut as their king. Two years later, Cnut conquered all England; in 1019, he was received as king of Denmark. In 1028, Cnut added Norway to his realm by election and exercised hegemony over Sweden. Cnut's northern empire was based on veteran Viking warriors and longships. He ruled England as a conqueror but posed as a Christian monarch in the guise of Charlemagne. He sought matrimonial alliances with leading European families and went on pilgrimage to Rome. In England, Cnut entrusted great earldoms to loyal commanders and turned the *danegeld* into taxation to maintain an elite royal guard of housecarls. He depended on the English resources to rule his Scandinavian realm. He also ruled by Scandinavian proxies: Jarls Thorkell and Ulf in Denmark and, in Norway, his unpopular son, Svein Alfivason (r. 1030–1035). Yet Cnut failed to force the institutions to ensure the integrity of his empire after his death.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we look at the career and impact of the Danish king Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035), who was also king of England and, for a short time, Norway and exercised hegemony over Sweden.
  - A. Cnut, sometimes known as Cnut the Old in the Norse tradition, was a king of importance for Europe and, in some ways, marked a new point in the Viking Age.
  - B. By the time of his death in 1035, Cnut ruled a North Sea Empire that included England, Norway, and Denmark and held personal dominion over the kings of Sweden. Briefly, Cnut's state seemed to be the realization of political developments that had taken place since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, that is, the unification of the Scandinavian homeland into a Christian kingdom ruled by a European-style king. Yet shortly before Cnut's death, the kingdom was already falling apart.
  - C. In this lecture, we shall first look at Cnut's early career, including his conquest of England; then, we'll examine Cnut as king of the North Sea Empire. As we shall see, for all of the influence of England in this empire, Cnut was a traditionally Scandinavian king in his approach to government. We shall conclude the lecture with some thoughts about why the empire broke apart, noting that there was a certain logic to the unification of Scandinavia and England and the empire was by no means doomed to failure.
- II. In some ways, Cnut can be seen as the most successful sea king of the Viking Age. He came to rule three kingdoms, was accepted as the equal of the Holy Roman Emperor, and was viewed as a great Christian monarch.
  - A. Cnut was the product of a dynastic marriage between Svein Forkbeard and a Polish princess. He was taken on campaign and fought in England with his father. When Svein died suddenly in England in 1014, the Danish army immediately acclaimed Cnut king. From the start, Cnut had been reared as the royal successor.
  - B. In 1003, Svein Forkbeard departed with a great fleet to begin the conquest of England. Scholars still debate whether Svein's goal was confined to exacting vengeance for the massacre of Danes on St. Brice's Day 1002 or whether he set out to conquer England. At least, Svein probably saw the campaigns in England as a means to gain revenues and booty to support the royal fleets and warriors necessary to assert his authority in Scandinavia.
  - C. In later expeditions, Svein depended on his jarls, including Tore (OE: Tostig) and Thorkell the Tall, a famous commander associated with the Jomsvikings. These men made headway in England, exacting payments of *danegeld* and winning over the former Danelaw areas, particularly the regions around York and the Five Boroughs. By 1013, when Cnut followed his father on the final campaign, considerable progress had already been made in the conquest of England.
  - D. As mentioned earlier, Svein died suddenly in February 1014, at a time when Cnut was back in Scandinavia raising fresh forces. Cnut then made an arrangement with his younger half-brother, Harald (r. 1014–1018), to rule in Denmark while Cnut returned to England to take charge of the army.

- E. When Cnut arrived in England, he found a changed situation. The feckless king Aethelred II the Unready (a nickname used to mean that he could not hold his counsel, that he tended to have a vacillating nature) had lost the cooperation of the landed classes in northern England and had taken refuge in Normandy with his brother-in-law, Duke Richard II. His oldest son, Edmund Ironside, had returned from Normandy and rallied the English against Cnut in Wessex and the city of London.
  - F. Following a war of maneuver, Cnut and Edmund came to an agreement in 1016 to partition the kingdom along almost the same lines that Alfred the Great had drawn in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. England would have been ruled as a divided state, but Edmund died unexpectedly in November 1016. The English nobility pledged its loyalties to Cnut, who was then received as king of all England. This turn of events was an unexpected triumph for the Danes.
  - G. Cnut took over a well-run state that had been forged by Alfred and his successors in response to the Danish raids of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. He is often viewed as settling into the position and ruling as an English king.
    - 1. Cnut returned to Scandinavia infrequently; the kingdom was run by deputies and Cnut's half-brother, Harald, who ruled in Denmark until his death in 1018.
    - 2. Cnut used his great jarls to run the Scandinavian kingdom, particularly Ulf, who was married to Cnut's half-sister Estrith. Their son, Svein Estrithson (r. 1046–1074), would later become Cnut's successor in Denmark. In later years, Thorkell the Tall was designated to run Denmark while Cnut was in England, followed by one of Cnut's sons, Harthacnut.
- III.** The English view of Cnut is generally that he was born a Danish Viking but died an English monarch, but it is more accurate to state that he was a Scandinavian conqueror who stayed in England because he had to.
- A. Cnut was able to run Denmark, Norway, and indirectly, Sweden, because he had the revenues in England to sustain his fleet and warrior companies and, thus, maintain control.
  - B. Cnut demobilized some of his forces in 1016 after the conquest of England, but he retained a royal army of 2,000 well-trained housecarls. Indeed, this force continued to serve under the later English king Edward the Confessor. Cnut also maintained a fleet of at least 60 dragon ships and longships, part of which was raised by the *leding* ("ship levy").
  - C. Cnut ruled with a hard hand over a well-organized medieval state. He patronized the English church and endowed a number of monasteries, but his generosity never inspired a royal biographer or earned him much mention in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.
    - 1. Indeed, the *Chronicle* devotes more attention to Earl Godwin and his sons, members of the leading political family in England, than to Cnut or his father, Svein Forkbeard.
    - 2. In spite of his attempts to rule as a Christian monarch in the mode of Charlemagne, Cnut was unable to forge a lasting memory of himself in the English tradition.
  - D. Although Cnut made use of the local institutions in England, established by Alfred and his successors, he also created a "charmed club" of powerful jarls. In allowing these jarls to run large sections of England, Cnut was maintaining a tradition that could be traced back to his father and grandfather. The high position of earl in the English aristocracy was essentially a creation of Cnut.
  - E. Finally, Cnut revealed himself very much as a Scandinavian king in his succession arrangements and dynastic plans.
    - 1. He first married an Anglo-Saxon woman, Aelgifu of Northampton, in an attempt to win support in central England. With Aelgifu, Cnut had two sons, Svein and Harald (often known as Harald Harefoot).
    - 2. Cnut then married Queen Emma, the sister of Richard II of Normandy, who had been recently widowed by the death of Aethelred II, Cnut's former rival. By marrying Emma, Cnut secured an understanding with Duke Richard II of Normandy not to support English dissidents in Normandy, particularly Emma's son and the future king of England, Edward the Confessor.
    - 3. A third son came out of this marriage, Harthacnut or Cnut III. Note that Cnut the Great is usually designated Cnut II because his great-great-grandfather, that is, the father of Gorm the Old, was also named Cnut.
  - F. Cnut now faced the problem of providing realms for each of his sons. One solution was to create a set of associated kingdoms ruled by the sons of Cnut, who would then acknowledge one of their number as the overall leader. In establishing this consortium, Cnut blundered badly.

1. In 1028, Cnut had secured the throne of Norway for himself, and in 1030, he handed it over to his oldest son, Svein. Svein and his mother, Aelgifu, offended the jarls and leading men of Norway and were ousted in early 1035. The Norwegians invited Magnus the Good (r. 1035–1047), the son of their former king, St. Olaf, to return to rule over them.
  2. Harald Harefoot was in England and Cnut III was in Denmark when their father died in 1035; a war of succession immediately followed.
  3. In these dynastic arrangements, Cnut followed the Germanic principle of providing separate realms for each of his sons, which is quite different from the English ideal, established with Alfred the Great, that the monarchy was not to be divided.
- G.** Foremost, Cnut had European-wide pretensions. He saw himself as the Charlemagne of the north, not specifically associated with Scandinavia or with England. He attended the coronation of a Holy Roman Emperor and arranged a marriage of one of his daughters, Gunnhild, to the future ruler of the same empire, a true indication that Denmark had come of age. Ironically, these diplomatic efforts by Cnut constitute one of the reasons that he is not remembered in the same way as St. Olaf and later Scandinavian kings.
- H.** Even so, in his lifetime, Cnut was immensely successful. He harnessed the energy of the Viking Age to carry out the conquest of England and built an empire embracing the three most important kingdoms in the North Sea. Unfortunately, he handed to his successors the difficult political task of holding this empire together, and we shall see why they failed to do so.

**Further Reading:**

Ian Howard. *Svein Forkbeard's Invasion and the Danish Conquest of England, 991–1017*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003.

M. K. Lawson. *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. London/New York: Longman, 1993.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. By what means did Cnut seek to rule England? How did he employ English fiscal, administrative, and ecclesiastical institutions? In what ways did Cnut rule England as a Viking conqueror?
2. How did Cnut rule over Denmark and Norway? Why did Cnut fail to secure the succession of his heirs? Was the fragmenting of Cnut's empire of the North Sea inevitable?

## Lecture Thirty

### Collapse of Cnut's Empire

**Scope:** The sons of Cnut, the half-brothers, Harthacnut (r. 1035–1042) and Harald Harefoot (r. 1035–1040), vied for control over England and Denmark, but they expended royal revenues and left no heirs. In England, the great Anglo-Danish earls asserted their power. In 1042, upon the death of Harthacnut, they recalled from exile Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–1066), heir of the West Saxon kings, to rule over England. In 1042, Denmark fell under Norwegian rule. Magnus the Good (r. 1035–1047), son of St. Olaf, gained his father's throne when the Norwegians expelled Svein Alfvason. In 1043, Magnus seemed destined to succeed to Cnut's legacy, but he faced a rival in the resilient Svein Estrithson, nephew of Cnut, who too claimed the Danish throne. Magnus acquired a powerful ally and co-king in his uncle Harald Hardardi (r. 1046–1066), who had gained fame, wealth, and veterans by service in the Varangian Guard. Harald failed to conquer Denmark, and in 1066, he fell at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in a bid for the English throne. Thereafter, kings of Denmark and Norway were in no position to revive the conquest of England.

### Outline

- I. Cnut's North Sea Empire fragmented and the more compact kingdoms of England, Denmark, and Norway emerged.
  - A. A major question went unanswered for about 30 years after Cnut's death: Would one of Cnut's surviving sons gain control of the English and Danish thrones and reassert authority in Norway, reconstituting Cnut's kingdom? No would be the ultimate answer to that question..
  - B. From 1042–1066, a complicated political struggle was played out at the courts of Rouen in Normandy, Winchester in England, and in Denmark and Norway, concerning the successor to Cnut's legacy and what portions of his legacy would constitute kingdoms. This struggle resulted in three major battles in 1066 that would settle the issue.
- II. It is best to begin with the succession crisis following Cnut's death.
  - A. Cnut died in England on November 12, 1035, several months after his oldest son, Svein, had died in exile at the Danish court in Roskilde.
  - B. By mid-summer of 1035, the Norwegian jarls and *lendirmenn* ("leading landowners") had ended Danish rule and invited as their leader Magnus the Good, son of St. Olaf. Olaf had been defeated and slain by his own subjects in northern Norway on July 29, 1030, at the Battle of Stiklestad. This battle had ensured Cnut's position in Norway. Unfortunately, Cnut had then given Norway over to his son, who had alienated the Norwegians.
  - C. Norway was now independent from Denmark. But the sons of Cnut held to the ancient Danish tradition that any powerful Norwegian sea king was, by definition, a rival. Further, they believed that southern Norway was really part of Denmark and that northern Norway should be ruled by jarls who were properly subservient to the Danish crown.
  - D. In 1035, two sons of Cnut, half-brothers, had a claim to the Norwegian throne. Harald Harefoot, the younger son of Aelfgifu, Cnut's first wife, was in England at the time of his father's death and, thus, controlled the instruments of government there. His mother was in Denmark, with his half-brother and rival, Harthacnut, or Cnut III, the son of Cnut's second wife, Queen Emma, who was in England at the time.
  - E. Emma was the more adroit diplomat and had on her side Earl Godwin, who had been a long-time supporter of King Cnut and was from a powerful political family. Emma and Godwin made an arrangement whereby Harthacnut was acclaimed king of both Denmark and England. Harald Harefoot was compensated with the understanding that he would rule England in the interests of his brother.
  - F. In 1037, Harald vitiated this agreement and seized the crown of England for himself, taking advantage of the fact that Harthacnut was busy in Denmark fighting the Norwegian fleet. In 1038, Harthacnut came to an unusual agreement with his opponent, Magnus the Good. They agreed to an armistice and a treaty that would have wide-ranging consequences.

