



English 401: Viking Studies The Medieval North Atlantic



Course Information:

Instructor: C. Fee
Meeting Time: W 6:30-9:00 PM
Meeting Place: Breidenbaugh 312
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Office Hours: MWF 10:00 AM-11:30 PM and by appointment
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Required Texts:

- Byock, Jesse L., trans. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Penguin, 1998. (ISBN: 014043593X)
- Byock, Jesse L., trans. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Penguin, 2000. (ISBN: 0140447385)
- Byock, Jesse L. *Viking Age Iceland*. New York: Penguin, 2001. (ISBN: 0140291156)
- Fee, Christopher with David Leeming. *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. (ISBN: 0195174038)
- Fox, Denton and Hermann Palsson, trans. *Grettir's Saga*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974. (ISBN: 0802061656)
- Gordon, E.V. *An Introduction to Old Norse*. 2nd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. (ISBN: 0198111843)
- Heaney, Seamus, ed. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. Reprint ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. (ISBN: 0393320979)
- Jones, Gwyn. *A History of the Vikings*. 2nd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. (ISBN: 0192801341)
- Loyn, Henry. *The Vikings in Britain*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995. (Only the hardback seems readily available: ISBN: 0631187111) (Order the cheaper paperback edition, if available: ISBN: 063118712X)
- Magnusson, Magnus and Hermann Palsson, trans. *King Harald's Saga*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. (ISBN: 0140441832)
- Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson trans. *Laxdaela Saga*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1989. (ISBN: 0140442189)

Page, R.I. *Norse Myths*. The Legendary Past Series. Austin: U of Texas P, 1991. (ISBN: 0292755465)

Page, R.I. *Runes*. Reading the Past Series. Berkeley: U California Press, 1989. (ISBN: 0520061144)

Palsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Egil's Saga*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. (ISBN: 0140443215)

Palsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1989. (ISBN: 0140445307)

Palsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, trans. *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney*. Penguin Classics ed. New York: Viking Penguin, 1987. (ISBN: 0140443835)

Reading Schedule:

Week 1 (8/29/07): The Dawn of the Viking Age: *A History of the Vikings* (1-54); *The Vikings in Britain* (1-20)

Week 2 (9/05/07): Life in Early Scandinavia: *A History of the Vikings* (59-140)

Week 3 (9/12/07): The Creation of the Vikings, the Birth of the Longship, and the Beginning of the Movement across the North Atlantic: *A History of the Vikings* (145-203); *Viking Age Iceland* (1-42)

Week 4 (9/19/07): The North Atlantic in the Context of the Coming of the Vikings and Islands as Stepping-Stones: *A History of the Vikings* (269-311; 334-353); *Viking Age Iceland* (43-98); *The Vikings in Britain* (21-29)

Week 5 (9/26/07): The History of the Vikings in Britain I--from Lindisfarne through the Danelaw: *A History of the Vikings* (204-240; 421-424); *The Vikings in Britain* (30-51); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Anglo-Saxon England"--161-162; "Anglo-Saxon Historical Sagas and Heroism"--162-166); *An Introduction to Old Norse* ("The Expansion": xvii-xxix)

Week 6 (10/03/07): The History of the Vikings in Britain II--The Northern Isles: *Orkneyinga Saga* (9-224); *The Vikings in Britain* (64-76); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Norse Britain"--153-155)

Week 7 (10/10/07): Introducing the Gods of the North and the Riddle of Runes: *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; "Deity Types"--75-99; "Sacred Objects and Places"--111-116; "Heroes and Heroines"--117-124; "Creation and Apocalypse"--139-145); *Norse Myths* (Page) (7-78); *A History of the Vikings* (315-334 and 419-420); *Runes* (6-62); *An Introduction to Old Norse* ("Runic Inscriptions": 181-193); *The Vikings in Britain* (77-117); *Viking Age Iceland* (292-307)

Week 8 (10/17/07): Saga and Society in Medieval Iceland I--Legend, Law, and Power in *Eyrbyggja Saga*: *Eyrbyggja Saga* (1-166); *Viking Age Iceland* (99-141 and 170-184)

Week 9 (10/24/07): Saga and Society in Medieval Iceland II--Love, Loss, and Blood Feud in *Laxdaela Saga*: *Laxdaela Saga* (9-239); *Viking Age Iceland* (185-232)

Week 10 (10/31/07): Beowulf and the Northern Imagination I--The Hero and the Troll: *Beowulf* ("Introduction" and ll. 1-836); *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (vii-xxxii and 1-78); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Germanic Demigods and Spirits"--101-108; "Heroic Battles with Monsters"--127-130; "The Sagas"--147-148; "Norse Echoes of English Heroic Sagas"--155-158); *An Introduction to Old Norse* ("The Earliest Norse Poetry", "The Poetry of the Skalds", & "The Sagas": xxxvi-lxi)

