



Danish Raiders, Danish Law, & Danish Kings:



The Vikings in Britain 793-1066

"In this year terrible portents appeared in Northumbria, and miserably afflicted the inhabitants: these were exceptional flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air, and soon followed a great famine, and after that in the same year the harrying of the heathen miserably destroyed God's church in Lindisfarne..."

Thus did a monk record in the pages of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* a devastating entry for the year 793. The Viking Age really began in earnest with the sacking of the great Northumbrian monastery at Lindisfarne. This ninth century grave marker from Lindisfarne commonly is thought to commemorate English victims of the Viking onslaught.

Course Information:

Instructor: C. Fee

Meeting Days and Time: M/TH 2:30-4:10PM

Meeting Place: F24-206

Office: F24-206

Office Hours: M/TH 1:00-2:00, & by appointment

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Course Webpage: <http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/DIS/DIS-Vikings-in-Britain/>

Course Description:

Vikings in Britain 793-1066

In 793 AD the first major Viking raid of England took place at the monastery at Lindisfarne, and this event marks the beginning of a presence in Britain which culminated with the crowning of a Danish king of England, Cnut, in 1016 AD. Large portions of Anglo-Saxon England were ruled under Danish law from the late ninth century onwards, and even the two great invasions of Britain in 1066, mounted by William of Normandy and Harald Hardradi, represented incursions from different branches of the same Viking family tree. The Vikings were Scandinavian (primarily Norsemen from Norway and Danes) adventurer-raiders who were first cousins to the Anglo-Saxons, who were following the same migratory patterns to Britain, and who made their way, like the Celts, to Spain and Asia Minor but even further, to North America.

The etymology of the term "Viking" is uncertain; the Old English *wiking* has to do with a war band, and hence may denote a warlike pirate, while the Old Norse *vikingr* has long been thought to come from a root meaning "bay" or "inlet," and thus may refer merely to those associated with those places and the crafts which plied them. These Scandinavian invaders still adhered to the old pagan religion, and thus their appearance in Britain reinvigorated the pre-Christian Germanic elements in the cultural melting-pot.

In this course we will explore the genesis, development, and dissemination of Medieval Scandinavian culture through a study of the Danish raiders in England. The course covers the first Viking raid of

England in 793 AD to the crowning of a Danish king of England, Cnut, in 1016 AD, and finally the two great invasions of Britain in 1066, mounted by William of Normandy and Harald Hardradi. Special attention will be paid to the long-term impact upon the British Isles of Viking Age Norse language, literature, religion, and legal & political institutions.

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to help students to gain in-depth knowledge concerning Medieval Norse life, culture, and literature, with special emphasis on the lasting legacy of Danish raiders, law, and kings on the development of the dominant institutions, literature, and language of the British Isles. To that end, in this course we will explore the genesis, development, and dissemination of Medieval Scandinavian culture, focusing on the age of the greatest impact of the Vikings upon the British Isles (roughly AD 793 through AD 1066) but surveying an overview of the entire breadth and depth of early Scandinavian Europe. We will also learn about the runes the Vikings left behind; this Medieval graffiti can still be found carved on bits of stone, bone, wood and metal, in a wide swath from Constantinople to Maritime Canada. This course is truly interdisciplinary: we will be interested in the history, literature, religion, and social structures of these traders, scholars, raiders, farmers, explorers, and mercenaries who first paralyzed, then conquered, then assimilated into much of Britain and the rest of Europe.

The Medieval North Atlantic Interactive Multimedia Project:

Imagine visiting the imposing site of the priory at Lindisfarne, where the Viking Age began, and consider how actually being there now would help to bring the events of the past alive for you; think of the excitement of visiting archaeological digs of pagan Viking ship burials, replete with buried treasure alongside human and animal sacrifices; consider the ability to wander at will through the spectacular Viking ruins of the settlement at Jarlshof in the Shetland Islands on a glorious, windswept day in the far north. Now consider the possibility of making such a journey at the speed of light through virtual reality technology, complete with a personal electronic guide which provides maps, static images, explanatory video clips and sound bites which bring to life these ancient peoples and places. We will do all of this in this course, utilizing digital video, panoramas, and other images compiled within the *Medieval North Atlantic* multimedia resource.