1. The two opponents agreed that should either of them die without issue, the family of the other would inherit the throne. In other words, if Magnus the Good died without children, the throne of Norway would go to the family of Harthacnut. In the same way, if Harthacnut died, Denmark and England would go to the family of Magnus.
  2. This treaty enabled Magnus and his supporters to consolidate control of Norway in the coming years so that Magnus was uncontested as king. For his part, Harthacnut readied a fleet to invade England. First, however, he sailed to Flanders, where Queen Emma was in exile, to consult with his mother.
  3. Early in 1040, Harald Harefoot died unexpectedly, apparently of illness. Harthacnut arrived in England and was declared king. Given that Harthacnut henceforth ruled England and Denmark, an invasion of Norway was not hard to predict.
  4. In June of 1042, Harthacnut had raised *dane Geld* payments to carry out his invasion. Unfortunately, he overindulged himself at a celebration, went into convulsions, and died the next morning.
  5. Contrary to all expectations, none of Cnut's sons had reached the age of 25 and none had children. The direct line of Cnut was defunct. Magnus now had the right to claim both Denmark and England. He was unable to advance his position in England, but he could assert his rights in Denmark.
  6. In the spring of 1043, a Norwegian fleet arrived in Denmark, and the Danes agreed, at a national *thing* in Viborg in northern Jutland, to accept Magnus as their king.
- G. The English nobility moved quickly to forestall Magnus's claim to the throne of England, inviting in Edward the Confessor, the son of Queen Emma and stepson of King Cnut. Edward had been in exile at Rouen and was, essentially, a Norman. Godwin and his followers hoped to rule England as regional lords through this weak Norman king. The history of England from 1042–1066 was marked by a power struggle among these great families of earls.

### III. As these struggles were being played out in England, what was happening in Scandinavia?

- A. Magnus seemed to be in a charmed position until Svein Estrithson, a nephew of Cnut, appeared on the scene. Svein had been living in exile in Sweden and received the support of the then-reigning Swedish king to make a political comeback in Denmark.
- B. A year after Magnus had been elected as king in Denmark and returned to Norway to prepare to invade England, Svein arrived in Denmark and was himself elected king by the *thing* at Viborg. Immediately, a war ensued.
- C. From that point until 1066, a period of 22 years, Svein fought largely losing battles against his Norwegian contenders, first Magnus the Good, followed by Harald Hardardi (r. 1046–1066), the half-brother of St. Olaf.
  1. This Harald had fled east to Kiev after the Battle of Stiklestad, made his way to Constantinople, and served in the Varagian Guard.
  2. When he received word of the complicated situation in Scandinavia, he returned there. As the half-brother of St. Olaf, he had a legitimate claim to the crown of Norway.
  3. Along the way, he made an important alliance by marrying Elizabeth, daughter of Yaroslav, the prince of Kiev.
  4. Harald arrived in Sweden and made contact with Svein Estrithson, and the two teamed up to take on Magnus.
  5. Harald was not impressed by Svein, who was not a charismatic warrior, but Svein knew with certainty that what he wanted was Denmark.
  6. Harald decided that he might do better if he teamed up with Magnus against Svein. In 1046, a strange alliance was formed between Magnus and Harald to share the kingship of Norway.
  7. This alliance was almost certain to fail. Harald was obviously the greater warrior, had greater resources, and had made a strategic alliance by taking another wife, Thora, the daughter of a jarl who dominated the Upplands. Magnus and Harald might have gone to war, but Magnus died unexpectedly of an illness in 1047.
- D. Harald Hardardi was henceforth the sole king of Norway facing Svein Estrithson. He could also claim the Danish kingdom and England, under the treaty of 1038, because he was the surviving relative of Magnus.
- E. Unfortunately, the unimpressive Svein managed to check the efforts of Harald to conquer Denmark and, thus, thwarted Harald's planned invasion of England—this despite Harald's repeated defeats of the Danes,

including a humiliation at the Nissa River in 1062, in which Svein had to jump ship in order to escape capture.

- F. In 1064, developments in England caused Harald and Svein to call a truce. By that year, it was obvious that Edward the Confessor would not survive long. Harald came to the conclusion that Denmark was too difficult to conquer; he might be more successful in shifting his efforts to England, then using the resources of England to return to Denmark. Several factors favored this decision.
1. First, Harald II's brother, Tostig, had been earl of Northumbria but had been run out of England. Tostig was willing to assist Harald Hardardi by raising rebellions in northern England.
  2. Further, the only other possible candidates to the English throne had weak claims. One of these was Harald II, brother-in-law of Edward the Confessor and the leading earl in England, but Harald had no royal blood. He could, however, command the loyalty of the Anglo-Danish ruling classes in England, as well as the royal army of 2,000 housecarls.
  3. The other candidate was Duke William of Normandy, the illegitimate son of Robert I, who also had a weak claim to the throne. Harald II had sworn to William that he would support William's claim to the throne. When Harald II took the throne early in 1066, William immediately challenged him; in January of 1066, three kings claimed the throne of England.
- G. King Harald II of England faced two threats, Harald Hardardi's from the north and Duke William's from the south, yet most of the spring and summer of 1066 passed uneventfully. In the autumn of 1066, Harald's forces were concentrated in protecting southern England from the Normans, when news came that the Norwegian fleet had sailed.
1. Harald Hardardi joined up with Tostig, sailing more than 300 longships and carrying 10,000 warriors. The force landed south of York and advanced on the city.
  2. On September 20, 1066, Harald and his allies smashed the northern English army at the Battle of Fulford.
  3. Within five days of the battle, Harald II and his army advanced from the south over 180 miles to attack Harald Hardardi's army outside of York. Harald II annihilated his opponent at the Battle of Stamford Bridge on September 25.
  4. Unfortunately for Harald II, three days later, William's army landed in England, 6,000 strong with 2,000 cavalry. Harald met William at Hastings, and on October 14, 1066, the decisive battle of English history was fought.
  5. The battle pitted 2,000 housecarls fighting in the Viking shield wall against the Norman cavalry. Harald was killed late in the day, and William took the kingdom of England, establishing a Norman dynasty and transforming the kingdom into a Carolingian-style feudal state.
- H. The Battle of Hastings marked the end of any efforts by Scandinavian kings to rule in England and left Svein Estrithson ruling in Denmark and the family of Harald Hardardi in Norway. Three kings, not one, would follow Cnut the Great.

#### **Further Reading:**

D. C. Douglas. *William the Conqueror*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

M. K. Lawson. *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. London/New York: Longman, 1993.

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What were the political conditions in Norway in 1042–1066? Why were Magnus the Good and Harald Hardardi so committed to overseas conquests? Why did each king fail to subject Denmark? How did Svein Estrithson check his more powerful Norwegian foes?
2. What were the respective claims of Harald II, Harald Hardardi, and William the Conqueror to the English throne in 1066? How did the battles of 1066 influence the destinies of Norway, Denmark, and England? Did these battles mark the end of the Viking Age? Why did later Danish or Norwegian kings fail to launch a new conquest of England?

## Lecture Thirty-One

### Jarls and Sea Kings of Norway

**Scope:** In the last quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Harald Finehair (r. c. 880–930), a king in the Upplands, imposed his rule over Norway after defeating a coalition of jarls at the naval battle of Hafsford in about 875. Harald cemented ties with regional kings and jarls by marriages, hospitality, and oaths. By exacting tribute and service in the royal fleet, Harald drew on the resources that Norwegian sea kings and jarls had amassed from a century of Viking raids. Icelanders recalled Harald as a tyrant, but he was also the first Norwegian figure celebrated in skaldic verse. Harald's numerous sons clashed. Erik the Bloodaxe (r. c. 930–936), viewed as a tyrant by the jarls and *lendirmenn*, was expelled in favor of his brother Hakon the Good (r. c. 936–960), who had been reared at the English court as a Christian prince. Hakon pressed neither the jarls for tribute nor his pagan subjects to convert. After Hakon's death, King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark exploited dynastic rivalries to impose his authority over southern Norway, while his ally, Jarl Hakon, ruled Trondheim. The line of Harald Finehair ended in 970, but another sea king, Olaf Trygvason (r. 995–1000), used his Viking fleet and Christian institutions to make himself king of Norway. When Olaf fell fighting a Danish rival, Svein Forkbeard, and his own jarls at the naval battle of Svöld, the Norwegians again acknowledged a Danish king.

### Outline

- I. This lecture looks at the second Scandinavian kingdom, Norway, which was intertwined with the political destiny of Denmark.
  - A. The development of kingship in Norway was a precocious act; King Harald Finehair was able to impose his authority over Norway almost a generation earlier than Gorm the Old did in Denmark.
  - B. Throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Danish kings clearly believed that they had a legitimate claim to at least two sections of Norway, the area of Vestfold and the Upplands. Further, they believed that they should have some authority over the rest of Norway.
  - C. One of the main reasons that Norway was able to develop a territorial kingdom first among the nations of Scandinavia was that it was in the forefront of the Viking expeditions overseas in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This experience was essential in transforming the isolated Norwegian communities into the types of settlements that could support, first, jarls, followed by regional kings and Viking sea kings.
- II. We should think of Norway as divided into four great regions with many sub-regions.
  - A. The core of the kingdom was around the Vik, which included important market towns and had to be the location of the capital for any royal authority. In this region, we find great ship burials, such as those at Oseberg and Gokstad. The western districts centered on the area known as Vestlandet, and the southwestern fjord districts ran from Agdir to Sogon. The northern zone encompassed Trondheim.
  - B. All these regions were settled comparatively late by Germanic-speaking people, including immigrants from central Sweden. King Harald Finehair claimed descent from the Yngling kings, the Swedish royal family ruling at Uppsala in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.
  - C. The Viking Age put Norway at the forefront of Scandinavia. The Norwegians were superior shipbuilders, and great warriors and sailors. Above all, they had a talent for Viking-style raiding. Archaeological evidence bears this out. Numerous graves have been found from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, filled with Irish and English objects.
  - D. English and Irish accounts tell us that fleets arrived from Norway and the sea king Turgeis arrived around 838. Turgeis was followed by Olaf, who arrived in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century to defeat the Danes in Ireland.
  - E. The Viking Age transformed many petty rulers, dynasts, and jarls in Norway into great sea kings, with the wealth and the warriors to impose their authority over various regions. This was an important building block in the creation of the Norwegian kingdom. The Viking Age saw isolated Norwegian communities evolve into polities with the resources to act as units of a wider Norwegian kingdom.

- III. The sea king who pulled these units together was Harald Finehair (r. c. 880–930).
- A. Harald inspired two antithetical traditions. In the first, recorded in a saga by Snorri Sturluson, and in poetry, he was a brilliant, charismatic sea king who inspired great loyalty, yet brooked no dissidence. Snorri says he conquered Norway because of a challenge by Gyda, whom he desired as a wife. He is also credited with establishing many institutions that we know date to later periods in Norwegian history.
  - B. In fact, Harald ruled through marriage alliances, kinship, fostering children, and, most important, customary law ratified in the *things* and by the consent of his subjects, especially the Trondheim jarls.
  - C. The second tradition, powerful in the literature, can be traced to the Icelandic scholar Ari the Learned. Ari was convinced, as were many of his countrymen, that Harald Finehair was a tyrannical king who had driven many Norwegians overseas to Iceland.
  - D. Harald's dates are vague, but he probably established his authority by 880 and retired from the throne around 930, dying several years later at the age of 80. He is remembered for winning a major naval battle at Hafsfjord (c. 875–880), in which he crushed a number of rival sea kings to impose his authority. The battle was celebrated in the Icelandic poem *Hrafsmal* ("Speech of the Raven").
- IV. The fact that Harald could achieve the unification of Norway at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century is a testament to the development of Norwegian institutions in the early Viking Age. However, Harald had a number of offspring, and all of his sons expected to be given kingdoms.
- A. At the time of his death, Harald had retired from ruling and turned over power to one of his older sons, Erik the Bloodax. Erik proved too tyrannical a king—he made great demands for ship service on his subjects—and was eventually driven out of Norway by the jarls and *lendirmenn*. A younger son of Harald Finehair was then called in, Hakon the Good (r. c. 936–960). These events tell us a good deal about the nature of the Norwegian monarchy: It rested in large part on the consent of its subjects.
  - B. Hakon had been reared as a foster son of King Aethelstan in England and was a Christian. He was unable to convert his subjects, and we're told that he reluctantly but openly participated in pagan rituals. Indeed, when he died in a naval battle around 960, he was accorded a ship burial. Hakon was much more astute than Erik; he knew that his rule depended on the consent of the landed classes and that he had to respect local customs, including worship of the ancient gods.
  - C. Hakon faced a great deal of resentment from the sons of Erik the Bloodax and their mother, Gunnhild. This group was able to convince the Danish king that Hakon's popularity in Norway made him a threat.
  - D. Thus, he faced three attempts by Erik's sons to overthrow him. The last attempt climaxed in a naval battle in which he was mortally wounded; before dying, he bequeathed the kingdom to his nephews, probably in the hope of avoiding further fighting.
  - E. The Erikssons divided Norway among themselves, with the eldest of them, Harald Greycloak (r. c. 960–970), named as king. The brothers were seen as foreigners and an unseemly lot; they violated oaths and were more violent than their father had been. Ironically, their overthrow was engineered by the Danish king Harald Bluetooth.
    1. The leading jarl in Trondheim was Hakon Sigurdsson, who had gone into exile at the Danish court of Bluetooth to protest the rule of Harald Greycloak and his brothers.
    2. Hakon and Bluetooth conspired to lure Greycloak to a celebration at the Danish court at Roskilde and killed him.
  - F. Hakon returned to Norway with a Danish fleet and ruled in "splendid isolation." He was technically the Danish king's vassal, yet he ruled northern Norway independently as Hakon the Great. He remained to the end of his days an ardent pagan, as were his sons and grandsons.
  - G. Meanwhile, Harald Bluetooth and his son Svein Forkbeard claimed some degree of authority over southern Norway. Hakon began to ignore the Danish king's directives, and Svein Forkbeard attempted his overthrow using the fleet of the Jomsvikings. Forkbeard and his forces were defeated at the Battle of Hjörungavág (c. 987–988).
  - H. Hakon the Great became a tyrannical pagan monarch who was overthrown by his subjects and died ignominiously in a pigsty.
  - I. The Norwegians turned to Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995–1000) to rule as their king. He had been a successful Viking sea king and had converted to Christianity sometime in the early 990s. In 995, Olaf sailed across

the Atlantic with a company of veteran overseas warriors, landed in Trondheim, celebrated mass as a Christian, and was received as king.

