



THE VIKINGS

Dr. Gabriel Baker

Course Overview

This course surveys the Viking Age (ca. 750-1100 CE), the period in which massive numbers of Scandinavian peoples appeared throughout western Eurasia and the North Atlantic as raiders, traders, conquerors, and colonists. The course aims to provide students with an overview of the major historical events and trends that characterized the Viking Age, giving particular attention to Viking activity overseas, as well as the development of medieval kingdoms in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Moreover, students will delve deeply into central themes and controversies within the field of Viking studies, such as the nature of Viking violence and the processes by which Christianity supplanted Norse paganism. The course will also approach the period with a wide interdisciplinary lens. In addition to historical methods and sources, students will examine the Vikings through surviving material evidence and learn the basics of archaeological method. Finally, students will explore Icelandic sagas and Skaldic poetry in order to understand how cultural values and historical themes were reflected in contemporary (or near-contemporary) literature.

Course Objectives

- ✓ Students will work towards mastery of historical methods, writing, and argumentation, ultimately approaching history as a form of analysis rather than chronology or narrative.
- ✓ Students will improve their ability to analyze, synthesize, and critically evaluate primary sources, including historical accounts, letters, literary works, and poetry, using the tools of historical investigation.
- ✓ Students will critically evaluate medieval and modern controversies regarding the Vikings.
- ✓ Students will understand Viking expansion, specifically how and why medieval Scandinavians appeared among, and interacted with, the peoples of Europe, the Mediterranean, and North America.
- ✓ Students will explore the ways that medieval Scandinavia was increasingly drawn into the cultural ambit of European Christendom, and understand how conversion precipitated both cultural and political transformation.

Course Expectations

In class: When you arrive in class, please take a seat and get out your class materials, including (preferably) a pen and paper for taking notes and a physical copy of the relevant reading assignment. This class will be heavily discussion-based. In order to have the best possible discussions, everyone should have a chance to speak and be heard, and everyone should be able to hear what others are saying. To maintain this classroom environment, it is essential that students and the instructor are treated courteously, that we all listen attentively when others are speaking, and that we avoid interrupting, talking over (or under) one another, the distracting use of electronic devices, etc.

Homework: Before many class periods, I will assign readings from primary and/or secondary sources. These will provide the foundations for classroom activities, so it is important that you do the reading

before coming to class. These readings will vary in length, however, and it is important that you monitor your reading time outside of class. If you feel like you are spending too much time reading, please let me know so we can discuss reading strategies.

In addition to regular class readings, all students will write short responses for each reading assignment. These are just short reflections (a meaty paragraph / about 150-250 words) in which you explain the thesis (or central argument) for secondary sources, and provide a short summary for primary sources. These allow me to see how you are interpreting class materials, to pinpoint areas of difficulty, and to see what topics interest you.

Finally, there will be a few larger assessments throughout the semester, including a short essay, a creative project, and an open-topic research paper (see below). Note that this class is deliberately research and writing intensive, and as such there are no tests or quizzes.

Late work: Barring very exceptional circumstances, I will not accept late work a week after the original due date. You may rewrite one written assignment in conference with me. Rewrites must be completed within two weeks of the original due date (if you did not complete the work at all) or within two weeks of receiving feedback. Also, I do not offer last-minute extensions; however, if something comes up and you give me reasonable notice (at least one week), let me know so that we can discuss options. Please give me as much heads up as possible.

Grading

For every assignment, I will provide you with a rubric that assesses your mastery of several skills and content areas; these include (but are not limited to) Written Expression, Argument & Argumentation, and Knowledge of History. This rubric will be used to calculate your grade on each individual assignment. In turn, each assignment will be worth the following percentage of your grade:

Assignment	Weight of Overall Grade (%)
Short Essay	15
Short Reading Summaries	10
Controversy Piece	15
Research Paper	45
Participation	15

Texts

We will use two main texts in this course:

- Somerville, Angus A., and Russell Andrew McDonald. 2014. *The Viking Age: A Reader*. University of Toronto Press. (“Reader” on the course schedule below)
- Somerville, Angus A., and Russell Andrew McDonald. 2013. *The Vikings and Their Age*. University of Toronto Press. (“Somerville & McDonald” below)
- Byock, Jesse L. 2013. *The Saga of the Volsungs*. Penguin. (“Volsung Saga” below)

The rest of our readings will be available on Canvas. They are drawn from the following books:

- Winroth, Anders. 2012. *The Conversion of Scandinavia*. Yale University Press. (“Winroth A” below)
- Winroth, Anders. 2014. *The Age of the Vikings*. Princeton University Press. (“Winroth B” below)
- Rosenwein, Barbara. 2014. *A Short History of the Middle Ages*. University of Toronto Press. (“Rosenwein” below)
- Haywood, John. 1995. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. Penguin.

