



The Ad-Hoc Committee of  
the Secretary-General

**AD HOC**

**MUNUC 37**

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

## CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates,

A super warm welcome for you all to MUNUC 37! My name is Serena Bernstein and I will be serving as your chair for the Ad Hoc Committee. I am a current fourth-year from right outside of Boston majoring in Public Policy with a minor in GIS (spatial data).

After participating in MUN conferences all throughout high school, I knew I wanted to stick with MUN, but through running conferences instead of competing. This is my third year involved in MUNUC and I cannot wait to work with you navigating Danelaw in 900s Britain. They'll certainly be chaos and schemes galore, all of which we hope will put your MUN skills to the test, while also being tons of fun. Myself and my CD have put so much energy into this committee and we could not be more excited to see how you all interact with the wonderful challenges our committee holds and how you all will help us bring it to life.

Beyond MUNUC, I am involved in a handful of other activities at UChicago. Along with being a chair for the college MUN conference at UChicago (MUNUC), I am involved in the campus Hillel, run a humanitarian mapping organization called the Tobler Society, and am working on research re-mapping the 77 Chicago neighborhoods. In my spare time I also love to cook, hike, and paint. Finally, a fun fact about me is that I have gnome and antique map collections (you may notice the mapping theme).

Before I leave you to read the rest of this hefty background guide, I want to emphasize the importance of respect in this committee. We'll be dealing with Viking history, and it's not only important everyone remains respectful to all the other delegates on committee, but also important to employ modern considerations for use of violence during conflict. Of course, we will talk about this more extensively when we're all together. That being said, I know this will be an amazing committee and I look forward to meeting all of you delegates this February!

Lastly, make sure to read the background guide and please reach out over email if you have any questions!

Best,

Serena Bernstein

[srbernstein@uchicago.edu](mailto:srbernstein@uchicago.edu)

Chair

## CRISIS DIRECTOR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to MUNUC 37 and our committee, “Viking ‘Things’: Navigating Danelaw in 850 Britain”. My name is Jose Vazquez and I will be your Crisis Director. A little bit about myself, I was born in Jalisco, Mexico, but grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am a fourth-year student double majoring in Political Science and Germanic Studies. Alongside MUNUC, I am a Crisis Director for ChoMUN, UChicago’s high school conference. Outside of Model UN, I teach elementary students German in an afterschool program, attend a contemporary Spanish book club, participate in our Institute of Politics, and compete in intramural sports.

Serena and I are thrilled to present and explore this time period with you. We pride ourselves on running conferences that break from traditional settings and venture into ideas and topics that delegates have likely never seen before. We have run conferences in Antarctica, space, and now it's onto the vikings. As you read the background guide, we hope you find the topic as fascinating as we do, gain knowledge on the subject, and that you come away with exciting ideas and inspiration for the committee.

What you can expect from me is my utmost dedication to ensuring that the conference runs smoothly for all of you, and that you all feel welcome and respected. I will go over what I am looking for in backroom notes, crisis arcs, and JPDs, and more to ensure we are all on the same page. Additionally, I will be taking and giving feedback, and you can always feel safe to come to me with questions or concerns. To ensure that everyone feels welcome and respected, we will not tolerate any attempts at reverting towards oppressive policies and cultural norms and will not hesitate to shut down crisis arcs that pursue this same goal. We demand that delegates act according to modern standards of respect, allowing this space to be comfortable and accepting for everyone regardless of identity and background.



We envision a space where all of the trust is placed onto you to make this setting your own. Serena and I want to actively encourage your active participation, and innovative and creative ideas. With this, you will be ready to take on crises ranging from political strife, betrayal, Gods, and more. Let's get this Thing going!

Welcome again, enjoy the background guide, and please do not hesitate to reach out to me or the other execs with questions about the committee, research, or anything else you may need.

Best,

Jose Vazquez

[josevazquez@uchicago.edu](mailto:josevazquez@uchicago.edu)

Crisis Director

## COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MECHANICS

The Ad Hoc Committee of the Secretary General is a continuous crisis committee that contains both frontroom and backroom mechanics, with additional special mechanics.