- J. Olaf made a concerted effort to convert Norway. He destroyed cult statues and killed sorcerers. He had learned his Christianity in England, where he saw the potential of Church institutions and power.
  - 1. Olaf's success in advancing Christianity made enemies of the Norwegian jarls and *lendirmenn*, and the Danish and Swedish kings. They arranged to bushwhack Olaf's fleet on an expedition in the Baltic at a small island called Svöld, probably near Sjaelland. Olaf was overwhelmed by superior numbers; he jumped ship and presumably drowned, although he lived on in legend.
  - 2. Although he is remembered as an important Christian king, Olaf Trygvason's reputation depends on the achievements of his namesake and successor, St. Olaf, Olaf the Stout.

**Further Reading:**

Sverre Bagge. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*. Translated by L. M. Hollander. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. Why was the Viking experience crucial for the emergence of the monarchy in Norway? How did the Viking raids and trade transform society in Norway?
- 2. What was the basis of the power of King Harald Finehair? How did Harald co-opt local rulers and *lendirmenn*? Why did Erik the Bloodaxe and his sons prove such unpopular rulers? Why was King Hakon the Good so revered?

## Lecture Thirty-Two

### St. Olaf of Norway

**Scope:** Olaf the Stout (r. 1015–1030), later revered as the sainted king of Norway, claimed descent from Harald Finehair, but he was, in truth, a Viking sea king who had campaigned in the Baltic lands, England, and Normandy. In 1015, Olaf, who had embraced Christianity while in Norman service, sailed to Norway and was hailed as king by jarls and farmers resentful of Danish rule. After defeating his pagan foes at Nesjar in 1016, Olaf ruthlessly imposed his authority and Christianity. He viewed Cnut as his greatest rival. Although Olaf won a tactical victory over Cnut at Holy River in 1026, the Norwegians rebelled against royal tyranny in 1028. Cnut was acclaimed king, and Olaf fled to the Swedish court. In 1030, Olaf fell fighting at Stiklestad in a desperate gamble to regain his throne. In death, St. Olaf achieved the fame and respect that had eluded him in life. Based on miracles performed at his tomb, Olaf was the first Scandinavian king canonized and became the Christian king upon whom all subsequent Norwegian kings based their legitimacy. Hence, Olaf enjoyed in saga and poetry a reputation far greater than that of his foe, Cnut the Great.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we see the latter half of the creation of the kingdom of Norway in the late Viking Age; that success is intimately tied to the career of Olaf the Stout, canonized after his death as St. Olaf.
  - A. As the first royal saint in Scandinavia, Olaf has a symbolic importance that is far greater than any historical action he took. Neither Cnut the IV (r. 1080–1086) in Denmark nor Erik IX (r. 1156–1160) in Sweden ever achieved the reputation of Olaf in Norway.
  - B. We shall look at the historical record of Olaf and compare it to his legacy. As we shall see, Olaf was defeated at the Battle of Stiklestad by his own subjects on July 29, 1030, but that battle came to be viewed as the national struggle of Norway, the fall of a great king, and the first step in overthrowing the hated Danish tyranny.
- II. Throughout his career, Olaf followed in the tradition of other Norwegian kings in retaining skilled Icelandic poets to celebrate his deeds.
  - A. The poet Sigvatr was one of these; he accompanied Olaf in his early career in England and traveled with him to Norway in 1015 when Olaf made his bid for the Norwegian throne. Ottar the Black was a well-known poet who also teamed up with Olaf. A number of verses by these poets are quoted by Snorri Sturluson and other authors.
  - B. Ecclesiastical authors also contributed to his image. He was seen in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the model Christian ruler, the *rex iustus* (“just king”) described by St. Augustine, and as the model for the monarch in *King’s Mirror*, written c. 1220–1225 in the reign of Hakon IV.
  - C. The best source we have on Olaf is the work of Snorri Sturluson, who fell more into the tradition of the skaldic poets than the ecclesiastical writers. Snorri offers a continuous narrative of Olaf’s career, ensuring that his reputation would be remembered by all subsequent historians.
    1. Snorri’s *Heimskringla Saga* is the history of the kings of Norway; it begins in the legendary past and ends in the late 1170s. Just over a third of this work is devoted to St. Olaf.
    2. The saga is essentially divided into four parts. Initially, it deals with the early career of St. Olaf, followed by his bid for the throne and his reign as king, the deterioration of the regime, and finally, his exile, return, and heroic death at Stiklestad.
    3. Snorri’s work is a masterpiece of saga storytelling, revealing different aspects of Olaf’s character with each phase of his career.
    4. Olaf did not fit the heroic image of height and beauty. So Snorri claimed he was called “Stout” for his barrel chest and strength and emphasized his piercing blue eyes and commanding voice.
  - D. Snorri and other Norwegian authors go to great lengths to disassociate St. Olaf from the Danes, notably Svein Forkbeard and Cnut the Great.
    1. According to Snorri, Olaf began his career raiding the Baltic as a Viking; he might have been associated with the Jomsvikings. He transferred his activities to England and went into the Danish

- king, Svein Forkbeard's service which presented opportunities to gain wealth. We believe he accompanied Thorkell the Tall, one of Svein's jarls, in an invasion of England. Again, Snorri and later Norwegian authors avoided these connections to the Danish king.
2. In c. 1011–1012, King Aethelred II bought the services of Thorkell the Tall; Olaf was included as part of the deal. He ended up in Normandy during Aethelred's exile there and converted to Christianity, probably when he was only 15 or 16 years old. The conversion was said to have occurred in the cathedral of Rouen with Duke Richard II acting as Olaf's godfather.
  3. For Olaf, the conversion was probably the climax of a long realization of the power of the Christian God. He became a convinced Christian king and further believed that the old Scandinavian gods were demons.
- E.** In 1015, Olaf brilliantly exploited a strategic situation by sailing to Norway with his veterans from England. He arrived in Trondheim and was promptly hailed king. His timing was impeccable.
1. At the time, the Danish king, Cnut, was occupied in England trying to bring that kingdom under control. Olaf knew that many of the Norwegian jarls and Vikings were fighting in England in Cnut's service. His opposition in Norway was minimal.
  2. Two sons of Jarl Hakon the Great had been ruling Norway as allies of the Danish crown. Olaf was seen as a native king who would respect Norwegian traditions and end Danish overlordship.
  3. Olaf was skilled in cementing relationships with Norwegian jarls and dynasts. He particularly cultivated his stepfather, Sigurd the Sow, who saw that he was elected in the things of the Viken and Upplands. He promoted his dynastic associations with Harald Finehair and Olaf Tryggvason.
- F.** Olaf established a church at Nidaros, which was destined to be elevated to the archbishopric of Norway. With this church, Olaf sought to establish institutional Christianity in his kingdom.
1. The pagans under Jarl Svein rallied against Olaf, but they were defeated in a naval battle at Nesjar on Palm Sunday in 1016.
  2. From that point on, Olaf's mission was to secure, rather than conquer, Norway.
- III.** Olaf found himself faced the daunting task of controlling the vast realm of Norway.
- A.** He had to spend much of his time traveling to isolated fjords and communities and attempting to convince proud jarls and *lendirmenn* that they should give allegiance and tribute to his monarchy.
- B.** Olaf knew that Cnut would not allow him to rule in Norway uncontested—Cnut saw Norway as part of his legacy. Olaf, however, found willing allies in the kings of Sweden to check the power of the Danish king in Scandinavia.
1. Olaf teamed up with the Swedish king Anund Jakob (r. 1022–1050) and began raiding the Danish isles; this action eventually provoked a response from Cnut.
  2. The result was the Battle of the Holy River (1026), during which Olaf was forced to abandon many of his ships and retreat.
- C.** This battle proved to be a turning point for Olaf. His pagan subjects increasingly viewed him as arrogant and high-handed. He had destroyed cult statues and practiced forced baptisms, and his demands for ship service were seen as excessive by *lendirmenn* and jarls. Olaf's position in Norway quickly deteriorated between 1026–1028, and he was forced to flee.
- D.** The Norwegians summoned in Cnut and elected him king of Norway in 1028, but Cnut in turn, handed the kingdom over to his son Svein. As we know from previous lectures, Svein and his mother, Aelgifu, quickly alienated the Norwegians.
- IV.** As an exile in 1028, Olaf made his way to the court of Prince Yaroslav of Kiev.
- A.** In the winter of 1029–1030, he began to assemble an army from forces in Kiev and his old ally, King Anund. Olaf then made a desperate attempt to retake Norway, violating military and political principles that had been established over the last 125 years.
- B.** Olaf may have had 2,000–3,000 warriors, many of whom were Swedish pagans. In May or June of 1030, he marched across the Keel Mountains, aiming for Trondheim. Unfortunately for Olaf, the region was notoriously pagan, and most of the farmers and *lendirmenn* had no desire to receive him again as king. The Norwegians rallied to oppose Olaf.

- C. The result was the only significant Scandinavian land battle fought in all of Viking history. The Battle of Stiklestad is associated with an eclipse and traditionally dated to June 29, 1030. We are told that Olaf and his warriors went into battle chanting the *Bjarkamal*, a poem celebrating the destruction of Hrolf Kraki, the legendary Danish king. Olaf was killed in battle, and his warriors were defeated.
- D. Within a year, many Norwegians repented the fact that they had opposed Olaf. His body was conveyed to Nidaros and buried in the church, and immediately, healing miracles were reported. He was quickly canonized and, in death, became a far more dangerous opponent to King Cnut than he ever had been in life.

**Further Reading:**

Sverre Bagge. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

G. Turville-Petre. *The Heroic Age of Scandinavia*. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did St. Olaf seize power in Norway? How successful were his policies of promoting Christianity and royal authority? At what point, did Olaf lose the support of the majority of his subjects? Why was the campaign that ended at the Battle of Stikelstad doomed to failure?
2. What accounted for the popularity of St. Olaf as a martyred king? Why did King Cnut the Great fail to achieve a comparable reputation?

## Lecture Thirty-Three

### Kings of the Swedes and Goths

**Scope:** In resources and population, Sweden seemed destined for primacy in Scandinavia, but the Yngling kings of Uppsala did not profit from the Viking expansion in the east. Merchant princes with regal pretensions emerged at Birka and Gotland in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Gotar, who dwelled to the south of the Swedish lake districts, long remained independent. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the legendary Erik the Victorious (c. 980–995), remembered in saga as a favorite of Odin, imposed his authority over the Svear and Gotar. His Christian heirs, Olof Skötkonung (r. 995–1022) and Anund Jakob (r. 1022–1050), established their capital and mint at Sigtuna. They promoted royal institutions modeled on those of Cnut the Great, but they lacked the revenues and warriors to forge an effective monarchy. Christian kings were required to be elected by both the Svear and Gotar, and they long battled pagan jarls and regional kings. The great sanctuary to Odin, Thor, and Frey flourished at Uppsala at least until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, so that institutional Christianity was introduced gradually during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Two rival royal families battled for succession in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, until Valdemar (r. 1250–1275) established the hereditary right of the Folkungar to the throne, but kings still ruled by consent and election of the Royal Council. In contrast to the Viking experience in Norway and Denmark, Sweden did not witness the emergence of powerful sea kings who could forge a territorial state under hereditary Christian monarchs.