Specific Learning Goals:

In addition to mastering general knowledge of and gaining conversance with Medieval Scandinavia, students in this course will develop a substantial understanding of the legacy of the Viking Age in the history, language, letters, and landscape of the British Isles. Within the outline of such broad strokes students will develop some detailed knowledge of major relevant historical events of the period, the most important literary echoes of some of those events, and key Viking Age sites and objects.

Thus this course is of special interest to those with an affinity for the Medieval period, specifically the history of Scandinavia and the British Isles, as well as to those who study Germanic languages, or to those who wish to explore the confluence between literary and historical texts and material cultures. Most importantly, this course is especially appropriate for anyone who would care to plumb the depths of the relationship between Danes and the English-speaking world, a relationship spanning more than a dozen centuries, a relationship fraught with violence in its early stages but subsequently comprised of many facets with unforeseen long-range outcomes.

Moreover, embracing the “Europe as Classroom” philosophy and practice of DIS, this course utilizes relevant critical readings concerning the Viking Age as a nexus of history, religion, narrative traditions, and archaeology in tandem with the on-line *Medieval North Atlantic* multimedia project in order to ground each student’s understanding of Viking Britain within specific sites, structures, and artifacts which are informative and evocative. Not incidentally, this course is designed to enrich and to be enriched by potential opportunities to travel to and study *in situ* any number of related sites, objects, and museums throughout the British Isles and Scandinavia.

Outcomes Assessment:

How will we know that students in this course have achieved the course objectives? Students will demonstrate their growing mastery of the material in a number of ways: Literary and historical knowledge will be cultivated and illustrated through class participation and the composition of discussion board entries; retention and synthesis of the major themes of the course will be facilitated and manifested in the successful completion of final projects and exams. A much more significant measure of the success of this course, however, would be evidence of abiding student interest in and conversance with the culture of early Medieval Scandinavia, and most especially knowledge of and engagement with issues, locations, objects, and texts related to the impact of this culture upon the British Isles: This course will have been successful if students—perhaps long after the present semester— are empowered and inspired to choose to seek out and to attempt to contextualize related texts, objects, and locations. If it results in or enriches subsequent forays into the saga record & Norse Mythology, or later visits to such venues as the Viking Ship Museums in Roskilde or Oslo, or the Viking exhibits at the British Museum, or Viking Age settlements such as that at Jarlshof in Shetland, this course will have been amply successful.

Field studies (Required Course Component):

Each Field Study will involve one or more structured exercises and/or activities to help to place the experiential component within the academic context of the course, but have no fear: Full and thoughtful participation in each field study will result in a very high grade for that course component.

Wednesday, 8 February, from 10:00am-12:30pm

We will begin the term with a visit to the National Museum in Copenhagen, the holdings of which are particularly rich in Viking Age materials. We will pay special attention to Viking weapons, everyday artifacts, treasure items, and runic inscriptions.

Wednesday, 14 March, from 1:00-5:00pm

We will have the opportunity to travel to the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde later in the term. Given this course’s emphasis on the ways in which raiders from early Medieval Scandinavia were able to become disproportionately powerful cultural, political, and military players in a wide arc from Constantinople to Newfoundland, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to place the academic content of the course in the context of the nails and wood of the ships which made it all possible!

