

EUH-4185: The Viking Experience



Time and Location

M, T, W, R, F Period 3 (11:00 to 12:15)

Room: TBA

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-Près near Paris described one of the first attacks 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*]; the readings for each class meeting below are also available in pdf format on [Canvas](#)
- Russel Andrew McDonald and Angus A. Sommerville, *The Viking Age. A Reader*. 2nd edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014 [hereafter *McDonald*]; available in pdf format on [Canvas](#)
- *The Viking World*. Ed. by Stefan Brink. London/New York: Routledge, 2008 [hereafter *Brink*]; available in pdf format on [Canvas](#)
- (optional) *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. Ed. by Phillip Pulsiano. New York: Garland, 1993.

Assignments and grading policies

Since this is an online course, you are responsible for watching all lectures and reading the required texts. 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. 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. The day 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 15 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 day. 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 circumstances such as absence due to sickness, 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 term. Be aware that missed reports may result in a substantially lower grade. For further information, consult the [attendance policies of the University of Florida](#).

In-class assignments. The remaining 30 percent of your final grade will be based on five short assignments "in class." All five will consist of multiple-choice, matching, short-essay questions, or a combination thereof. Besides material covered in class lectures, these in-class assignments will focus primarily on primary source readings from your *McDonald* book. A careful study of these texts is necessary for a good performance at the test. Because in-class assignments are announced, I do not intend to grant any make-ups, except for emergencies (e.g., illness), in which case I may ask for official justification.

Grades. The following scale will be used in determining your final grade.

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 30	E

Weekly Topics

[05/11] Introduction. Who were the Vikings? Vikings in European history [*Brink* 4-7]; visit the exhibit “Vikings: Beyond the Legend”

[05/12] Myths about the Vikings; read “Eight Viking Myths Busted” and Brian McMahon’s “The Vikings: myths and misconceptions”

Sources

[05/13] 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*, see a presentation of Snorri Sturluson’s *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*; browse Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*; see the five Skuldelev ships and visit Lejre, with the hall of a Scandinavian chieftain

Geography and landscape

[05/14] 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

[05/15] Viking raids: why and how [*Sawyer* 51-54; *Brink* 193-203; *McDonald* 182-187 and 202-222]; 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 Péran, the two tortoise brooches, such as found at Pîtres; see also maps of the 843 division of the Empire and of the Viking raids

[05/18] 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

[05/19] **In-class assignment #1.** Iceland and Greenland [Brink 562-570; McDonald 292-293, 297-303, and 305-310]; 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](#)
[05/20] Viking ships and eastern trade [Brink 170-192; McDonald 152-153]; see an example of [clinker construction](#) and a depiction of a Viking priest 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

[05/21] The Rus' Vikings [Brink 543-561; McDonald 262-279]; see the Russian Primary Chronicle, a map of the most important sites and a shaded relief map of Russia
The tenth century

[05/22] Denmark under the Jelling dynasty [Sawyer 54-57; Brink 652-663; McDonald 429-433]; 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
[05/25] Danelaw [Brink 375-384; McDonald 232-237 and 433-435]; visit the Jorvik Viking Center in York; see presentations of the Cuerdale 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

[05/26] **In-class assignment #2.** British Isles [Brink 391-438; McDonald 251-252 and 456-463]; 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 Cuarán, 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
[05/27] Iceland, Greenland, America [Brink 571-617; McDonald 311-319]; see the Brattahlid settlement; 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 Grágás
[05/28] Kievan Rus' [Brink 496-542; McDonald 282-290]
Viking society

[05/29] 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 *félag*
[06/01] Kings and royal retinues [Sawyer 86-89 and 92-94; McDonald 26-36, 119, 367-370, and 435-448]; see one of the mounds excavated at Borre (Norway) and some artifacts found within the great hall at Slöinge; see the great halls found at Borg (Lofoten Islands, Norway) and Lejre (Sjælland, Denmark; see also a view of the reconstructed interior); read the *Life of Anskar*, ch. 26 on the power of the Svea kings
Before the conversion to Christianity

[06/02] **In-class assignment #3.** Paganism [Brink 235-273; McDonald 64-74 and 122-127]; 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 Høje in Denmark
[06/03] Mythology [Brink 212-234 and 291-323; McDonald 40-64]; read *Völuspá*
Conversion to Christianity

[06/04] Early attempts. Denmark and Iceland [Sawyer 57-58 and 100-108; Brink 621-628; McDonald 372-394 and 402-404]; 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
[06/05] Rus'; see an icon of SS. Boris and Gleb and read the account of their passion

After the Viking Age

[06/08] Native saints: St. Olav, St. Knud, St. Erik, and St. Birgitta (Bridget) [Sawyer 214-232; *McDonald* 394-402]; see the St. Olav frontal and visit the Stiklestad National Culture Center; visit the Uppsala Cathedral, read St. Bridget's *Revelations to the Pope*, and visit the Vadstena Abbey
[06/09] The Danish empire and the post-Viking Middle Ages [Sawyer 57-71; *Brink* 665-667]; 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

[06/10] **In-class assignment #4.** Landowners and peasants; family and inheritance [Sawyer 129-142 and 166-87; *Brink* 67-82; *McDonald* 16-26]

[06/11] 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

[06/12] 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

[06/15] Trading centers and towns [Sawyer 144-165; *Brink* 83-149]

Scandinavian women

[06/16] Before conversion [Sawyer 188-196; *McDonald* 86-95 and 105-116]; see the ship in which the Viking-age woman was buried in Oseberg (Norway)

[06/17] After conversion; Valkyries and the myth of the "shield maiden" [Sawyer 197-213; *McDonald* 95-96]; watch Éowyn 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 Goscinny and Uderzo's version of a Viking raid

[06/18] Conclusion: Vikings in history.

[06/19] **In-class assignment #5.**