### Outline

- I. In this lecture, we shall look at the emergence of the kingdom of Sweden or, to be more accurate, the realm of the Swedes and the Goths.
  - A. We devote only one lecture to Sweden, because we do not have the same type of documentation for Sweden as we do for Norway and Denmark. This lack of evidence restricts our knowledge about political developments in Sweden during the Viking Age.
  - B. The unusual geographic and economic circumstances in Sweden inhibited the emergence of a territorial monarchy there.
  - C. Taking into account our lack of evidence, we shall examine three topics in this lecture: First, we shall look at the conditions in Sweden during the Viking Age that prevented the emergence of a territorial monarchy in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Second, we shall see that the Swedish political genius was expressed more in Russia and the eastern colonies, rather than in the homeland. Finally, we shall explore the type of monarchy that did emerge in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the first Christian kings of Sweden began to organize a realm.
- II. What factors prevented the emergence of a monarchy similar to what developed in Denmark and Norway?
  - A. In some ways, Sweden would seem to have been an ideal candidate for an effective monarchy. In the long run, especially by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden emerged as the unquestioned power in Scandinavia, but that destiny was not possible for Sweden in the Viking Age for several reasons.
  - B. First, Sweden was broken up by forests, which formed a barrier far more daunting than the sea.
    1. The area around Lake Mälaren, that is Svealand—the heartland of the Swedes—was linked by the lake and its tributaries. Uppsala, the early royal center and location of the sanctuary to the gods, was in communication with the market towns, such as Birka and Helgo and, later, Sigtuna. This region, however, was broken off from the other areas of Sweden.
    2. To the north of Uppsala were dense forest lands that ran to the Keel Mountain range, cutting Sweden off from Norway. The distant Arctic zones were home to the Lapps, and Swedes ventured there mainly as fur trappers and merchants, not settlers.
    3. To the south lay the lands of the West Gotar and East Gotar. This area was independent; the Goths seldom acknowledged the king in Uppsala or, later, Sigtuna. Indeed, even when Sweden was unified, the Goths always retained the right to ratify the election of the Swedish king.
    4. The rest of Sweden was divided into numerous farmsteads, jarldoms, and independent communities, separated by forests. Not until the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the forests were cleared and roads were constructed, did Sweden really become a united kingdom.

5. We should also note that certain western districts of Sweden, notably Västergötland and Jamtland, were part of the kingdom of Norway. The far south, including the important arable areas of Halland, Skåne, and Blekinge, were part of the kingdom of Denmark.
- C. The Viking Age contributed a great deal of prosperity to the Swedes and the Goths, but Swedish kings were unable to turn that prosperity to their fiscal advantage.
1. Between the time of King Adils, the legendary opponent of Hrolf Kraki in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and Erik the Victorious (r. 980–995), we have little information about any king functioning in Sweden. Instead, most of our information comes from those Swedes who trekked east and operated in Russia.
  2. So many opportunities were available in exploiting the eastern lands that the political and organizational abilities of the Swedes were applied there rather than in the homeland.
  3. Our information seems to point to the fact that not many Swedes who traveled overseas to Kiev or Byzantium returned as sea kings with the military power and resources to establish an effective monarchy. Instead, many of them preferred to remain overseas and settle as merchant princes in Russia, to take service in the Varangian Guard in Constantinople, or to sign on with Svein Forkbeard or King Cnut to serve in Denmark.
  4. Rune stones in Sweden suggest that the wealth accrued during the Viking Age was more evenly distributed, not concentrated among certain powerful families, as it was in Denmark and Norway. Most of these rune stones are in central Sweden, and most come from the later Viking Age, that is, the late 10<sup>th</sup> century to the mid- to late 11<sup>th</sup> century. They do not bear great royal inscriptions; instead, they seem to be memorial stones of merchant princes and warriors.
- D. The profits gained from Viking activities in Sweden resulted in the emergence of a substantial landed class and a large merchant class. This population felt loyalty to the concept of Sweden but would not hand over unrestricted power to any king. In part, this situation explains the paucity of sources on the Swedish monarchy, because Swedish kings simply did not have the means to maintain great courts that would attract Icelandic poets to celebrate their deeds.
- E. We should also note that later Icelandic sagas and Danish Latin sources seem to treat the area of the Baltic as a sort of common ground that was open to raiding by any Scandinavian. The region posed no political threat to Sweden and, thus, did not serve as an incentive to organize an effective monarchy.
- F. In the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, we begin to get some information on the Swedish kings, and they seemed to rule more provisionally than their counterparts in Norway and Denmark. The monarchy in Sweden remained elective, and leading families from both the Swedes and the Goths could present plausible royal candidates.
- III. The earliest king about whom we have information is Erik the Victorious, a colorful character remembered largely as a contemporary opponent of Svein Forkbeard, the king of Denmark.
- A. Erik ruled from Sigtuna, which was a planned market town, established around 975–980, on a northern estuary of Lake Mälaren, when the port at Birka was ruined by the receding coastline. Erik also ruled as king in Uppsala, the great pagan sanctuary and the traditional capital of Sweden.
  - B. Erik is remembered as a favorite of Odin in the *Flateyjarbok*. His son was known as Olof Skötkonung (“tithe king” or “tax king”; r. 995–1022); we have information about Olaf in Snorri Sturluson and Danish accounts. Olaf was the father of the second Swedish Christian king, Anund Jakob (r. 1022–1050).
    1. Olaf was baptized at Husaby in Västergötland early in his reign, not at his capital of Sigtuna.
    2. Coins were minted in Sigtuna, probably to pay tribute to King Cnut, which explains why Cnut claimed hegemony over Sweden.
    3. These two facts back up a point noted by Adam of Bremen, which is that Sweden remained pagan far longer than Norway and Denmark. Writing around 1070, Adam gives us a report from the sanctuary at Uppsala, noting that even Christians were required to participate at pagan festivals. In contrast, no Danish or Norwegian king would have adhered to any pagan traditions in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.
    4. The power of the old cults inhibited the ability of the Christian kings around the Lake Mälaren area to impose their authority and control. They could rule as Christian kings at Sigtuna, but their ability to establish Christian institutions outside of that core was greatly circumscribed.
  - C. Anund Jakob was followed as king by his half-brother, Emund the Old (r. c. 1050–1060). After Emund’s death, civil wars ensued, and by the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, two rival royal families had emerged.

1. One of these families was descended from King Sverker I (r. c. 1130–1150), and the other, from St. Erik IX (r. 1156–1160).
  2. These wars indicate a different kind of kingship than what emerged in Denmark and Norway. Clearly, the *things* of the Swedes and the Goths selected kings from rival families.
  3. Starting in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter, all Swedish kings ruled with the consent of the Royal Council. This council included leading nobles and bishops of the different districts of Sweden and exercised true control of the kingdom. The kingship was a means by which a powerful family could put together a coalition, dominate the Royal Council, and implement its own policies through the king.
- D.** Institutional Christianity was not in place until about the year 1200, with the establishment of bishoprics, supporting parish churches, and the primate at Uppsala. That structure, however, never translated into effective royal power; that is, no king was able to use the bishoprics as a means of consolidating power into a hereditary monarchy.
- E.** What emerged in Sweden at the end of the Viking Age was a much more loosely organized kingdom. In fact, by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Royal Council, now residing in Stockholm, had become the main power in Sweden and was responsible for political stability in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1250, the Royal Council transferred the crown to Valdemar (r. 1250–1275), who established the Folkungar dynasty.
- F.** Quite in contrast to the Viking experience in Denmark and Norway, great sea kings did not create a territorial kingdom in Sweden. The society in Sweden comprised many landowners of substantial rank and many independently operating merchant princes; much of the society remained pagan for quite some time. The wealth and widening horizons gained in the Viking Age produced a rich society, yet those advantages did not convert into royal power and an effective monarchy.

**Further Reading:**

Thomas Lindkvist. “Kings and Provinces of Sweden.” In *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. I, *Prehistory to 1520*. Edited by K. Helle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 221–236.

Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer. *Medieval Scandinavia from Conversion to the Reformation, circa 800–1500*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did geography and regional loyalties prevent the emergence of a monarchy in Sweden? What was the significance of the persistence of pagan cults and the slow progress of Christianity?
2. What were the resources available for forging a monarchy in Sweden during the Viking Age? Why did the prosperity of the eastern trade not lead to the emergence of powerful kings in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries as it did in Norway and Denmark?

## Lecture Thirty-Four

### Christianization and Economic Change

**Scope:** With the spread of episcopal and monastic institutions in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, distinct national churches emerged in each of the three Scandinavian kingdoms. Primates at Lund (1104), Nidaros (1153), and Uppsala (1164), for Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, respectively, marked the dominance of Christianity in public and intellectual life. With the reception of Christianity came new prosperity and population growth. Cathedral churches and monasteries stimulated the rise of market towns and trade. The introduction of coulter plows, superior tools, and the three-field system allowed Scandinavians to greatly extend the arable, and agricultural productivity improved significantly for the first time since the Iron Age. Kings, secular nobles, and ecclesiastical landlords demanded taxes and rents in coin, and in Denmark (and to a lesser degree in Norway and Sweden), a dependent peasantry emerged. Yet the Scandinavian kings turned over the lucrative fishing and carrying trade to the German burghers of the Hanseatic League and, thus, tied Scandinavia to the wider European markets.

### Outline

- I. This lecture looks at the Christianizing of Scandinavian society, along with economic change and progress in Scandinavia from 1100–1350.
  - A. On first glance, these two subjects may seem to be unrelated, but as we shall see, the development of a distinctly Christian society and the economic improvements that evolved as a result of accepting Christianity transformed Scandinavia from a Viking world into a part of Latin Christendom.
  - B. These changes, more than any specific political or military event, determined the end of the Viking Age. Both the martial ethos that had motivated Vikings from the 9<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and the economic underpinnings of Scandinavian society were transformed—there would never again be a Viking Age.
- II. The Christianizing of Scandinavian society was already taking place in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it picked up momentum after 1100.
  - A. We see this phenomenon in the establishment of bishoprics and parish churches, first, in Denmark and, later, in Norway and Sweden. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the creation of this type of institutional Christianity.
    1. King Cnut, who ruled in both England and Denmark, began the process in Denmark, with the establishment of what became the eight bishoprics there. The process required setting up a town as a diocese, constructing a cathedral, and endowing lands to support the cathedral. With the endowment came the imposition of tithes to maintain the clergy, undertake alms, and cover other expenses.
    2. Between 1025–1100, Viborg, Aarhus, Ribe, Odense, Lund, and Roskilde assumed the trappings of European-style towns. The churches in these towns generated business and, in the process, transformed the economic activities that were prevalent in Denmark during the Viking Age. As bishoprics were established in Norway and Sweden, the same changes accompanied them.
  - B. In 1104, Lund was elevated by the pope as the archbishopric of Denmark, endowing the Danish monarchy with its own national church. The primate of Norway was established at Nidaros in 1153, and Uppsala was so designated for Sweden in 1164.
    1. The archbishops and bishops in this hierarchy were closely associated with the nobility and the king.
    2. The best example we have of this relationship comes from 12<sup>th</sup>-century Denmark under the reign of King Valdemar I (r. 1157–1182). Valdemar's cousin Absalon served, first, as bishop of Roskilde and, later, as the third archbishop of Lund (1178–1201). Absalon and Valdemar worked as a team to push the crusade against the Wends and to establish both religious and royal law.
    3. Thus, the creation of bishoprics and archbishoprics played a significant role in transforming the kingships in Denmark and Norway into effective monarchies.
  - C. In addition, the creation of bishoprics and parish churches profoundly changed the spiritual and ethical outlook of Scandinavians throughout the 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

1. Shortly after 1100, the practices of constructing great barrows and including grave goods in burials ceased in Denmark and Norway. Burial practices shifted over to more typical memorials associated with Christians. We also see this shift in Iceland after the act of conversion in 1000.
  2. Paintings and relief sculptures donated to early Romanesque churches in Denmark and Norway further indicate that the Christian conceptions of heaven and hell had been widely accepted, at least among the middle and upper levels of society. In Norway in particular, the heroes of the Volsung were added as decorations to artwork, but the old gods were regarded as demons and witches.
  3. Interestingly, in 2004, the Danish government recognized 1,000 of its citizens as part of an official religion worshipping the ancestral gods known as the Aesir.
- D.** The number of parish churches multiplied across the landscape in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in Denmark, by the year 1200, no peasant lived more than a short walk from a parish church. In Norway and Sweden, the distances were greater, and travel to a church may have taken as long as a week. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Denmark had around 2,000 churches; Norway and Sweden might have had half that number. This situation enabled Christianity to become embedded in the social values and daily lives of Scandinavians.
- E.** Starting in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the clergy and some of the nobility in Scandinavia began to attend universities in Europe, notably at Paris, and Bologna, and then, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, at Heidelberg. Indeed, the type of Christianity that pervaded in Scandinavia in the High Middle Ages was very conservative, an outlook that can be traced back to the connection with Heidelberg and inclined Scandinavians to listen to the appeals of Luther during the Reformation.
- F.** The transformation of the nations of Scandinavia to Christian lands is one of the most significant reasons that the Viking Age came to an end. Raiding the territories of fellow Christians and engaging in the slave trade were proscribed.
- III.** The other powerful force shaping these changes was economic. By converting to Christianity and forging closer links with Western Europe, the Scandinavians gained a number of practical advantages.
- A.** As the Viking Age passed and attacks and raids were supplanted by trade, the Scandinavians gained immediate access to technical and managerial advances in European agriculture.
1. Scandinavians acquired coulter plows, which were pulled by horses and could cut deep into the soil, enabling farmers to turn the soil over into furrows, similar to what was seen in manorial farming in Western Europe.
  2. Along with the coulter plows came mill stones, water mills, windmills, and other devices that allowed for more rapid threshing and grinding of flour.
  3. These improvements promoted the development of classical manorial agriculture, in which peasants paid dues and labor services to a landlord in return for permission to work the land. This system was seen especially in the Danish medieval kingdom.
  4. Between 1100–1250, the Danish landscape was changed dramatically; forests were cleared and villages populated by peasants sprang up.
- B.** This type of agriculture produces surplus, and as a result, prosperity increased. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish economy had become diversified, and the Danes were able to respond to market conditions in Germany and central Europe. They exported pork and dairy products and imported wheat to feed a population that had doubled from 1100 to 1250.
- C.** The pattern in Norway and Sweden was different. By 1350 in Denmark, 75 percent of the land was in the hands of landlords exacting labor services from their peasants. In Norway, perhaps one-third of the land was held by small landowners, and in Sweden, the figure may have been 50 percent or more.
1. Norway still depended greatly on fishing and hunting, although the manorial system was used in some areas. Many Norwegians engaged in commercial fishing and, thus, maintained independence from landlords.
  2. In Sweden, the difference was even more dramatic. With the end of the Viking Age and the development of trade, the Swedes began to exploit their iron and copper deposits. This is one of the reasons that Stockholm emerged as a capital—it was close to the mining districts and, as a deep-water port, enabled the export of ore to the German world. Agriculture was also more diverse in Sweden. Indeed, by 1350, the time of the Black Death, the Swedes had, by far, the most diversified economy in Scandinavia.

