



Department of History

**EUH-4185:**  
**THE VIKING EXPERIENCE**

Professor: Dr. [Florin Curta](mailto:fcurta@ufl.edu)

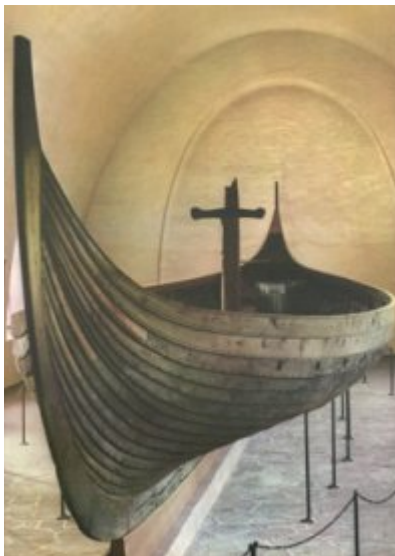
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Class will meet in Flint 105, Tuesdays 3:00-4:55 and Thursdays 4:05-4:55



**THE COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Spring 2019**

## Course description

"In the year of our Lord 845, the vast army of Northmen breached the frontiers of the Christians. This was something that we never heard or read of happening before." This is how a Frankish monk from the monastery of St. Germain-des-Pres near Paris described one of the first attack of those whom we now call Vikings. Ever since that attack, the Vikings have fascinated European and American audiences of many persuasions. Visions of the Vikings as racial forebears and role models helped glorify Nazi territorial demands and the construction of the "Aryan" culture. Scandinavian immigrants of Wisconsin and Minnesota identified with the Viking farmers mentioned in old sagas as having settled in Vinland. To many, Leif Eriksson, not Christopher Columbus, is the true hero in the saga of the New World. As plunderers, hooligans, but also mercenaries and soldiers of fortune, the Vikings populate the American imagination with dragon ships and horned helmets, from a Minnesota football team to Hoggetown's medieval fair. But who were the Vikings? What made them so difficult to represent by the traditional means of Western historiography and so easy to manipulate in contemporary culture? What were the historical conditions in which this name, Vikings, was first used and for what purpose? How was Viking ethnicity formed and under what circumstances did the Vikings come into being? Above all, this course aims to provide answers to some of these questions. We will explore social and political issues of Scandinavian medieval history and examine various aspects of daily life and Church organization. Following a chronological order, we will look, each week, at the questions and problems raised by the study of this region, and at some of the primary sources from which historians draw their analysis.

## TEXTBOOKS

- Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia. From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [hereafter *Sawyer*]; on two-hour reserve in [Library West](#); the readings for each class meeting below are also available in pdf format on [Sakai](#)

- Russel Andrew McDonald and Angus A. Sommerville, *The Viking Age. A Reader*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010 [hereafter *McDonald*]; on two-hour reserve in [Library West](#)
- *The Viking World*. Ed. by Stefan Brink. London/New York: Routledge, 2008 [hereafter *Brink*]; on two-hour reserve in [Library West](#)
- (optional) *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. Ed. by Phillip Pulsiano. New York: Garland, 1993 [available in the Reference section of [Library West](#)]

### Assignments:

There is no attendance policy, but you are responsible for attending all lectures and reading the required texts. Class participation may be taken into account to determine the overall grade. The basis for evaluation of performance will be a reading journal and a research paper.

Below is a detailed description of these assignments and the corresponding percentages of your final grade. Extra-credit work will be accepted only for students with active participation in class discussions. If necessary, I will explain the format of the extra-credit option during regular office hours. You are otherwise encouraged to keep in touch with me by e-mail, if you have any questions: I check my mailbox regularly, and promise to answer quickly.