Course Schedule

The following lays out the schedule of our class. Below the daily schedule, you will find full descriptions of all the major assignments.

Readings marked “Canvas” will be available on our Canvas site.

Week	Class	Topic	Assignments DUE on this day
1	1	Introduction / Course Overview	None
	2	Scandinavia on the Eve of the Viking Age	Somerville & McDonald, 1-8 Reader: Intro to chapter 1, #1-2 Canvas: Winroth A, 12-23
2	1	Scandinavian Politics & Society	Somerville & McDonald, 39-45 Reader: #'s 3-6 Canvas: Winroth A, 41-51
	2	Women in Scandinavian Society	Reader: #'s 20, 22-23, 27 (a), 28 (a)
3	1	The Religions of the North	Canvas: Winroth B, 181-198 Reader: #'s 7-8, 11-15
	2	Warriors & Warrior Ideology	Reader: #'s 29 (a-c), 30 (a-b), 31 (a, b, e)
4	1	A Viking Burial in Scotland	There is no homework for today. In class we will be examining a Viking Age burial digitally in ThingLink.
	2	Controversies: Warrior Women?	Controversy Write-up Due (see below) Please read each of the following in the order listed here; these will be the basis for the “Controversy” assignment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First read this: Hedenstierna-Jonson et al, “A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics,” <i>AJPA</i> 164, 4 (2017) • Then read an example of how this research was covered in popular media: Greshko, “Famous Viking Warrior Was a Woman, DNA Reveals,” <i>National Geographic</i> • Then read the responses of Viking studies professor Judith Jesch and professor of archaeology Howard Williams • Then read the most recent update by archaeologists: Price et al, “Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj.581,” <i>Antiquity</i> 93, 367 (2019) • If you have time, read an example of recent press coverage from Live Science.
5	1	Byzantium, the Islamic World, and Europe in the Early Middle Ages	Canvas: Rosenwein, 39-114. Note: For this assignment, groups of students will be responsible for different sections of the reading. One group will read on Byzantium, one on the Islamic world, and one on post-Roman Europe. Each student must write down a short summary (c. 250-350 words) of their section and, in conjunction with other members of their group, be prepared to teach other classmates about their material. Groups will be assigned in class. You will hand in your summaries at the end of class.

	2	The Raids Begin	Somerville & McDonald, 16-24 Reader: #'s 39-42 Canvas: Winroth A, 24-40
6	1	The Raids Intensify	Somerville & McDonald, 25-29 Reader: # 51 Canvas: "Viking Settlement" (maps); "The Battle of Maldon" (source)
	2	Causes of Viking Age Expansion	Somerville & McDonald, 8-15 Canvas: Barrett, "What Caused the Viking Age?" <i>Antiquity</i> 82 (2008): 671–685;
7	1	Essay workshop	You should come to class with <i>at least</i> a draft thesis statement and outline for your essay, and ideally with a full rough draft.
	2	Formulating Research Topics	Short Essay Due To allow you time to begin the research paper, we will have no class today. All students are responsible for meeting with me to discuss research topics by the end of the week.
8	1	Saga and Kenning	Somerville & McDonald, 105-128 Take some time to explore this online database of kennings . Example lines from Skaldic poetry (with English translations) can be found here (click through the numbered arrows near the top of the poems to scroll through examples)
	2	The Volsung Saga	Read the Volsung Saga to page 66 (including the intro)
9	1	The Volsung Saga	Read the Volsung Saga from 67 to the end.
	2	Creative Projects	Creative Project Due We will continue developing the research papers in class
10	1	Controversy: Viking Atrocity?	For this assignment, groups of students will be responsible for different readings, as follows: Group 1: Smyth, "The Vikings in Britain" Group 2: Halsall, "Playing by Whose Rules?" Group 3: Winroth, "Violence in a Violent Time" Each student must write down a short summary (c. 250-350 words) of their assigned reading, including a clear articulation of the author's thesis and evidence. In conjunction with other members of your group, be prepared to teach other classmates about your material.
	2	Trading & Raiding, The Eastern Road	Somerville & McDonald, 25-30 Reader: #50, 62, 63, 65, 79
11	1	Developing Research Papers	Work on research papers/presentations <u><i>Be sure to sign up for a research presentation timeslot!</i></u>
	2	Developing Research Papers	Annotated Bibliographies & Topic Proposals Due
12	1	Viking Age Emigration	Somerville & McDonald, 53-56 Reader: # 72 (a-b), 91 Canvas: Winroth B, 45-70
	2	Greenland & Vinland	Canvas: Patricia D. Sutherland, "The Norse and Native North Americans," in Fitzhugh, and Ward