- D. With the emergence of towns and the establishment of trade across northern Europe, commercial fishing became a profitable venture. Danish and Norwegian fishermen exploited the demand for herring and cod in northern Europe. Bergen in Norway and Lund in Denmark emerged as centers for the processing and distribution of fish to European markets.
- E. Another development that did not prove so beneficial to the Scandinavian monarchs was the transfer of the carrying trade from Scandinavian to German hands.
1. By the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Scandinavians slowly began to lose their lead in shipbuilding to the Dutch and the Germans. Further, the city of Lubeck was established on the Baltic Sea as a major German port.
  2. Scandinavia developed economically and its population expanded during the period 1100–1350, but its expansion was small in comparison to that of Germany. In the Lowlands in Germany, for example, the economy and population exploded, and the Germans came to dominate the towns established on the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic.
  3. As city-states, without the obligations of a monarchy, these German settlements were able to concentrate their efforts on shipbuilding and trade. By 1300, the Hanseatic League, an association of two German consortia (one in the north at Lubeck and the other in Cologne and the Rhineland), came to dominate the carrying trade, shipbuilding, and banking.
  4. The transformation of Scandinavians into Europeans resulted in the economic and financial integration of Scandinavia into the wider German world, which would also explain why the Christian kings of Scandinavia could not capitalize on this economic development and make their kingdoms the arbiters of the north.

**Further Reading:**

H. Andersen. “Urbanisation.” In *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. I, *Prehistory to 1520*. Edited by K. Helle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 312–344.

O. J. Benedictow. “Demographic Conditions.” In *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. I, *Prehistory to 1520*. Edited by K. Helle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 237–249.

E. Orrman. “Rural Conditions.” In *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. I, *Prehistory to 1520*. Edited by K. Helle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 250–311.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why were the institutions of Western Christianity so important in transforming religious, economic, and social life in Scandinavia in 1100–1350? How did Christian spiritual and ethnical values displace the pagan values of Scandinavians? How did this change transform Scandinavians into Europeans?
2. What were the major changes in agriculture and trade in 1100–1350? How did population growth and the rise of towns stimulate improved agriculture and commercial fishing? Why did the Hanseatic League come to dominate commercial life in Scandinavia from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century?

## Lecture Thirty-Five

### From Vikings to Crusaders

**Scope:** By 1100, the Viking Age had passed, and the Scandinavians would not play a decisive role in European history again until the Reformation. Norway was rocked by dynastic wars during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, until the kingdom achieved peace and prosperity under King Hakon IV (r. 1217–1263). Hakon created the royal institutions that transformed Norway into the most effective of the northern kingdoms, and he extended royal authority over the far-flung Norse colonies in the Atlantic. In contrast, Valdemar I (r. 1157–1182) and his heirs sought to transform Denmark into a Baltic power by crusading against Slavic and Baltic pagans. Because the Valdemarian kings lacked manpower and shipping facilities, they recruited German burghers, knights, and peasants in their efforts. The defeat of Valdemar II at the Battle of Bornhöved (1227) lost Valdemar II (r. 1202–1241) his Baltic conquests and plunged the monarchy into civil war and fiscal crisis. Thereafter, Danish kings depended on German knights and the Hanseatic League. Swedish kings with Eric XI (r. 1222–1250) sought to extend their power by waging crusades against the Finns and Russians. But Swedish kings were checked by powerful jarls and a large landed class. On the eve of the Black Death (1347–1351), all three Scandinavian kingdoms shared similar fiscal and institutional weaknesses.

### Outline

- I. This lecture parallels the preceding one by looking at political, diplomatic, and military developments in Scandinavia in the period from 1100–1350.
  - A. This period of 250 years is known as the High Middle Ages to most historians, and it was a time during which Scandinavia was fundamentally transformed.
  - B. The three kingdoms were in various stages of development but were definitively Christian. In 1100, the kingdoms were poised to play important roles in European history, but by 1350, none of the Scandinavian kingdoms was in a position to play anything more than a local or regional role in the Baltic. Power had shifted to the great principalities of the Holy Roman Empire, especially to the Hanseatic League.
  - C. In this lecture, we shall explore the question of why the descendants of the Viking sea kings who founded Norway, Denmark, and Sweden in the late Viking Age failed to become effective crusaders and were unable to compete on the same level as England or France.
- II. We'll begin by looking at certain political and fiscal conditions that affected all three monarchies.
  - A. The Christian kings who came after 1100 wished to transform themselves into crusader kings; that is, they wanted to capitalize on the religious wars being waged in the Holy Land and, later, in Spain, the Baltic, and Eastern Europe. By posing as crusaders, Scandinavian kings could win legitimacy and the favor of the papacy.
    1. The first crusading king of Scandinavia was Sigurd Jorsafar (“Jerusalem farer”) of Norway (r. 1103–1130), the grandson of Harald Hardardi. In 1107–1108, Sigurd equipped a fleet of 60 longships and undertook a personal crusade. After stops at the English court and Lisbon, Sigurd teamed up with King Baldwin I of Jerusalem to capture a city in Lebanon and returned with a fragment of the True Cross. Sigurd's actions established Christian legitimacy for Norwegian kings thereafter.
    2. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Danish and Swedish kings sought to gain crusading advantages and legitimacy closer to home. The Danish kings waged wars along the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic to convert the Slavic Wends or the Baltic-speaking peoples, such as the Pomeranians and Prussians. The Swedes would direct their efforts against the Finns and against Novgorod.
    3. All of these were efforts by Scandinavian kings to join the circle of privileged Christian kings in Europe.
  - B. Scandinavian kings promoted European styles of fighting and, above all, knighthood and chivalry. Denmark converted to a manorial structure of agriculture to support what was called a *lens* (“fief”), and many Danish warriors were enfeoffed as knights. To a lesser extent, the same system was applied in Norway and Sweden.

- C. The Danish kings, followed quickly by the Norwegians and the Swedes, always had an appetite for revenues. By becoming Christian kings, they were required to maintain a far more expensive style of diplomacy that included international marriages and the conduct of crusades. The need for revenues translated into the extension of royal justice and the collection of tolls on trade and rents on lands. The traditional obligations of service to the monarchy (Danish: *leding*) were converted into cash payments.
- D. In turn, Scandinavia fell into the pattern of most European states in the later Middle Ages; that is, there was a professional warrior caste, and most of the rest of the population was engaged in agriculture, stock-raising, and fishing and was not expected to use arms.
- E. Shipping and banking fell into the hands of German burghers in most Danish and Norwegian towns. The Danish and Norwegian kings could not tax their Hanseatic subjects; indeed, in Norway, the kings were forced to make deals with the Hanseatic League for shipping.
- F. Finally, the Scandinavian monarchies, to varying degrees, were struggling to make themselves hereditary.
  1. By 1217, with the accession of King Hakon IV, Norway had achieved a hereditary Christian monarchy.
  2. The Danish kings eventually asserted the principle that members of the Jelling family, going back to Gorm the Old, were the only candidates qualified for election as king. The power of the Danish kings was, however, increasingly restricted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by a royal council of prelates and nobles called the *Danehof*.
  3. The Swedish kings never succeeded in making their monarchy hereditary. From 1250 on, the Royal Council in Stockholm dictated royal policy.

**III.** We now turn to a brief examination of the fortunes of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the aftermath of the Viking Age and during the period of the High Middle Ages.

- A. Initially, Denmark showed the greatest promise. Svein Estrithson had made the wise decision not to attempt to revive the empire of King Cnut and to concentrate on creating a territorial Christian kingdom.
  1. Svein left five sons. The second of his sons to succeed, Cnut IV (r. 1080–1086), was canonized after his murder by a mutinous crew refusing to carry out an invasion of England.
  2. Cnut was followed by Olaf the Hungry (r. 1086–1095), so named because of a famine that took place in Denmark during his reign.
  3. Olaf was followed by Erik the Evergood (r. 1095–1103) and Niels (r. 1103–1134). Collectively, the sons of Svein Estrithson are credited with advancing ecclesiastical institutions in Denmark and carrying out reforms of royal law.
  4. After the death of Niels, the Danish kingdom went through a violent set of civil wars that nearly wiped out the monarchy. This period has led some scholars to question the depth of Christian values in Denmark. Erik the Unforgettable, for example, killed eight of his own children, nephews, and nieces and murdered at least six bishops.
  5. The situation changed with the accession of Valdemar I in 1157. Valdemar and his two sons, Cnut VI and Valdemar II, brought Denmark to the brink of becoming a great naval power that would dominate the Baltic.
  6. Valdemar and his cousin and counselor, Absalon, carried out an aggressive set of campaigns along the southern shores of the Baltic and extended their overlordship to the border lands south of the Eider River, with the objective of gaining control of Hamburg and Lubeck. By the time of his death, Valdemar I ruled a monarchy that was comparable to Norman England.
  7. The possibility for Denmark to emerge as the leading crusader kingdom in the Baltic came to an end in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1227, Valdemar II was defeated by his German vassals at the Battle of Bornhöved and was forced to relinquish most of his German conquests. Lubeck became the point of departure for German colonists, merchants, and crusaders, who fanned out across the Baltic area and brought the region into the Christian community.
  8. With that defeat, the Danish kings took a back seat to the Hanseatic League and the Teutonic Order in the Baltic. By the opening of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish crown was close to bankruptcy, and at one point early in the century, the monarchy was actually abolished for about a decade.
- B. As the Danish monarchy declined in the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Norwegian monarchy achieved success, following a period of civil wars in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

1. These wars are discussed in the latter portions of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla Saga* and were fought, in part, over the dynastic question of who should follow Sigurd Jorsalfar.
  2. Until 1217, the Norwegian royal house still operated on the understanding that all sons, legitimate and illegitimate, had some claim to a realm.
  3. From 1130–1217, a series of violent civil wars broke out between rival branches of the same family. Each contender armed companies of retainers (*flokk*), who plundered and pillaged on an incredibly destructive level.
  4. After about a generation and a half of Norwegian civil wars, the landed class was willing to accept a hereditary monarch who would impose the rule of law. In 1217, the two warring factions, the Croziers and the Birchlegs, agreed to accept Hakon IV, who proved to be the best monarch for Norway at the time.
  5. Hakon received the assurance of strict hereditary succession. He also linked royal power with local institutions, bringing in English-style sheriffs and justices of the peace, who would administer justice in accordance with traditional law and with the sanctification of the crown.
  6. In addition, Hakon developed ecclesiastical institutions and gained the full support of the church. Hakon IV and his son and successor, Magnus VI, both expanded ecclesiastical institutions and transformed the Norwegian church into a national church, working in close tandem with the monarchy.
  7. By the opening of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the Danish monarchy was in serious jeopardy, Norway emerged as the most effective and central state in Scandinavia and a kingdom that commanded the respect of other European monarchies.
- C. As mentioned in a previous lecture, Sweden never developed a hereditary monarchy. The Royal Council retained the right to elect kings and to direct policy.
1. Swedish kings of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, starting with Erik X (r. 1208–1216), attempted to gain legitimacy and profits by waging crusades in Finland. It was hoped that these expeditions, in addition to extending the reach of Christianity, would give the Swedes control over the lucrative fur trade.
  2. The fur trade was centered on the old Scandinavian colony of Novgorod, which had become a Russian principality that was very Orthodox in its faith and very jealous of its fur trade.
  3. Over the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Swedish kings launched a number of expeditions to convert the Finns and succeeded in bringing southern Finland under their control, but they failed to push into the fur trade of Russia and would not become a major power in the late Middle Ages.
- D. In our final lecture, we'll look at the futures of these Scandinavian kingdoms in the aftermath of the Black Death.