Week 11 (11/07/07): Beowulf and the Northern Imagination II--The Hero and the Descent into the Water-Wife's Cave: *Beowulf* (ll. 837-2199); *Grettir's Saga* (viii-xiii and 3-187); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("The Hero's Descent into the Otherworld"--124-127; "Norse Echoes of English Heroic Sagas"--158-161)

Week 12 (11/14/07): Beowulf and the Northern Imagination III--The Hero and the Dragon: *Beowulf* (ll. 2200-3182); *The Saga of the Volsungs* (1-109); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Heroic Battles with Monsters"--130-137; "Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Heroic Saga as History"--166-168); *An Introduction to Old Norse* ("The Heroic Literature of the North": xxix-xxxvi and "The Preservation of Texts": lxi-lxvi)

Week 13 (11/21/07): Thanksgiving Break--NO SEMINAR

Week 14 (11/28/07): Egil Skallagrimsson--The Great Icelandic Anti-Hero: *Egil's Saga* (7-239); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Norse Britain"--151-153)

Week 15 (12/5/07): The Twilight of the Viking Age: *A History of the Vikings* (354-415); *King Harald's Saga* (9-163); *The Vikings in Britain* (52-62); *Gods, Heroes, and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* ("Sagas of Norse Britain"--148-150)

Course Requirements:

Regular Weekly Assignments:

There are a number of activities, in addition to your research schedule, which you are expected to complete fully and thoughtfully each week. **1)** You are expected to have completed the reading in advance of each week's seminar. **2)** You should be prepared to participate regularly in discussion, especially when your comments and questions might be of value to the research of your peers. **3)** You must attempt to be a knowledgeable (but tactful!) critic of your peers' work. **4)** Finally, all of these requirements presuppose weekly attendance.

Language Exercises:

During most of the term there will be weekly language exercises; these usually will consist of the translation of a highly-glossed Old Norse passage, the identification of the parts of speech and forms of Old Norse words, and the memorization of a handful of Old Norse grammatical structures. These exercises will be supplemented by some discussion during seminar time. The purpose of these exercises is to approach a closer understanding of the Viking World through some conversance with concepts and language from that world.

Final Research Project:

Each student will research one of a series of designated broad topics listed below; this research will culminate in a Final Research Project of 4000-5000 words which must be submitted both as hardcopy and as an electronic document. The Final Research Project must engage scholarly sources (these should include history, archaeology, politics, religion, etc., as necessary and

relevant) as well as several specific saga references relevant to that topic. The target audience for this work is an expert in the field, so the tone of the Final Research Project should be scholarly, authoritative, and as exhaustive as possible. The point is to illustrate that the student can complete a thorough and readable research project of significant substance.

Possible Research Topics

- Law, Government, and Assembly in Norse Life and Saga
- Viking Travel, Commerce, and Raiding in Norse Life and Saga
- Marriage, Domestic Life, and the Home Front in the Viking Age
- Norse Farming and Settlement in the Viking Age
- Gods of the North: Norse Mythology and Religious Rituals in the Viking Age
- Death, Burial, and Funeral Rituals in Norse Life and Saga
- Ghosts, Hauntings, the Spirit World, and the Afterlife in the Viking Age
- The Norse Conversion to Christianity
- Lindisfarne and the Dawn of the Viking Age
- The Jarls of Orkney: Material and Saga Evidence of Viking Scotland
- Secret Writing, Magic Reading: The Riddle of Runes

Project Site Report:

As a part of developing a Final Research Project, each student will be responsible for compiling a Project Site Report of 2500 or more words on a specific Project Site related to that student's particular Final Research Project topic. Students are expected to make relevant mention of several specific pertinent saga episodes, as well as to cite a number of scholarly sources. **The existing Icelandic site narratives should point you in the right direction.** While not an abbreviated version of the Final Research Project, it is to be expected that the Project Site Report will be closely related to the Final Research Project, and might comprise as much as a third of that Final Research Project. The target audience for this work is an informed non-specialist, so the tone of the Project Site Report should be serious, but not overly scholarly: The point is to give a visitor to that particular Project Site an overview of the most important information available regarding that site, as well as to offer direction regarding further relevant reading in both research works and the saga record.

Interactive Fiction Project:

Finally, each student will devise an Interactive Fiction (IF) Project of 2500 or more words involving a creative approach to that student's Project Site. Each student is expected to collaborate with the other students whose Project Sites are located on the same island, as well as with those students whose Project Sites might be grouped under the same or similar categories. The point is to make as many connections as possible and to develop as coherent an overall IF Project as possible. The student should feel free to be creative and to have fun. While the IF project is, by its very nature, fiction, the student should incorporate as much factual detail about the site and relevant themes as possible, and several relevant saga references are also expected. **The Instructor's sample IF Project should point you in the right direction.** One might use Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code" as a primer for a kind of engaging fiction dressed up with facts. The target audience for this work is a student in an upper-level high school or lower-level college survey course, so the tone of the IF Project should be light-hearted and fun. The student need not fear an overly harsh editorial hand, but should be reminded that under-age high school students, ancient parents and faculty members, and potential employers will have easy and permanent access to this work. The point is to engage the interest and incite the imagination of the visitor to that site, thereby informing them of actual pertinent information about the site and its connection with other sites, themes, and sagas in as transparent and entertaining a way as possible.