Reading journal. A quick glimpse at the list of weekly topics (see below) will no doubt convince you that this is a course with serious readings. You will be expected to digest a substantial amount of information in a fairly short period of time. The best way to do this is to keep a journal. Before every class meeting, you will post an e-mail message on my address (on top of this syllabus), in which you will discuss briefly the readings for the coming meeting, ask questions and/or make comments, raise issues that need clarification, etc. All e-mails should arrive at least 12 hours before class meetings. Be sure to keep your postings to a reasonable length (175 to 250 words long). I do not want you to spend too much time on them, but I expect you to give an articulate presentation of your thoughts. Needless to say, I also expect you to check on correct grammar and spelling before clicking on "Send." Because the journal is designed to demonstrate your efforts towards an initial understanding of the readings, I must have *in time* one report for each class meeting, every week (except, of course, week 10). There are only 26 class meetings with required readings (textbook readings are indicated in brackets, followed by online readings, if any, in the weekly topic list below), so journal entries for these days represent 70 percent of your final grade, 2.69 percent for each entry. You can make up a reading report only in extraordinary circumstance such as absence due to participation in an official university activity, observance of a religious holiday, performance of a military duty, or any other conflict (e.g., jury duty), about which you know in advance of the scheduled assignment. In such cases, you are required to notify me of the conflict *before the assignment is due*, and if possible at the start of the semester. Be aware that missed reports may result in a substantially lower grade. For further information, consult the [attendance policies of the University of Florida](#).

Research paper. The remaining 30 percent of your final grade will be based on a paper of approximately ten pages (with a minimum of 8 and

an absolute maximum of 15 pages). The topic of interest to you may be chosen from a variety of issues pertaining to medieval Scandinavia that we will discuss in class (economic life, society and social structures, law, Norse mythology, conversion to Christianity, rise and growth of towns, etc.). The research paper topic is due on the last day of class meeting before Spring break. Keep in mind that your research must include both primary and secondary sources. You can use the readings for this course, but in addition you need to have at least six sources not listed below. Your relatively complete list of sources to be used for the research paper is also due on the last day of class meeting before Spring break. You are strongly encouraged to begin looking earlier for the material for your research paper and to consult with me as early and often as possible. Your research paper must follow the formatting and style rules of the [\*Chicago Manual of Style\*](#). It should also follow the expectations of a good research paper, with a proper introduction, thesis, body and conclusion, well written in proper formal English with correct spelling and punctuation. A research paper also implies the proper use of footnotes documenting the sources for your facts and ideas. My recommendation is that you write a first draft, which we (you and I) can go over during my office hours.

Journal entries: 70 points  
 Research paper: 30 points  
 Total: 100 points

### Grades:

Points	Grade
97-100	A
93-96	A-
88-92	B+
81-87	B
75-80	B-
68-74	C+
61-67	C

55-60	C-
48-54	D+
41-47	D
35-40	D-
under 35	E

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## COURSE WEEKLY TOPICS

### Introduction

[01/08] Introduction. Who were the Vikings? Vikings in European history [*Brink* 4-7]; visit the exhibit "[Vikings: the North Atlantic Saga](#)"

[01/10] Myths about the Vikings; read "[Eight Viking Myths Busted](#)" and Brian McMahon's "[The Vikings: myths and misconceptions](#)"

### Sources

[01/15] Written sources and associated problems; archaeology and numismatics [*Brink* 350-367, 281-290, and 629-638; *Sawyer* 1-26]; for an example of Runic inscription, see [the rune stone U 194 from Upplands Väsby \(Sweden\)](#) and the [Jelling rune stones \(Denmark\)](#); browse the [Life of Anskar](#), [Snorri Sturluson's Chronicle of the Kings of Norway](#); and [Saxo Grammaticus' Gesta Danorum](#); see the five [Skuldelev ships](#) and visit [Lejre, with the hall of a Scandinavian chieftain](#)

### Geography and landscape

[01/17] Landscape, resources, communications, and people [*Sawyer* 27-48; *Brink* 57-66 and 274-280; *McDonald* 2-15]; see shaded relief maps of [Norway](#), [Sweden](#), [Denmark](#), and [Iceland](#); see also pictures of a [fjord](#) and of the [Hekla](#) volcano in Iceland; see a [map](#) with the most important locations mentioned in lecture; see a [map](#) of the Black Death

### The ninth century

[01/22] Viking raids: why and how [*Sawyer* 51-54; *Brink* 193-203; *McDonald* 228-229 and 245-272]; see [Einhard's Life of Charlemagne](#), Charlemagne's [letters](#) and [capitularies](#) and [Agobard of Lyon](#) on the division of the Empire; read a short biography of [Alcuin](#); see also [the on-line map](#) and an example of [Carolingian script](#); see also [three sources on Viking raids in late Carolingian Francia](#); see also a Carolingian coin (a [penny of Charlemagne](#)), the bridge at [Pont de l'Arche](#),

the ringfort at [Camp de Pétan](#), the two [tortoise brooches](#), such as found at [Pétres](#); see also maps of the [843 division of the Empire](#) and of the [Viking raids](#)