#### Further Reading:

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#### Questions to Consider:

1. What political, military, and fiscal challenges were faced by all three Scandinavian monarchies in 1100–1350? How did each monarchy respond to these challenges?
2. Why did the Valdemarian kings fail to turn Denmark into a Baltic power? What reforms of Hakon IV were crucial to the success of the Norwegian monarchy? What were the limitations Swedish kings faced in 1100–1350?

## Lecture Thirty-Six

### The Viking Legacy

**Scope:** The course of medieval history was fundamentally altered by the Viking Age (790–1100), but ironically, the common experience of the Viking Age led to a united Scandinavia in the later Middle Ages. Danish and Norwegian Vikings revealed the institutional weaknesses of the Carolingian Empire. As a consequence, the feudal states of Western Europe were born in the Viking assaults of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The kingdoms of England and Scotland likewise arose in the British Isles. Orthodox Kiev, founded by Swedish Rus, gave political organization to the East Slavic peoples and forever linked them to the Byzantine commonwealth. The three Scandinavian kingdoms also emerged out of the Viking experience, as did the Norse settlements in the North Atlantic. In poetry, saga, decorative arts, and shipbuilding, Scandinavians of the Viking Age made major contributions. To be sure, the Vikings are still remembered foremost as worshipping the terrifying and ancient Germanic gods, pillaging monasteries, and enslaving Christians. The Vikings, more than any other invaders, struck fear into the hearts of Christians, who implored God to spare them from the fury of the Northmen. In so doing, the Vikings gave Christian Europe strength, and thus, the era of the Crusades would have been impossible without the era of the Vikings.

### Outline

- I. We shall conclude the course by looking at what would become of the Scandinavian nations as Christian kingdoms that had been integrated into the wider European world. We shall also sum up the importance of the Viking Age for Scandinavia and for medieval civilization as a whole.
- II. What was the future for Scandinavia in the aftermath of the Viking Age?
  - A. We have looked at the history of Scandinavia up until the year 1350, which was the time of the Black Death. This great epidemic raged across Europe and the Near East between 1347–1351, killing between one-half and two-thirds of the population.
    1. The attrition rates in cities from the Black Death were nothing short of catastrophic. Figures from the Mediterranean world suggest that within two months of the plague's arrival, a city could lose 75–80 percent of its population. The plague had major repercussions in economic, political, and religious life for both Christian and Islamic civilizations, and Scandinavia was profoundly affected by it, notably Norway and Denmark.
    2. The aftermath of the Black Death, along with the rising prosperity in Scandinavia, the common Viking heritage and culture, and the success achieved in forging territorial Christian kingdoms, combined to unite the three kingdoms of Scandinavia for a brief period starting in 1397.
  - B. The *Union of Kalmar* saw the unification of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden in the hands of Erik of Pomerania (r. 1389–1442), the great-nephew of Queen Margaret of Denmark (r. 1389–1439), who was the daughter of Valdemar IV of Denmark.
  - C. The unification seemed to promise a new age for Scandinavia. An effective Scandinavian monarchy could curb the power of the Hanseatic League, which had come to dominate banking and shipping, and could enable Scandinavia to compete with the other monarchies emerging in the late medieval period, particularly England, France, and Poland and the principalities of Germany.
  - D. Unfortunately, the unification did not fulfill its promise. The Union of Kalmar was brought about more by weakness and hope than strength; from the start, the Swedes turned the union to their own advantage and restricted royal rights in Sweden. The Union of Kalmar also revealed several important characteristics of the development of Scandinavian society.
    1. Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes had evolved into different peoples. They were no longer speakers of a common language. In their mores and aesthetics, the Danes resembled their German neighbors to the south.
    2. Norway was treated as an unimportant outland province by the Danes. Both Norway and Denmark had been hit hard by the Black Death, but Denmark recovered rapidly. Immigration from Germany helped to replenish the population of Denmark, and the economic consequences of the epidemic favored trade

- in “luxury” over subsistence goods. In Norway, the economy depended on the export of bulk goods, such as cod, for which there was no market; in contrast, Denmark’s economy was based in part on dairy products and meat, which were more in demand from the smaller remaining populations of Europe.
3. Norway was integrated into the Danish kingdom because its population had been so decimated by the Black Death that it no longer had sufficient numbers of bishops and leading landowners to carry on royal institutions. The Danish crown, under the Union of Kalmar, appointed Danish and German officials to run Norway and transform it into a Danish province.
- E. Sweden was affected the least by the demographic and economic implications of the Black Death and did quite well in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Eventually, the Royal Council in Sweden was able to assert itself and shake off Danish rule.
  - F. The result of the Union of Kalmar was the reconfiguration of two kingdoms, Norway-Denmark under the Oldenburg dynasty and Sweden-Finland under the Vasa dynasty, which would both become hereditary monarchies and would vastly expand their powers during the Reformation. These two monarchies represented quite separate national identities. The kings of Denmark and the kings of Sweden would go on to struggle for mastery in the Baltic, but in the end, Moscow would win.
- III.** Our course has been more ambitious than its title implies: We have not looked just at the Viking Age but at the evolution of Scandinavia before the Viking Age and in the centuries immediately after. This wider perspective is important for understanding the decisive role played by the Scandinavians in the Viking Age.
- A. In the first third of the lectures, we looked at the origins of Scandinavian civilization, the influence of Western and Central Europe on that civilization, and the Scandinavians’ ability to assimilate technological and cultural innovations of other nations into their landscape.
    1. We started in the Bronze Age, during which the adoption of farming and stock-raising techniques, as well as bronze tools, led to the birth of the first significant Scandinavian cultural period, the Northern Bronze Age (1550–1100 B.C.). In this period, the core areas of Scandinavia were settled, the practice of agriculture was begun, and the Scandinavian gods were defined.
    2. This pattern was repeated in the Celtic and Roman Ages, when trade and immigration greatly enriched the material life of Scandinavians and led to technological changes in shipbuilding, starting around 300.
    3. The trade connections with Western Europe that developed in the Celtic and Roman Ages continued in the Age of Migrations (400–600 A.D.). This period was decisive in shaping the civilization of the Viking Age; at this time, the Scandinavians lived by their martial ethos and had defined themselves as distinct from their Germanic kinsmen. The “Danish tongue” was developed, as was Scandinavian poetry, which in turn, intensified the heroic traditions of the Vikings.
  - B. We devoted almost a third of this course to the Viking impact overseas during the Viking Age, and we might reflect on how wide-ranging the Scandinavians’ influence was: Viking trade, raiding, and settlement wrought great changes from Ireland to Russia.
    1. Vikings were feared by Christians and Muslims as the quintessential barbarians. The stereotypical images that we still have of the Vikings can be traced back to the images of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and as we have learned, these images have some basis in history.
    2. The Vikings revealed the fundamental fiscal and military weaknesses in the Carolingian Empire. In place of that empire, Europe broke up into smaller states that became the building blocks for the new European political order that would emerge.
    3. Indeed, the Vikings established the premier feudal state in this new order, the duchy of Normandy. It is inconceivable to imagine European history without Normandy and the Normans. They forged the most effective state in what was to become France; William the Conqueror took England and reintegrated the British Isles into the political order of Western Europe; and the Normans founded the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in southern Italy, destined to become one of the great four monarchies of the Middle Ages.
    4. The Vikings also dictated the course of English history. In response to the Danish attacks, one of the most brilliant kings of the early Middle Ages, Alfred the Great, forged the institutions that allowed his descendants to incorporate the inhabitants of the Danelaw into an expanded and unified kingdom.

5. Viking attacks in Ireland destroyed the brilliant monastic culture of the early Middle Ages and, in many ways, determined the future course of Irish history. In the wake of the Viking Age, Ireland was condemned to political fragmentation until the arrival of the Normans in 1170.
  6. Scotland, too, was a creation of the Viking Age. The Scots took advantage of the political disorder caused by the Viking raids to unite the northern third of Britain into the Kingdom of Scotland in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century.
  7. Finally, the Russian principalities owed their creation directly to the efforts of the Rus in developing market towns and trade with Constantinople. The civilization that emerged in the Russian forest zone was sparked by the activities of Scandinavians.
  8. Therefore, the Vikings had a major impact in determining the religious, economic, and political destinies of Western and Eastern Europe.
- C. Over the course of these lectures, we have also seen profound changes in Scandinavia, and we should consider some of the more positive contributions made by Scandinavians.
1. Scandinavians were largely responsible for the evolution of shipbuilding in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, which climaxed with the development of the great longships and knarrs. In the early Middle Ages, the Scandinavians achieved a shipbuilding tradition in northern Europe parallel to that achieved in the ports of Italy, southern France, and eastern Spain.
  2. Scandinavians were particularly adept at assimilating outside influences. For example, Cnut adapted the institutions of England to create an effective Danish state. Christianity triumphed in Scandinavia because it was accommodated to existing social and economic institutions; we saw this phenomenon particularly in Iceland.
  3. The Scandinavians were also receptive to the technological advantages that accompanied the conversion to Christianity. Between 1100–1350, they rapidly took on superior techniques in agriculture and modified their laws and institutions to create a Christian Scandinavia.
- D. In the end, what was the overall Viking impact on medieval civilization? Perhaps we can sum it up in two conclusions: First, despite the suffering and destruction wrought by the Vikings, their prowess in warfare forced Christian Europe to organize and arm itself—to become strong. Second, the intrepid settlers in Iceland, just below the Arctic Circle, recorded the ancient traditions of the Norse past and transmitted that literary heritage to Western Europe. Indeed, the greatest victories of the Vikings were not in England, not in Normandy, and not in Russia, but on the velums—the manuscripts—composed in Iceland.

#### Further Reading:

Peter Foote and David M. Wilson. *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1970.

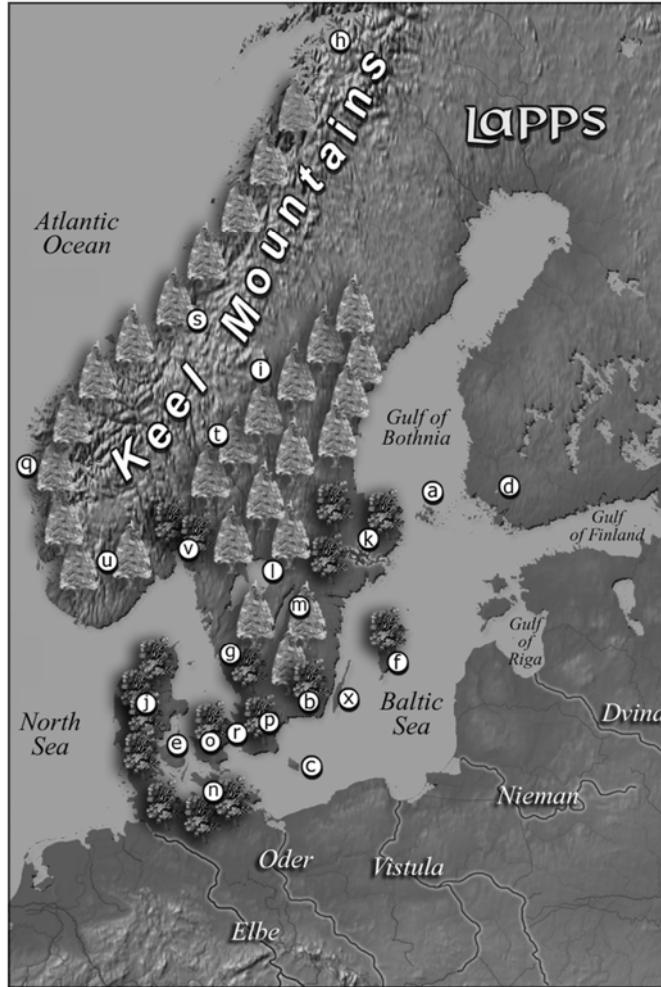
Rosedahl, Else. *The Vikings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by S. M. Margeson and K. William. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Why did the Scandinavians fail to achieve political unity in the later Middle Ages despite the common experience of the Viking Age? What was the purpose of the Union of Kalmar in 1397, and why did it fail?
2. How did the Vikings alter the course of medieval history? What was the nature of the Viking impact on the Carolingian Empire, England, Ireland, and Russia? How did Viking attacks, trade, and settlement transform these societies? How did the Viking Age transform Scandinavian life? Why did the Scandinavian monarchies owe their creation to the Viking Age? What were the greatest contributions of the Viking Age?