Specific Course Requirements:

1) The **Final Research Project**, while not by any means the only graded component of the course, is the single most important piece of work. The Final Research Project is due on the Wednesday (Reading Day) of Finals Week: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than 6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, December 12th, 2007.

2) The **Project Site Report** is the main scholarly way in which the student may collaborate in the multimedia Medieval North Atlantic project, and promises to provide a permanent, public record of the student's research work in this course. **The first draft** of the Project Site Report is due during Week 7, on the Wednesday after the October Reading Days: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than 6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, October 10th, 2007. **The final draft** of the Project Site Report is due during Week 13, on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than 6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, November 28th, 2007.

3) The **Interactive Fiction Project** is the main creative way in which the student may collaborate in the multimedia Medieval North Atlantic project, and promises to provide a permanent, public record of the student's creative work in this course. **The first draft** of the Interactive Fiction Project is due during Week 12, on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than 6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, November 14th, 2007. **The final draft** of the Interactive Fiction Project is due during Week 14, on the last day of class: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than 6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, December 5th, 2007.

4) There will be a **Final Exam** in this course; it will be administered during finals week and will consist of three parts:

- One (1) essay [from a selection of 2-3] on the History of the Viking Age
- One (1) essay [from a selection of 2-3] on the Norse Sagas and Myths
- A translation of a short sentence of Old Norse [already seen in class] with commentary on selected grammatical details of that sentence [already discussed in class] along with the reiteration of relevant paradigms [previously memorized for class]

5) All reading and homework assignments must be complete in entirety and on time; there will be a series of Old Norse language exercises, for example, in addition to the weekly reading assignments and the individual research project.

Assignment Schedule:

Week 2-Week 4 (9/05/07-9/19/07): **Make Individual Appointment to Discuss Research Project and Site Report Topics with Instructor**

Week 4 (9/19/07): **Site(s) for Report Chosen**

Week 5 (9/26/07): **Topic for Research Project Chosen**

Week 6 (10/03/07): **Site Report Bibliography Assembled (3-5 Items)**

Week 7 (10/10/07): **First draft of Project Site Report DUE:** ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) NO LATER than 6:30 PM.

Week 8 (10/17/07): **Research Project Bibliography Assembled (10-12 Items)**

Week 9 (10/24/07): **Be prepared to discuss 3-5 specific ideas for Interactive Fiction Project**

Week 10 (10/31/07): **Research Project Bibliography Annotated (25-50 Word Annotations)**

Week 11 (11/07/07): **Be prepared to demonstrate 3-5 aspects of Interactive Fiction Project**

Week 12 (11/14/07): **First draft of Interactive Fiction Project DUE:** ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) NO LATER than 6:30 PM.

Week 13 (11/21/07): Thanksgiving Break--NO SEMINAR

Week 14 (11/28/07): **Final draft of Project Site Report DUE:** ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) NO LATER than 6:30 PM.

Week 15 (12/5/07): **Final draft** of Interactive Fiction Project DUE: ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) NO LATER than 6:30 PM.

Finals Week (12/12/07): The **Final Research Project** is due on the Wednesday (Reading Day) of **Finals Week:** ONE (1) Printed paper copy AND ONE (1) electronic version (sent as an email attachment) are due in the grubby paws (and crowded in-box) of the instructor NO LATER than **6:30 PM on WEDNESDAY, December 12th, 2007.**

Rough Grading Breakdown:

The **Final Research Project** will be worth approximately 35% of the final course grade.

The **Project Site Report** first draft will be worth approximately 10% of the final course grade.

The **Project Site Report** final draft will be worth approximately 15% of the final course grade.

The **Interactive Fiction Project** first draft will be worth approximately 10% of the final course grade.

The **Interactive Fiction Project** final draft will be worth approximately 10% of the final course grade.

The **Final Exam** will be worth approximately 10% of the final course grade.

Preparation, participation, and satisfactory completion of weekly reading and exercises will be worth approximately 10% of the final course grade.

Perfect attendance and prompt arrival is presupposed; failure in this regard would likely result in failure of the course.

Course Disclaimers:

While it is expected that, in general, each student will receive some form of publicly displayed recognition for any work of that student which appears in some recognizable form in the Medieval North Atlantic project, no such recognition will be awarded on C-, D+, D, D-, or F work. The student's name will be mentioned in the general acknowledgments for C, C+, B-, or B work, while the student will receive full and due recognition in the appropriate place in the project for B+, A-, A, or A+ work. These provisos are based on the assumptions that failing work is unlikely to be used on the project at all, and thus no recognition would be due, while middling work will require substantial editing, revising, and augmenting by the instructor before it is fit for use, and thus only some acknowledgment of collaboration is due. Very good and excellent work, on the other hand, will likely pass into the project with little modification, and thus will be fully acknowledged as the student's original work.

Every student must sign a copyright waiver before submitting work for a grade.

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

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change