Specific Course Requirements:

Weekly Workload:

Each week is organized around an exploration of a particular topic concerning the Vikings in Britain, developed around discussions of historical and/or primary text(s), related critical readings, and relevant site visits to the *Medieval North Atlantic* or other multimedia resources. The reading for any given day is generally in the range of no more than about 20-30 pages, including historical, primary, and critical texts; the discussion of anything longer most likely would be divided over a couple of class periods. The emphasis in this course, then, is on gaining an intimate knowledge of a representative sample of the relevant materials, and not on mastery over a huge volume. That said, students are expected to have completed the assigned readings in advance of each class session, and to demonstrate familiarity with the material both through Discussion Board entries and class participation.

Preparation & Participation:

Each student is expected to be present, prepared, and ready to participate in each and every class period. Some find participating in class discussions to be fun and easy, while others find it threatening and uncomfortable. One need not be a big talker to do well in this class (although it doesn't hurt!), but one does need to be prepared to answer an occasional question, articulate intelligent confusion, or voice the odd query (about the subject matter at hand rather than, say, grading procedures!). This is always a touchy and somewhat subjective area to evaluate, so do us both a favor by trying to put in your two cents!

Discussion Board:

You must participate **at least** once weekly in our on-line class Discussion Board (available through DIS Forum); such participation must include an insightful and informed discussion (250 or more words) of the issue of the week (a question or comment which I post on the forum page for that week), as well as **at least** two follow-ups (50 or more words each) to the discussion of your peers. The Discussion Board provides an excellent opportunity for you to explore those issues which interest, intrigue, annoy, or confuse you; in any case, both your primary discussion and your follow-ups should show evidence that you have absorbed and digested the week's reading, as well as the ensuing class discussion. The Discussion Board is meant to supplement and to formalize casual out-of-class discussion and contact with your peers, and thus it takes on a special significance; please feel free to participate several times a week, and to post additional comments and questions as you see fit. I will read your thoughts carefully and eagerly. You must complete your primary discussion of the issue of the week **each week by Sunday at midnight**, and your follow-ups must be posted by **Wednesday at midnight**. As the Discussion Board is meant to spur and extend class discussions, the minimum required posts may not be made up. If the majority of the class consistently utilizes the Discussion Board fruitfully, there will be no need to institute a series of comprehension quizzes in its place. We will begin contributing to our Discussion Board after the first week of class. Furthermore, the unexpected crops up in all our lives from time to time, rather like a threatening sail on the horizon. For that reason, any student may fail to complete the required posts for any one (1) week with no penalty. Each student thus should submit, on time, 1 primary discussion and 2 follow-up posts for each for at least 10 of our 12 weeks of class.

Individual Research Project:

This short paper should concern a key Viking Age historical and/or literary episode from the reading which can be grounded logically in a specific location in the British Isles. The point of this project is for each student to identify and to research in depth a given episode which can be linked in some way to a

specific location of particular interest to that student. A description of Viking raids might be grounded in Lindisfarne in England; an account of Norse funeral rites might be linked to Balladoole on the Isle of Man; a discussion of the Norse gods might be associated with Maughold or Andreas on the Isle of Man. In simplest terms, what historical location, material object, or archaeological dig from Viking Britain is of most interest to you? How might you link it to some aspect of the reading from the course? What should an intelligent and well-informed visitor to that site/object know about it? What can you discover about it that would enrich and illuminate a visit to it? What can you find out about it that makes you really want to go and experience it first hand?

Each student should develop the written report in tandem with a multimedia presentation suitable for inclusion on the Vikings in Britain course website. The emphasis should be on rigor rather than bulk, and the focus should concern how a sense of place permeates some aspect of the given narrative episode. The readings required for this course, the site reports available on the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, and the bibliographies thereof give a good indication of the types of critical readings which might well inform such an effort. The paper should be in the range of 1500 words, and the presentation should contain about a half dozen slides or equivalent. You will have great latitude in your choice of subject, which will be made in consultation with the instructor. Ideally, this project will align with some aspect of one of the Field Studies.