## Maps

# Guide to the Scandinavian Landscape



# Key

Aland Islands	a
Blekinge	b
Bornholm	c
Finland	d
Fyn	e
Gotland	f
Halland	g
Halogaland	h
Jamtland	i
Jutland	j
Lake Malaren	k
Lake Vanern	l
Lake Vattern	m
Lolland & Falster	n
Oland	x
Sjaelland	o
Skane	p
Sogne Fjord	q
Sund	r
Trondelag	s
Upplands	t
Vestfold	u
Viken & Oslo Fjord area	v



coniferous  
forest, e.g.  
pine



deciduous  
forest, e.g.  
oak

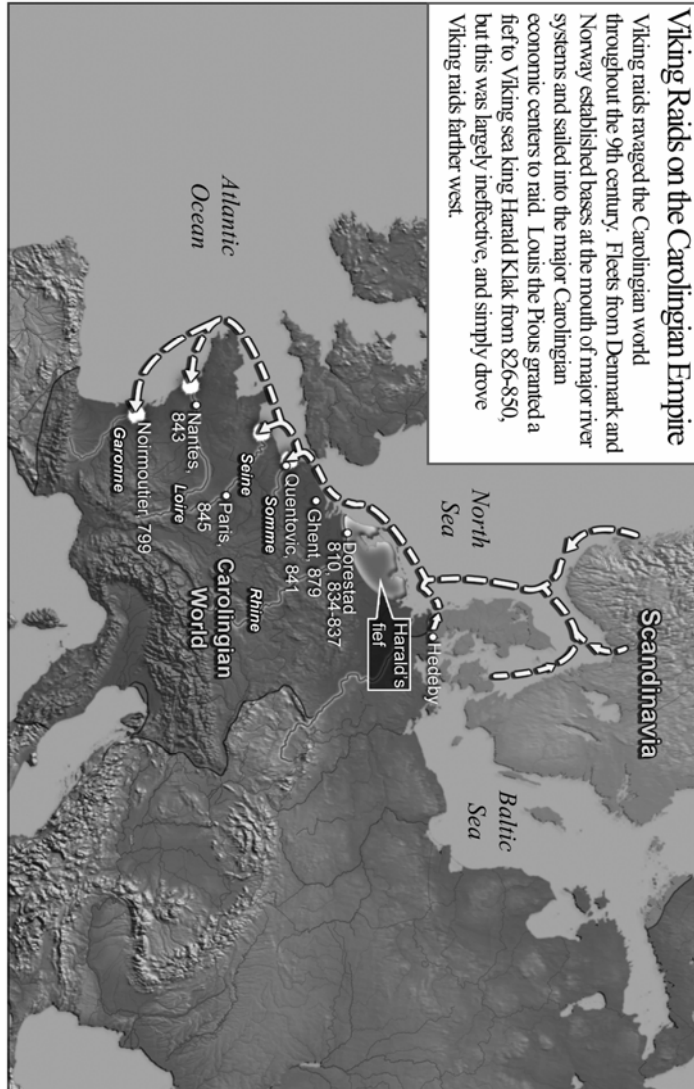


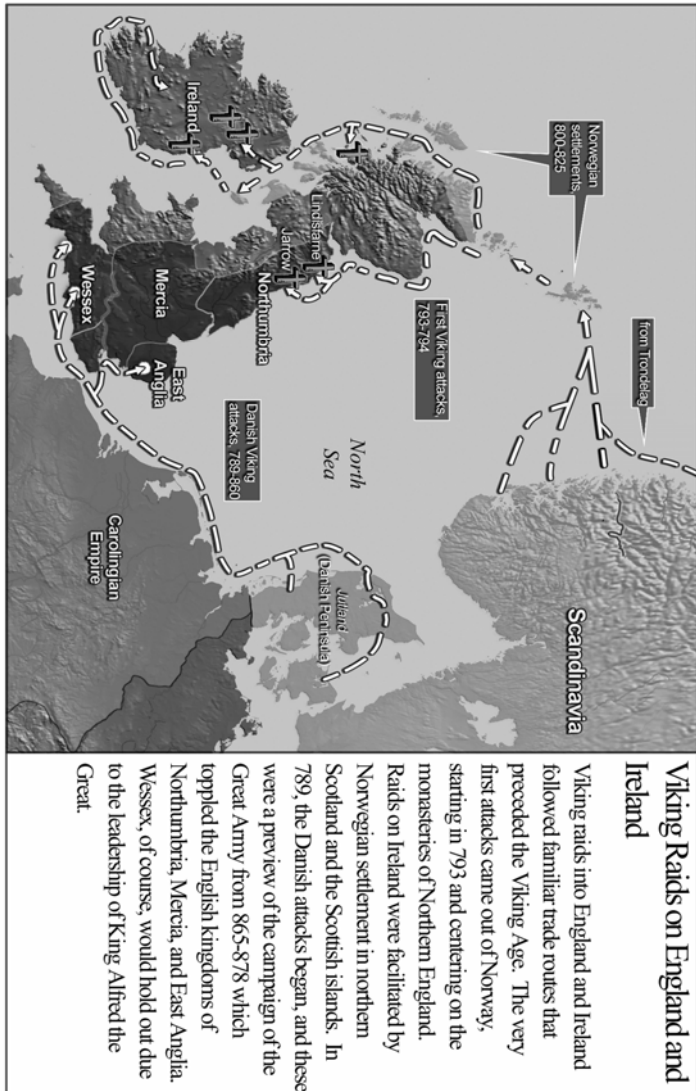
## Heroic Scandinavia, 475-600

The Heroic Age in Scandinavia precedes the period of true territorial states. The boundaries shown here reflect not political borders, but areas inhabited by the peoples (Danes, Gotar, Swedes) that would form the basis for the kingdoms that emerged by 1100. Kingdoms in this period centered around great halls such as Hleidr, the home of the legendary figure Hrolf Kraki, and Uppsala, the seat of his Swedish rival Adils. Note also that in this period, Danish power was concentrated on the island of Sjaelland, not the Jutland peninsula.

### Viking Raids on the Carolingian Empire

Viking raids ravaged the Carolingian world throughout the 9th century. Fleets from Denmark and Norway established bases at the mouth of major river systems and sailed into the major Carolingian economic centers to raid. Louis the Pious granted a fief to Viking sea king Harald Klak from 826-850, but this was largely ineffective, and simply drove Viking raids farther west.





### Viking Raids on England and Ireland

Viking raids into England and Ireland followed familiar trade routes that preceded the Viking Age. The very first attacks came out of Norway, starting in 793 and centering on the monasteries of Northern England. Raids on Ireland were facilitated by Norwegian settlement in northern Scotland and the Scottish islands. In 789, the Danish attacks began, and these were a preview of the campaign of the Great Army from 865-878 which toppled the English kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia. Wessex, of course, would hold out due to the leadership of King Alfred the Great.



### Scandinavian Kingdoms, 1100-1300

Shown here are the three kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway as they existed from 1100-1300. These newly Christianized kingdoms established primates in Uppsala, Lund, and Nidaros, and became integrated into Europe. Their primacy receded during this period, however, as Denmark's influence was checked by the Holy Roman Empire to the south, and Sweden was challenged by Russia to the east.

## Glossary

### Specialized Terms:

**Althing:** The national assembly of Iceland founded in 930 and reformed to include a higher court of appeals in 965. The *Althing* convened each summer at Thingvellir.

**andri:** The title of high king of Ireland; awarded to the leading ruler, who was crowned at the ancient capital of Tara.

**Bayeux Tapestry:** Commissioned by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, half-brother of William I, circa 1066–1076; it depicts the Norman conquest of England.

**berserker:** “Bear shirts,” frenzied warriors of Odin who attacked in a rage. In later sagas composed in the Christian era, berserkers were cast as supernatural figures, but all legendary heroes were regarded as berserkers. See *comitatus*.

**Birchlegs** (ON: Birkibeinar): A Norwegian party opposed to the descendants of King Inge (1135–1161) in the civil wars down to 1217.

**Bjarkamal:** A famous skaldic poem (known today in fragments) in which the heroes Bjarki and Hjalti defiantly exchange remarks of their doom and defeat at the hall of Hrolf Kraki.

**blood eagle:** This sacrificial rite to Odin was performed by cutting the victim’s ribs by the spine so that they resembled an eagle’s wings; the lungs were then pulled out. The rite, while doubted by some modern scholars, is reported in sagas.

**boruma:** The tribute exacted by a victorious Irish king to denote submission of his rivals.

**boyar:** Slavic nobleman, used to translate Norse *jarl*.

**bracteate:** A silver coin minted from a single die so that the image of the reverse is the mirror of that on the obverse.

**Bretwalda:** “Britain ruler,” an Anglo-Saxon honorific title for an English king who achieved primacy in the island.

**burgh:** A fortified Anglo-Saxon town. A network of such positions was constructed by Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder.

**chain mail** (ON: *brynja*): Armor made of interlocking steel chains.

**comitatus:** Latin for “retinue of ruler.” Cornelius Tacitus in *Germania* uses the term to describe professional warriors attached to a Germanic lord. See *berserker*.

**Croziars** (ON: Baglar): A Norwegian party supporting the descendants of King Inge (r. 1135–1161) in the civil wars down to 1217.

**curragh:** A Celtic coastal skin boat, without keel, constructed with a rib frame.

**danegeld:** The payment of silver by English or Frankish monarchs to Vikings.

**Danelaw** (OE: Denelagu): The Danish settlement in England during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Danevirke:** A wooden palisade with fossa first constructed circa 737, which stretched from the market town Hedeby west toward the Eider River. There were three building phases in about 739, 808–810, and 968. Valdemar I (r. 1157–1182) replaced the system with a brick and mortar wall.

**dendrochronology:** The scientific method of dating by tree-ring patterns.

**denier:** Silver coin of the Carolingian Empire fixed at 1.65 gr and 20 mm by Charlemagne in 800–814.

**dirhem** (2.97 grs.): Silver coin of the Islamic world carrying Kufic inscriptions.

**Domesday Book** (1086): A census of England compiled on orders of King William I.

**dreng:** “Brave man”; designated the Anglo-Danish landowner in the Danelaw. See *thegn*.

**druzhina:** Company of armed retainers of Russian princes from the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Dubhgaiill:** “Black Foreigners,” the Irish designation for Danish Vikings.

**Edda:** Denotes collections of poems and stories of the Norse gods. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of poems composed between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. In about 1220, Snorri Sturluson composed his *Prose Edda* based on the Eddaic poems.

**ell:** A measurement of cloth (between 37 and 45 inches in length) used as a means of reckoning wealth in Scandinavia.

**Finnagaiill:** “White Foreigners,” the Irish name for Norwegian Vikings.

**Flateyjarbok:** The Norse chronicle of the monastery of Flatey, Iceland, which records myths and legends of early Scandinavia.

**flokkar** (“flocks”): Professional companies of armed retainers during the Norwegian civil wars in 1130–1217.

**Futhark:** See **runes**.

**fyrð:** The Anglo-Saxon levy of the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> centuries; an armed warrior was maintained for royal service by ever five units of hides in a shire.

**Gaell-Gaidail:** “Foreign Gaels,” apostate Irish who allied with Norse Vikings in the ninth century.

**Gardariki:** “Kingdom of fortified towns”; Norse for Russia in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**godí** ( gothi; pl. *godar*): “Chieftain”; a figure skilled in law and negotiation who assumed a leading position in Icelandic society. The position (*godarod*) could be held jointly, transferred, or sold.

**Gotar or Gautar** (OE: Geatas): The “Goths” dwelling in southern Sweden.

**Gragas:** “Grey Goose Laws”; the first written compilation of Icelandic law, circa 1115.

**Haerveg:** “Army route”; the principal north-south wooden corduroy highway of Jutland first constructed in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century.

**hagiography:** The genre of saints’ lives.

**Hanseatic League or Hansa:** This German consortium of cities comprised two groups, the Wendish towns headed by Lübeck and the towns of the Rhineland and Westphalia. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Lübeck and her trading partners took over the shipbuilding and carrying trade in the Baltic Sea. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Hanseatic communities (*kontor*) enjoyed privileges and fiscal exemptions in leading Scandinavian ports and dominated banking.

**Havamal:** “Sayings of Har”; an Eddaic wisdom poem, in which Odin names his titles and gives aphorisms.

**Heimskringlasaga:** Written by Snorri Sturluson circa 1225, this saga records the history of the kings of Norway from earliest times to 1177. One-third of the work is devoted to St. Olaf (1015–1030).

**hide:** This fiscal unit of land (120 acres) was the basis for military service and taxation in Anglo-Saxon England.

**housecarl:** A professional Scandinavian warrior maintained by the English monarchy from the reign of Cnut the Great (r. 1014–1035).

**Hrafsmal** (*Speech of the Raven*): A skaldic poem celebrating the victory of Harald Finehair at Hafrsfjord circa 875–880.

**hundred:** The division of a shire.

**Islendingabok** (*Book of Icelanders*): Written by Ari the Learned (1067–1148) to record the descent of Icelandic families from the original settlers.

**jarl:** Norse for nobleman, “earl.”

**Jomsvikings:** A company of professional Vikings who had their base at Jomsborg (Wolin) at the mouth of the Oder and were allied to the Jelling kings of Denmark. Their exploits were celebrated in a saga of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

**kenning:** A metaphorical phrase adapted to skaldic meter.

**Kensington Stone:** A hoax perpetrated in 1898 by Olaf Ohman in Minnesota. The stone was purported to be a rune stone erected by Swedish Vikings.

**King's Mirror:** Composed in Latin as an exhortation to ideal kingship for Norway in about 1220. The values were based on St. Augustine's views of a just king (*rex iustus*).

**knarr:** A Scandinavian ocean-going cargo ship.

**lamellar armor:** Composed of overlapping steel or leather scales.

**Landnamabok (Book of Settlements):** Written by Ari the Learned (1067–1148); reports the settlement of 430 individuals in Iceland in 879–930.