[01/24] [England and Ireland](#) [*Brink* 341-349; *McDonald* 230-232, 235-240, and 242-245]; see the [Anglo-Saxon Chronicle](#) (on the first Viking raid on Wessex) and the [Annals of Ulster](#), a brief presentation of the [Orkneyinga saga](#), and the [Old English inscription in the Codex Aureus](#) mentioning earldorman Aelfred; visit [Jarlshof](#), [Balladoole](#), [Repton](#), and [Dublin](#); see a brief presentation of [Alfred's Jewel](#) and a picture of the [Cross of the Scriptures](#) at Clonmacnoise; see also on-line maps of the ninth- and tenth-century [Anglo-Saxon kingdoms](#) and of ninth-century [Ireland](#)

### Vikings in the West and in the East

[01/29] [Iceland and Greenland](#) [*Brink* 562-570; *McDonald* 330-331, 336-343, 346-348, and 350-357]; see a [brief history](#) and a [map](#) of the Norse settlement in Greenland; see a plan of the [Brattahlid settlement](#) and the [house](#) said to have been that of Erik the Red; see also a [map of Iceland](#)

[01/31] [Viking ships and eastern trade](#) [*Brink* 150-192; *McDonald* 318-320]; see an example of [clinker construction](#) and a depiction of a Viking priare on the [Hejnum stone](#); see also the Skuldelev ships (nos. [2](#), [5](#), [3](#), and [1](#)) and the [Krampmacken replica](#) of a Viking ship that travelled from the Baltic to the Black Sea

[02/05] [The Rus' Vikings](#) [*Brink* 543-561; *McDonald* 302-328]; see the [Russian Primary Chronicle](#), a map of the [most important sites](#) and a [shaded relief map of Russia](#)

### The tenth century

[02/07] [Denmark under the Jelling dynasty](#) [*Sawyer* 54-57; *Brink* 652-663; *McDonald* 439-443]; see the Jelling [mounds](#) and [church](#); visit [Trelleborg](#) and [Fyrkat](#); see a [map](#) and an [aerial photograph](#) of the Danevirke; see also a [map](#) with the most important sites mentioned in lecture

[02/12] [Danelaw](#) [*Brink* 375-384; *McDonald* 274-282]; visit the [Jorvik Viking Center](#) in York; see presentations of the [Cuernale hoard](#), the [Gosforth cross](#), and the [Brompton hogbacks](#); see the Anglo-Saxon poem about the [Battle of Maldon](#); see also an example of [Aethelred's pennies of the small cross type](#)

### Second Viking Age

[02/14] [British Isles](#) [*Brink* 391-435; *McDonald* 294-295 and 464-471]; see the [Braddan](#) and [Kirk Andreas](#) crosses; read about the Viking-Age [Isle of Man](#); visit Clonmacnoise with its monastic [tower](#); read about Viking-Age [Dublin](#), [Wexford](#) and [Waterford](#), as well as about the Viking cemeteries excavated in [Kilmainham and Islandbridge](#); see a biographical note for [Olaf](#)

[Cuar](#), king of Dublin; visit the archaeological site at [Dublin-Temple Bar](#); see examples of [Ringerike](#) and [Urnes](#) ornamental styles; see the [Cross of Cong](#) and the [Clonmacnoise crozier](#)

[02/19] [Iceland, Greenland, America](#) [*Brink* 571-617; *McDonald* 348-357]; see the [Brattahlid](#) church; visit [L'Anse aux Meadows](#) (see the [smithy](#) found on the site) and the Goddard site in Maine that produced a [coin of King Olaf Kyrre](#); see two pages of the Jonsbok manuscript of the [Gr](#)

[02/21] [Kievan Rus'](#) [*Brink* 496-542; *McDonald* 321-325]

### Viking society (research paper topic and list of sources due on

Thursday, 02/28)