Midterm Exam:

The Midterm Exam will cover the historical & primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. In other words, all assigned course material is fair game, including that which we have not discussed in class. The exam will be divided into three sections: Short-answer identifications; passage identifications; and essay questions concerning major themes which we have discussed in class.

Final Exam:

The Final Exam also will cover the historical & primary texts, all critical reading, class discussions, on-line quizzes from the *Medieval North Atlantic* project, etc. It will have the same format as the Midterm Exam, and will be comprehensive.

Course Evaluation:

Preparation & Participation:	+/-10%
Discussion Board:	+/-10%
Field Study Participation:	+/-10%
Individual Research Project:	+/-20%
Midterm Exam:	+/-25%
Final Exam:	+/-25%

ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.

Course Texts:

Fee, Christopher with David Leeming. *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Hall, Richard. *Viking Age Archaeology in Britain and Ireland*. Shire archaeology, v. 60. Princes Risborough: Shire, 1990. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Jones, Gwyn. *A History of the Vikings*. 2nd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. **(Text provided by library)**

Loyn, Henry. *The Vikings in Britain*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Magnusson, Magnus and Hermann Palsson, trans. *King Harald's Saga*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Palsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards. trans. *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Suggested Further Reading Course Texts:

Page, R.I. *Norse Myths*. The Legendary Past Series. Austin: U of Texas P, 1991. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

---. *Runes*. Reading the Past Series. Berkeley: U California Press, 1989. **(Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum)**

Additional Course Readings (Required selection(s) available through DIS Forum):

Batey, Colleen E., and James Graham-Campbell. *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World*. New York: Facts on File, 1994. Pages 122-142.

Baugh, Albert C., and Thomas Cable. *A History of the English Language*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002. Pages 92-107.

Fee, Christopher. "Magic, Miracles, and Murder: Sifting through Sinners and Saints in the Stories and Sites of *Orkneyingasaga*." In preparation. (Draft article provided).

---. "Með lögum skal land vort byggja: 'With Law Shall the Land be Built.' Law-Speaking and Identity in the Medieval Norse Atlantic," in *Sailing the Western Sea: The Atlantic Ocean in Medieval Perspective*. B. Hudson, ed. In press. (Draft article provided).

McArthur, Tom. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pages 279-280.

McCrum, Robert, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil. *The Story of English*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1986. Pages 68-72.

Millward, Celia M. *A Biography of the English Language*. Fort Worth, Tex: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996. Pages 81-82, 116-117, 142-143.

On-line Video Exercise:

http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/DIS/DIS-Vikings-in-Britain/Assignments/VIDEO_SO.MOV

On-line Resources:

<http://public.gettysburg.edu/~cfee/MedievalNorthAtlantic/index970x650.html>
<http://vikingeskibsmuseet.dk/en/>
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/lindisfarne-priory/>
http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/online_tours/europe/the_vikings/the_vikings.aspx
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/>
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/conquest/after_viking/legacy_vikings_01.shtml
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/viking_settlements/
http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/T/timeteam/snapshot_vikings.html
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/>
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/who-were-vikings.html>
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/02/0217_040217_vikings.html
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/08/100810-thor-thors-hammer-viking-graves-thunderstones-science/>
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/03/100315-headless-vikings-england-execution-pit/>
<http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/voyage/subset/westernisles/history.html>
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/A-Viking-Mystery.html>
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/oct/19/viking-burial-ship-found-scotland>

Schedule of Classes:

Mon, Jan 23 Start of Semester

Thu, Jan 26 Start of Classes

Week 1: The Dawn of the Viking Age. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (1-13 & 34-54); *The Vikings in Britain* (1-20). **Suggested Further Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (14-33).

Week 2: Life in Early Scandinavia. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (59-77 & 97-117). **Suggested Further Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (78-96 & 118-140).

