

# SCAND 370 / HSTAM 370: HISTORY OF THE VIKINGS

Autumn Quarter, 2009

## Course Information

5 credits, VLPA/I&S

Thomson 119

MTWTh 10:30-11:20 am

(206) 543-7233

Office hours: T 11:30-12:20

and by appointment

## Instructor

Professor Terje Leiren

Office: 318 Raitt Hall

[leiren@u.washington.edu](mailto:leiren@u.washington.edu)

Course Website:

<http://depts.washington.edu/scand/leiren/vikings.html>

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## *Course Description:*

This is a lecture/discussion course on the history of the Vikings. Following a largely chronological sequence, but not rigidly bound by it, the class will examine the history of Scandinavia during the “Viking Age,” approximately A.D. 750 – A.D. 1100, through the written and archeological records. The first half of the course will focus on the Vikings at home in Scandinavia. This will include an examination of the origins of Viking society in the pre-historical period, including aspects of the great migrations and subsequent settlement patterns, the establishment of family farms, and the development of Viking material culture (such as the Viking ship). We will also examine the political, social, and cultural expressions of Viking society, such as commercial expansion, military conflict, and religious expression. The structure and significance of the pre-Christian pagan religion of the Scandinavian North will also be discussed. The second half of the course will focus on the expansion of Viking society and the international contacts of the Vikings through exploration, settlement, trading and raiding. Included in this overview will be Viking activity in Russia, Byzantium, Germany, France, England, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as the North Sea islands, Iceland, Greenland and Vinland (in North America).

Historically, Vikings have inspired, and occasionally been romanticized by, writers and musicians alike, from Richard Wagner in the nineteenth century, J. R. R. Tolkien and “Hollywood” in the twentieth century. What, if anything, is the historical basis of some of these views? Who were these people we call “Vikings” and how did they live? What were the roles of family, law, art, literature in Viking society? And, what has been the influence and legacy of the Vikings on western civilization?

### ***Learning Objectives:***

This course has essentially two learning objectives: to develop a fundamental knowledge of the Scandinavian region in the so-called “Viking age” and; to develop a critical understanding of the history, culture and broader influence of the Vikings at home and abroad. Through lectures, assigned readings, video/film viewings and classroom discussion, the course seeks to create a basic familiarity with, and understanding of, Scandinavian culture and history in the “age of the Vikings” (A.D. 750-A.D. 1100). Students should be able to understand and compare Viking history and culture with other people and regions, including their own, and be able to speak and write accurately about the Vikings and the northern European region in the “age of the Vikings.”

### ***Grades:***

The final grade for this class will be calculated as follows:

- Map Quiz: 10%
- First written exam: 45 %
- Second written exam: 45 %

### ***Course Structure:***

**Lectures:** In-class lectures will be a major component of this class. Lectures will consist of the presentation of topics and themes relating to the main subject of the course – the history of the Vikings. Lectures will occasionally be supplemented by films and videos and guest lecturers as appropriate.

### ***Texts/Required Reading:***

The main text for this class is: Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*.

In addition, students are required to read:

John Haywood’s, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*, *The Prose Edda* (edited by Jesse Byock) and *Egil’s Saga* (translated by Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards).

These books can be purchased at the UW Bookstore. Additional required reading is available online: *The Hávamál* and *The Rigsthula*. Links to these readings are found on the course website -

**<<http://depts.washington.edu/scand/leiren/vikings.html>>**

## Reading Schedule for Exams:

### Map Quiz:

- John Haywood, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings* – maps.

### First Exam:

- Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings* – pp. 9- 184
- John Haywood, *Historical Atlas* – pp. 8-45
- Snorre Sturlason, *Prose Edda* – entire book
- *The Hávamál* (Sayings of the High One) – online
- *The Rigsthula* (The Lay of Rig) – online
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### Second Exam:

- Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings* – pp. 185-323
- John Haywood, *Historical Atlas* – pp 46-135
- *Egill's Saga* – entire book

**Exams:** There are three exams in this class. These include a map quiz and two written exams. Exams are essay-type.

## Course Schedule:

### *The Establishment of Viking Scandinavia:*

- Week 1: Introduction to the Course: Scandinavia and the Background to the Vikings Age; Discussion of the Written Sources; Overview of the Geography of the Viking world.
- Week 2: The Archeological Evidence – Viking ships, Runic stones.

### *Viking Mentality:*

- Week 3: Viking Society: The Rigsthula and the structure of a Viking social order. (Map Quiz, Mon., Oct. 11)
- Week 4: Daily Life in the Viking Age. The *Hávamál* as a guide to the everyday.
- Week 5: Religion and Spiritual Values. The *Prose Edda* and the mythology.

Mid-Term Exam: Thursday, Nov. 5 \*

***Viking Expansion:***

- Week 6: Expansion: Background causes and impulses.
- Week 7: Vikings in Russia, Byzantium, the Low Countries, France.
- Week 8: Vikings in Britain (England, Ireland, Scotland).
- Week 9: Vikings in the North Atlantic: The Faroe Islands, the Shetlands, the Orkney Islands, Iceland, Greenland. The establishment of a new society in Iceland. Conversion to Christianity.
- Week 10: On the Edge – At the End: Vinland and North America. Stamford Bridge and Hastings in 1066 – end of the Viking Age? Review and discussion of “the Viking legacy.”

Final Exam: Monday., Dec. 14, 8:30 -10:00 am.\*

**\*Please use green/blue books and a pen (not pencil) for the written exams.**