[02/26] [Written sources and archaeology](#) [*Brink* 11-22 and 49-56]; read Ibn Fadlan's account of a Rus' ship burial ([Risalat](#)); see the rune stone from the island of [Berezan'](#) mentioning a *f*

[02/28] [Kings and royal retinues](#) [*Sawyer* 86-89 and 92-94; *McDonald* 434-439 and 457-461]; see one of the mounds excavated at [Borre](#) (Norway) and some artifacts found within the great hall at [Sl](#); see the great halls found at [Borg](#) (Lofoten Islands, Norway) and [Lejre](#) (Sjaelland, Denmark; see also a view of the reconstructed [interior](#)); read the [Life of Anskar](#), 26 on the power of the Svea kings

### Before the conversion to Christianity

[03/12] [Paganism](#) [*Brink* 235-273; *McDonald* 101-114 and 162-170]; see the [Stora Hammars](#) rune stone, with a depiction of a [human sacrifice](#) to Odin; see pictures of [Hemlanden](#), the main cemetery of Birka, and of [Lindholm H](#) in Denmark

[03/14] [Mythology](#) [*Brink* 212-234 and 291-323; *McDonald* 76-101]; read [V](#)

### Conversion to Christianity

[03/19] [Early attempts. Denmark](#) and Iceland [*Sawyer* 57-58 and 100-108; *Brink* 621-628; *McDonald* 398-419 and 421-423]; see the cathedrals in [Roskilde](#) and [Trondheim](#); see examples of stave churches from [Hopperstad](#), [Urnes](#), and [Borgund](#); see [another account of the conversion of Iceland in Njal's Saga](#)

[03/21] [Rus'](#); see an [icon of SS. Boris and Gleb](#) and read the account of their [passion](#)

### After the Viking Age

[03/26] Native saints: St. Olav, St. Knud, St. Erik, and St. Birgitta (Bridget) [*Sawyer* 214-232]; see the [St. Olav fronta](#) and visit the [Stiklestad National Culture Center](#); visit the [Uppsala Cathedral](#), read St. Bridget's [Revelations to the Pope](#), and visit the [Vadstena Abbey](#)

[03/28] The Danish empire and the post-Viking Middle Ages [*Sawyer* 57-71; *Brink* 665-667; *McDonald* 444-457]; see a portrait of [Valdemar the Great](#) on one of his coins and a Romantic version of the story about the [Dannebrog at the battle at Lyndanis \(1219\)](#); visit [Tallinn, ca. 1300](#), the [Kalmar castle](#), the medieval city of [Abo \(Turku\)](#), and the [Vyborg \(Viipuri\)](#) castle; read a short biography of [Alexander Nevsky](#)

## Land and kingdom

[04/02] Landowners and peasants; family and inheritance [*Sawyer* 129-142 and 166-87; *Brink* 67-82; *McDonald* 18-28]

[04/04] Law, kings and things [*Sawyer* 80-85 and 89-92]; see the itinerary of the [Erikskata](#), ca. 1200; visit the [Kronborg Castle](#); learn more about the Danish [Folketing](#), the Norwegian [Storting](#), and the [Sameting](#) in Sweden

[04/09] Church organization [*Sawyer* 108-123]; see images of the Benedictine [Selja Abbey](#) and the Cistercian [Hovedøya Abbey](#) in ruins; visit the church of the Augustinian chapter in [Vestervig](#) and the Cistercian abbey at [Alvastra](#)

## Trade and towns

[04/11] Trading centers and towns [*Sawyer* 144-165; *Brink* 83-149]

## Scandinavian women

[04/16] Before conversion [*Sawyer* 188-196; *McDonald* 130-134, 148-149, and 151-154]; see the [ship](#) in which the Viking-age woman was buried in Oseberg (Norway)

[04/19] After conversion; Valkyries and the myth of the "shield maiden" [*Sawyer* 197-213; *McDonald* 135-137]; watch [Gowyn of Rohan](#) fighting like a man and listen to a particularly good version of Wagner's ["Ride of the Valkyries"](#); see the [Hollywood version](#) of Viking history in Eastern Europe and of Viking-Muslim cooperation and [Gosciny and Uderzo's](#) version of a Viking raid



[04/23] Conclusion: Vikings in history. **Research paper due**

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