Thu, Feb 09 – Sat, Feb 11 Short Study Tours

Week 3: The Creation of the Vikings, the Birth of the Longship, and the Beginning of the Movement across the North Atlantic. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (145-203). **Multimedia Tour:** Visit the Viking Ship site in Roskilde in the *Medieval North Atlantic*.

Week 4: Britain in the Context of the Coming of the Vikings and the British Isles as Norse Stepping-Stones. **Reading:** *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (122-142); *The Vikings in Britain* (21-29); "Law-

Speaking and Identity" (in entirety). **Multimedia Tours:** Visit Norse Thing sites in the British Isles in the *Medieval North Atlantic*. **Suggested Further Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (269-311; 334-353).

Week 5: The History of the Vikings in Britain I—from Lindisfarne through the Danelaw. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (204-240; 421-424); *The Vikings in Britain* (30-51). **Suggested Further Reading:** *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Anglo-Saxon England"--161-162; "Anglo-Saxon Historical Sagas and Heroism"--162-166). **Multimedia Tour:** Visit Lindisfarne in the *Medieval North Atlantic*. *Orkneyinga Saga* Assignment Distributed.

Sat, Mar 03 – Sun, Mar 11 Long Study Tours

Week 6: The History of the Vikings in Britain II—The Northern Isles. **Reading:** Selections from *Orkneyinga Saga*; "Magic, Miracles, and Murder" (in entirety). **Suggested Further Reading:** *The Vikings in Britain* (64-76); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Norse Britain"--153-155). **Multimedia Tours:** Visit saga and settlement sites in Orkney and Shetland in the *Medieval North Atlantic*. *Orkneyinga Saga* Assignment Due. **MIDTERM EXAM.**

Week 7: Introducing the Gods of the North. **Reading:** *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* [N.B. Focus on Germanic--i.e. Norse and Anglo-Saxon--material.] ("Preface"--ix-xi; "Introduction"--3-9; "The Pantheons"--13-63). **Multimedia Tours:** Visit Odin and Loki on cross-slabs on the Isle of Man in the *Medieval North Atlantic*. **Norse Creation Re-Creation Exercise.**

Week 8: Interpreting the Gods of the North. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (315-334); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Deity Types"--75-99; "Sacred Objects and Places"--111-116; "Heroes and Heroines"--117-124; "Creation and Apocalypse"--139-145). **Suggested Further Reading:** *Norse Myths* (Page) (7-78). **Norse Pantheon Debate. Norse Twilight of the Gods Exercise.**

Sat, Mar 31 – Sun, Apr 15 Optional Study Tours/Adventure Trips

Week 9: The Archaeological Record of Viking Britain: Stones and Bones and the Riddle of Runes. **Reading:** Selections from *Viking Age Archaeology in Britain and Ireland*. **Suggested Further Reading:** *Runes* (6-62); *A History of the Vikings* (419-420); *The Vikings in Britain* (77-117). **Multimedia Tours:** Visit Norse grave sites on the Isle of Man in the *Medieval North Atlantic*. **Runic Battle Royale.**

Week 10: The Twilight of the Viking Age. **Reading:** *A History of the Vikings* (354-415).

Week 11: "My Army Went to Stamford Bridge, and All I Got Was this Lousy Patch of Seven Feet of English Soil...." **Reading:** Selections from *King Harald's Saga*; *The Vikings in Britain* (52-62); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Norse Britain"--148-150). **"Postcards from the Edge...of the Viking World" Assignment:** *King Harald's Saga* as Viking Age Guidebook.

Fri, May 04 – Sun, May 06 Optional Study Tours/Adventure Trips

Week 12: Taler vi engelsk-dansk eller dansk-engelsk? The Danelaw and its Impact upon the English Language: *A Biography of the English Language* (81-82, 116-117, 142-143); *A History of the English Language* (92-107); *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, (279-280); *The Story of English* (68-72). **Individual Research Project Due.**

Sat, May 12 – Sun, May 13 Reading Days

Mon, May 14 – Fri, May 18 Final Exams