			(eds.), <i>Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga</i> (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); “Contact Between Norse and Native Greenlanders” (source selections) Reader: #74 (a – b), 75, 77, 78; Optional: this pop article
13	1	Developing Research Papers	Rough Drafts Due Peer Review: In class today, at least two students must review your paper and provide feedback. Your peer reviewers should SIGN your paper in some way. To get a full participation score, you must review two papers and have your paper reviewed by two students.
	2	Research Presentations	Research presentations in class
14	1	Research Presentations	Research presentations in class
	2	Research Presentations	Research presentations in class
15	1	Conversion	Canvas: Winroth B, 198-212 Reader: # 90 and 91 (pp. 386-394).
	2	From Chieftains to Kings	Winroth B, 142-156; Haywood, 110-117
16	1	Final Papers	Research Papers Due (no final exam)

Assignments in Detail

Short Essay: In Unit 1 you will write a short essay about the causes of Viking Age expansion. In this essay, you will briefly discuss and compare *at least 2 modern theories* about why the Viking Age began, choosing from the arguments found in Barrett, Somerville/McDonald, and Winroth. **You must explain which of these theories is most plausible and why, judging from the evidence you have encountered thus far in the course.** The paper will be about 3 pages (750 words) and it must include an introduction with a thesis statement—in other words, it should make an argument. You should aim for well-structured paragraphs with topic sentences, and minimal problems with grammar and syntax. Finally, you must cite all sources using a formal citation style. Please use a 12 pt font, Times New Roman or similarly sized, double-spaced with 1 inch margins.

Short Reading Summary for Rosenwein: For this assignment, each student will write a short summary (c. 250-350 words) on their assigned section of the Rosenwein reading. Summaries should highlight the author’s *main points* (use the sub-headings as a guide) and include specific illustrative examples.

“Controversy” Piece: For this assignment, you will have two main tasks. First, you must summarize two scholarly arguments in the “warrior women” debate, providing both their thesis and a brief outline of their main points; you may choose from the arguments of Hedenstierna-Jonson et al, Jesch, Williams, and Price et al. Second, you must describe how the Birka findings were reported in a popular source (either the Nat Geo piece or, with the instructor’s approval, another piece), and explain if your popular source *fairly* or *unfairly* represented the archaeological findings. Summarizing information succinctly but clearly is an important skill in formal, analytic writing. Thus you should be brief, aiming for both economy and specificity of language. Aim for 750 words or less.

Creative Project: In this assignment, you will create your own version of either Skaldic poetry or saga literature. You should take this as an open invitation to play with medieval Norse literary forms within a few loose parameters. First, your work must in some way reflect the literary forms and conventions of our period. For example, your Skaldic poetry might use kennings (a task that requires some inventiveness in English!), or your saga might riff on the family feud stories so common to the Icelandic sagas. Second, your work should be no longer than 750 words (about 3 double-spaced pages)—enough space to write a long poem or a single vignette from a saga. Finally, you must write a reflection piece (c. 250 words). Your reflection should state what your project is and what historical phenomenon it represents, and explain how *specific* features of medieval Norse literature are represented in your project. In the reflection, be sure to cite your sources using a formal citation style.

Short Reading Summary for Smyth/Halsall/Winroth: For this assignment, each student must write down a short summary (c. 250-350 words) of their assigned reading. Summaries should highlight the authors' *main points* and must include specific illustrative examples.

Participation: Classroom participation will be evaluated in a number of ways, including attendance and discussion, but also through regular reading responses (see above). Discussions in this class are essential to student success, since they provide opportunities to make and critique historical arguments in a relatively low stakes environment. Student contributions to discussion should demonstrate familiarity with the material and preparedness for class. However, if you are particularly nervous about talking in class, please meet with me to discuss alternative modes of participation. Attendance is mandatory, though you will be allowed 2 unexcused absences. Absences are excused due to illness, mandatory religious obligations, certain extracurricular obligations, or other unavoidable circumstances. If you will be absent, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

The Research Paper

Part 1: Formulating Research Topics. As indicated on the schedule above, we will have one-on-one meetings to discuss possible research topics. You should come to our meeting with a few broad topic ideas. I recommend that you think about a topic or theme that interests you (e.g. Viking raiding and warfare; women in Viking Age Scandinavia; Norse paganism and Christianity; Saga literature; the exploration of North America, etc.) Then try to narrow that topic into something more specific (e.g. the use of terror tactics in Viking raids; women as leaders in Viking Age Iceland; the influence of Christianity on descriptions of Norse paganism; the role of magic in the Volsung Saga; interactions between Norse explorers and indigenous populations, etc.).