**law rock (ON: *logberg*):** The location where cases in the *Althing* were announced.

**law-speaker (ON: *logosumadr*):** Elected to a three-year term to preside over the *Althing* and to recite the laws.

**leding (Danish), leidang (Norwegian), or ledung (Swedish),** from Old Norse *leidang*: The ship levy was an obligation of free men to serve in the fleet at royal command. Under King Valdemar I of Denmark (r. 1157–1182), the ship levy totaled 1,400 ships manned by 160,000 men. Service was often commuted into cash payments.

**lendirmenn:** Norse landed notables, “squires,” who controlled local justice and *things*.

**lens:** A fief awarded to a vassal by the crown from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on.

**Miklagard:** “Great City”; the Norse name for Constantinople.

**motte and bailey castle:** An earthen mound with palisade and moat constructed in early medieval Europe.

**Norman:** Frankish term for Scandinavian Vikings; it was derived from medieval Latin *Normanni*, “Northmen.”

**Old Church Slavonic:** The literary language created by St. Cyril (827–869) for the translation of the Bible.

**oppidum (pl. *oppida*):** A Celtic fortified town of the La Tène civilization (500–50 B.C.)

**Ostmen:** “Easterners”; Norse settled in the Irish ports from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century on. In Anglo-Irish law of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ostmen were still recognized as a privileged legal class with a distinct Norse language.

**Pale:** The area of English settlement in Ireland after 1170.

**pandemic:** A cycle of plagues, such as those in 542–750 and those following the Black Death (1347–1351), that lead to demographic collapse.

**Papar:** Old Norse term for Irish anchorites encountered in Iceland and the Western Isles.

**peers of France:** The leading feudal lords who owed direct homage to the king of France. The secular peers were the count of Flanders, duke of Normandy, duke of Burgundy, duke of Aquitaine, count of Champagne, and count of Toulouse. The ecclesiastical peers were the archbishop of Rheims, and the bishops of Langres, Beauvais, Chalons, Noyon, and Laon.

**penny (1.10–1.35 grs.):** Silver coin of Anglo-Saxon England, minted on varying weight standards. The Anglo-Saxon penny inspired the first Scandinavian coinages.

**portage:** The conveying of ships overland between river systems.

**Ragnarsdrapna:** The earliest surviving poem written by Bragi the Old, c. 850–900.

**ridings (ON: *thridjungr*):** “Thirds”; divisions of Yorkshire.

**Rigsthula:** The Eddaic poem in which Heimdall, watchman of the gods, uses the guise of Rig to father the classes of mortals.

**runes:** The early Germanic alphabet devised from north Italic script in about 300–100 B.C. The original long Futhark comprised 24 runes, whereas the short Futhark of the Viking Age had only 16 runes. Runes had magical and numerical value and, thus, were sacred to Odin.

**Rus:** The term is of uncertain origin; it may be derived from Finnish *Ruotsi*, the name for Swedes. The term designated those Swedes who settled in what became Russia between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Russian Primary Chronicle:** A monk of the Cave Monastery, outside of Kiev, composed this narrative of early Russian history in about 1115. The chronicle was based on oral traditions and includes many early documents.

**seithr:** The ritual of summoning spirits by a *volva* dedicated to Freya.

**sept:** The extended clan in Ireland by which descent and inheritance was determined.

**shire:** Anglo-Saxon term for “county.”

**skald:** A Norse poet between the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries who employed the complicated skaldic meters and kennings. Skalds at the Danish and Norwegian courts devised a wide range of laudatory and narrative skaldic poems.

**Skjoldungar** (OE: Scyldingas): “Shield-bearers”; the legendary Danish kings of Sjaelland descended from Skjoldr.

**Skraelingar:** “Screechers”; Old Norse name for indigenous peoples of North America and Greenland.

**spanghelms:** A class of early medieval conical helmets based on late Roman prototypes.

**Stave church:** An early medieval wooden-frame church.

**Svear:** Old Norse for Swedes, who occupied the regions around Lake Mälaren.

**syncope:** The linguistic process of a language reducing the syllables in words.

**thegn:** An Old English landowner whose lordship entailed royal military service. See *dreng*.

**thing:** The assembly of free men in Germanic society that passed laws and settled legal disputes. In 930, Iceland was divided into four quarters, each with its own regional *thing*.

**Thule:** In the Classical Age, this term designated the shores of Norway above the Arctic Circle. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Christian authors used it to designate Iceland. The term also designated the farthestmost, unexplored regions of the world.

**Union of Kalmar** (1397): The formal act of uniting the three crowns of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway under Erik of Pomerania.

**Varangian Guard:** The elite regiment of Scandinavians formed by Byzantine emperor Basil II in 988–989.

**Varangians:** “Men of the pledge”; Vikings recently arrived from Scandinavia either in Russia or the Byzantine Empire during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Vinland:** The region discovered by Leif Eriksson in 1001; it originally designated Newfoundland, but it was extended to include regions of the Lower Saint Lawrence and Nova Scotia, where Norse attempted settlement in 1001–1014.

**Vinland Map:** Purportedly dating to circa 1440, the map was acquired by Yale University in 1965 and declared a fraud in 1974. In the upper left corner, Vinland and Greenland were forged. The map was bound with a genuine manuscript reporting the papal mission of Giovanni Caprini to the Mongol court in 1245–1246.

**Voluspa:** “Sayings of the prophetess”; the first poem of the *Prose Edda*, in which a *volva* recites the story of the creation and destruction of the world.

**wapentake** (ON: *vapnatak*): “Brandishing arms”; the division of shire in the Danelaw.

**Ynglingar:** The legendary kings of Uppsala who claimed descent from Yng (“Ing”); a title for the god Frey.

### **Norse Gods and Mythology:**

**Aesir:** Gods of the principal family headed by Odin who dwell in Asgard.

**Asgard, Asgarth:** The home of the halls of the gods.

**Baldr:** The blameless god and son of Odin, slain by blind Hodr at the connivance of Loki. The act led to the binding of Loki.

**Fafnir:** The dragon slain by Sigurd in the legend of the Volsungs.

**Fenrir:** A gigantic wolf, an offspring of Loki and Angrboda, that is bound by deception; the god Tyr loses his right hand in the process. The wolf will swallow Odin at Ragnarök.

**Frey:** Son of Njord and god of fertility who surrendered his sword to woe, the giantess Gerd. At Ragnarök, he is slain by Surt, the fire giant. The Yngling kings of Sweden claimed descent from Frey.

**Freya:** The fertility goddess, daughter of Njord. She possesses many of the same powers as Odin, and she was identified with many lesser goddesses.

**Heimdall:** The watchman of Bifrost, the rainbow bridge and entrance to Asgard. In the guise of Rig, he fathers the classes of mankind. At Ragnarök, he and Loki will slay each other.

**Hel:** The daughter of Loki and Angrboda who is assigned by Odin to the realm Niflheim.

**Loki:** The god of mischief, he fathered, with the giantess Angrboda, the wolf Fenrir, the Midgard serpent (*Midgardsormr*), and the goddess Hel. A god of guile, Loki often accompanies Thor in his adventures. His instigation of Baldr's death leads to Loki's binding until Ragnarök when he and Heimdall will slay each other.

**Midgard, Midgarth:** "Middle Earth"; the land of mortals.

**Midgard Serpent:** The offspring of Loki and Angrboda, the giant serpent encircles the Earth. At Ragnarök, Thor will slay the monsters, but he himself will die from the venom spewed over him by the dying beast.

**Nerthus:** A fertility goddess revered by the tribes of Jutland and described by Cornelius Tacitus. She was paraded in a sacred cart. She was likely a namesake and female consort to Njord of the Viking Age.

**Niflheim:** The cold realm of the underworld presided over by Hel.

**Niflungs:** The dwarves of the Rhine who had guarded the gold treasure cursed by Loki. The treasure is acquired by Sigurd upon slaying Fafnir. Gunnar, in turn, acquires the hoard after arranging Sigurd's death. Atli of the Huns, lusting for the hoard, lures Gunnar and the Burgundians to their death.

**Njord:** The god of fertility and associated with the sea travel. He was father of Frey and Freya, and the three joined the Aesir in Asgard to reconcile an ancient war between the two families of gods. See **Nerthus**.

**Norns:** The three sisters and fates: Urd (past), Verdandi (present), and Skuld (future).

**Odin** (OE: Woden): The supreme god of the Aesir, noted for his ecstatic powers in battle and poetry. He slays Ymir and creates the universe. He hangs himself on Yggdrasill to release the power of runes and gives up his eye for a drink at the well of Urd. He patronizes and collects the greatest heroes for Valhalla for the combat of Ragnarök.

**Ragnarök:** The final doom, when the gods and monsters are destroyed in a great combat. The event is preceded by a triple winter, and final destruction will result from fire and water. A new world will be reborn under Baldr.

**Thor** (OE: Thunor): The red-haired sky god of Odin and Jord who was the friend of mankind and subject of myths. He drives a goat-drawn chariot and smashes giants with his hammer, Mjollnir. His adventures include travels to the realm of Utgard-Loki and fishing for the Midgard serpent.

**Tyr** (OE: Tiu or Tew): The original Germanic sky and war god (Tiwaz); he lost his hand as a pledge in the binding of Fenrir. In the Viking Age, Odin had assumed many of the qualities and powers of Tyr.

**Utgard-Loki:** The giant rival of Thor. By a series of trials, he deceives and bests Thor, Loki, and Thor's companion, Thjalfi.

**Valhalla:** The hall of Odin in Asgard, where heroes feast until Ragnarök.

**Valkyries** ("choosers of the slain"): Female spirits who select the fallen for Valhalla; they also direct the course of battle.

**Vanir:** The gods of fertility, foremost Njord and his children, Frey and Freya.

**Volsungs:** The legendary Frankish kings favored by Odin, of whom Sigmund and Sigurd were the greatest heroes.

**Yggdrasil:** The world tree at the center of the universe; its branches hold the nine realms. At the three great roots are the wells of the three Norns.

**Battles:**

**Carlington Lough**, 851: Naval victory of the Danish Vikings over the Norwegian Vikings. The Danes, on advice of their Irish allies, invoked St. Patrick.

**Clontarf**, April 23, 1014: Brian Bóruma defeated a Viking-Norse coalition raised by Sigtrygg III Silkbeard of Dublin. Brian, while victorious, was slain. Mael Sechlainn II of Meath thus regained the high kingship of Ireland.

**Dyle River**, 891: The tactical victory of King Arnulf the Bastard over the Vikings. The Franks stormed the Viking camp, but the Vikings withdrew into England.

**Edington** (or Eddington), May 878: Decisive victory of Alfred the Great over Guthrum and the Great Army. The Danes thereafter agreed to the Treaty of Wedmore.

**Fulford**, September 20, 1066: King Harald Hardardi of Norway and Earl Tostig defeated Earls Morcar and Edwin outside of York.

**Hafsfjord**, c. 880: The decisive naval victory of King Harald Finehair over the *jarls* and kings of Vestlandet.

**Hastings**, October 14, 1066: The victory of William I, the Conqueror, over Harald II, king of England. The victory gained William the English throne.

**Hjörungavág**, c. 988: The naval victory of Jarl Hakon the Great over the Danes and Jomsvikings commanded by Thorkell the Tall and Sigvaldi.

**Nesjar**. April 1016: Decisive naval victory of St. Olaf over his Norwegian foes, led by Svein Hakonsson; the victory secured for Olaf the crown of Norway.

**Nissa River**, August 9, 1062: The naval victory of King Harald Hardardi over Svein Estrithson off the western shores of Sweden. Svein had to abandon his flagship, but the victory brought Harald no strategic gains.

**Sancourt**, 881: The victory of King Louis III of France over a Viking column. The victory was celebrated in the Old High German epic *Ludwigslied*.

**Stamford Bridge**, September 25, 1066: The victory of Harald II, king of England, over King Harald Hardardi and Earl Tostig.

**Stiklestad**, July 29, 1030: The Norwegians defeated and slew St. Olaf, who had sought to regain his throne with Swedish allies.

**Svold**, 1000: The naval victory of King Svein Forkbeard of Denmark over King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway. Olaf leaped into the sea from his flagship, *Long Serpent*. The battle was most likely fought off the southern shores of Skane.

**Tara**, 980: The decisive victory of King Mael Sechlainn II of Meath over Olaf Kvaran of Dublin. The Irish victory ended the military domination of the Hiberno-Norse.

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<http://www.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/courses/English4012001/English4012001.html>. The website of Professor Christopher Fee, University of Gettysburg, with emphasis on Viking settlement in the British Isles.

<http://www.vikings.ucla.edu>. An additional website from Jesse Byock.

<http://viking.hgo.se/>. The website of the popular *Viking Heritage* publication.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/bloodofthevikings/>. The website of the BBC documentary.

<http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/varangians.htm>. A popular summary of Vikings in the East, with a useful introductory bibliography.

<http://www.vikingart.com/VikingArt.htm>. A useful website, with an introduction and illustrations of the main Viking decorative styles.

<http://www.worldofthvikings.com/>. Guide to Viking sources on the Internet.