In our meeting, I will help you transform your idea into a research question that sets you up for exploration and an historical argument, and point you in the direction of some research resources.

At this point, do research! You will do your own research for this project, within certain constraints. I highly recommend that you use journal articles and books. I have several journal articles that I will post on Canvas. While you're on campus or in the library, you can search for journal articles and other electronic resources using the library's research databases, e.g. JSTOR. Additionally, the library has a large collection of books on medieval history; I will put some of these on course reserve, but I encourage you to search the stacks! And of course, don't forget our class Reader. It is an excellent bank of primary texts, and it can give you good leads for additional sources. Finally, you may use online sources that are academic in nature, but ask me if you are unsure about the quality of an internet resource. If you use Wikipedia for basic scouting, that's fine, but use it to find other (better) sources—don't cite it directly.

Part 2: Annotated Bibliography and Topic Proposal Due. Once you have settled on a research question and begun to examine your sources, you should write a topic proposal. This should not be very

onerous, and it only needs to be short a paragraph in length. In the proposal, you should state your basic research question and explain why it is a productive avenue for research. (Why is this an important question? What might it tell us about the Viking Age or medieval Scandinavian society?)

You will also turn in an annotated bibliography. This should include 8-10 sources; ideally, at least half of these will be primary sources. For each entry in your bibliography, you should write a sentence or two explaining why that particularly source is relevant to your topic.

Part 3: Draft Research Paper + Peer Review in Class. At this point, you should be well on your way to drafting your paper. The draft paper doesn't need to be 100% complete—that's why it's a draft—but it should have an introduction, a thesis statement, and 5-6 pages of text. You should aim for well-structured paragraphs with topic sentences, and minimal problems with grammar and syntax. Your draft paper should use evidence to make an argument and it should cite all sources. Please use a 12 pt font, Times New Roman or similarly sized, double-spaced with 1 inch margins.

For the Peer Review: in class, *at least* two students will review your paper and provide feedback. Your peer reviewers should SIGN your paper in some way. To get a full participation score, you must review two papers and have your paper reviewed by two other students.

Peer reviewers will be given a rubric and asked to comment on the following items:

- Your thesis statement (is it clear? is it specific?)
- Your overall writing quality (grammar, organization, clarity)
- Your use of interdisciplinary evidence (literature, documentary/historical sources, archaeology, etc.)
- Your engagement with modern scholarship (do you discuss or engage with the work of modern historians?)

Part 4: Research Presentations. The presentation will be 8-10 minutes long (including Q&A at the end). This will roughly follow the format of a research conference, i.e. you will give an abridged, oral version of your research. This presentation should have (1) a clear introduction in which you lay out your topic and thesis/argument, (2) short summaries of several of your main points, including some of your most important evidence, and (3) a conclusion. A successful oral presentation will be well organized and flow logically; if it helps, organize your presentation just like you would a paper (intro, "body paragraphs," conclusion), but with much more concise information. It also helps to practice.

Finally, visuals are highly recommended. However, if you use PowerPoint or other presentation software, please limit your use of text on slides.

If you use PowerPoint, Google slides, or other digital media, please provide a URL to the file.

Part 5: The Final Paper. The final paper will include the following:

1. An introduction with a clear, specific thesis statement.
2. Well-structured paragraphs with crisp topic sentences.
3. Use of evidence to support an argument, with at least one interdisciplinary source (archaeology, non-historical literature, epigraphy, etc.).
4. Engagement with modern scholarship (i.e. it should discuss or engage with the work of modern historians; if there are disagreements in the scholarship, the paper should at least briefly mention these in the main text or in a footnote).
5. Full citation for all sources.
6. A complete bibliography and a consistent citation style (Chicago Style preferred, APA allowed).
7. Minimal issues with grammar and syntax—proofread carefully.
8. A 12 pt font, Times New Roman or similarly sized, double-spaced with 1 inch margins.