In the frontroom, Serena, your chair, will be the legendary Viking hero, Halfdan Ragnarsson, a renowned leader with sufficient political sway to unite various Viking leaders to this committee's Thing. Fueled by the death of his father and the desire to amass power for the Viking nations, Ragnarsson has called upon various kings, chieftains, and clan leaders to unite under one Thing to coordinate actions, resources, and power. The aim is to expand the scope and influence of Viking power and presence, with an eye on countering the strong kingdoms entrenched in England. As Viking kings, chieftains, and clan leaders of your own various domains and Things, you have all been selected to take part in this Thing because of the resources you can amass for this united coalition, and the legitimacy you hold, facilitating resource development and deployment. There is no member in this Thing that holds more power than another, regardless of difference in title, birthright, lineage, or other factors—all delegates will have equal standing and voting power, with no added influence or power in either the frontroom or the backroom. Each member will have a unique background with some specific areas of expertise, interest, or lore that can inspire the direction of your arc and work in the backroom and frontroom. However, while this can inspire your work, you are by no means required to stick to the elements described in the background; in fact, you are encouraged to make the character your own.

While experience or familiarity with continuous crisis is encouraged for the Ad Hoc, this next section will give a high-level overview of the frontroom and backroom committee structures. Additional detail will also be given at the start of the conference. Frontroom aligns closely with the traditional structure of Model UN. Here, you will sit in a circle amongst one another acting as Viking leaders in this Thing, providing speeches, debating,

writing and passing directives, and responding to crisis cycles. Serena, the chair and Halfdan Ragnarsson, will be in the room, moderating discussion. For the backroom, delegates are asked to write notes in character (your assigned viking), to someone in the backroom to amass resources and power, and ultimately influence the committee and accomplish your character's goals. Please note that notes are narrative and dialogue driven, meaning that you are communicating with someone who you have a "personal connection" with and are essentially creating a story of resources that you want, and how to use those resources for your own personal gain—notes are kept secret from other delegates. Your character's background can be a helpful starting point to think about what resources you can amass and the means to do so, but we once again encourage you to quickly think of the direction you want to take your character. Ultimately, delegates should aim to influence the direction of the committee through their notes, meaning that you create a situation, a crisis, large and notable enough that it creates its own crisis cycle which all other delegates must then respond to.

## Statement of the Problem

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In the complex socio-political landscape of the Viking Age, various forces were at play, significantly impacting the lives of individuals and communities. The era began with problems that created the impetus for overseas raids, which characterized the era. Overpopulation within Viking territories led to a critical need for resources, especially food, driving an increased emphasis on raids, territorial expansion, and trade. For practical reasons, Vikings needed to decide where to raid, where to seek land, and what groups to trade with. However, as clans raided, sought new lands, and traded goods, individual honor remained paramount, with personal reputation often linked to one's success in raids, trade, and relationships with rulers. This meant that decisions were made both for the good of Viking communities, but also for personal gain. Every member of the committee will inevitably need to grapple with these two, sometimes competing, motivations.

However, the Viking Era also saw massive upheaval in Viking Society. The gradual movement towards Christianity introduced a fundamental shift which led to conflict within Viking communities. The traditional system of mutual loyalty between clan leaders and followers, grounded in the worship of old gods, began to erode as Christian values emphasized obedience to a singular divine authority. This religious transition was not universally welcomed; for many Vikings, it signified a dangerous departure from honoring the old gods, which could imperil the success of their communities. However, for those Vikings who were drawn to Christianity, be that because of a spiritual awakening or a strategic political move, the decision for how to convert others in their community was challenging. While many chose forced conversions, leading to significant tension, others gradually introduced Christianity and adapted it to fit traditional Scandinavian paganism.

Another disruption of the established Viking way of life was the push towards unification under centralized kingships. The consolidation of clans into kingdoms like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark reduced the



ability of individuals to carve out distinct identities, seek individual fame and fortune, or establish personal bonds with their leaders. The rise of these kingdoms also ignited inter-clan conflicts and struggles for succession, undermining the previously fluid power dynamics. Delegates will have to seriously consider whether the organizational efficiency of heightened unification is worth the degradation of traditional society.

Moreover, alliances with external powers, such as the British and the Franks, showcased the complex loyalties of the Vikings, who were not always unified in their objectives. Vikings had complex and shifting alliances with each other, but also leaders of overseas kingdoms. The proliferation of power struggles and the constant competition for dominance drove many Vikings to seek new territories, catalyzing an era of extensive travel and exploration. Our committee will primarily focus on the British Isles, but should delegates find the fight for power in this area congested, they may too want to venture as to places like Russia, Greece, or even America.

In this shifting environment, aspiring leaders faced the dual challenges of navigating human politics and appeasing the gods. The quest for power and recognition often meant balancing the demands of both earthly and divine realms, adding layers of complexity to the pursuit of individual and collective goals.

## HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

The time period covered by our committee is the Viking Age, which takes place from about 800 to 1066 AD. This era of the Middle Ages, characterized by extensive global conquest and trade from Norsemen, creates massive shifts in Norse Society. While we will dive into the drivers and nature of these upheavals later in the background guide, this section will provide an overview of Viking History just prior to the Viking Age, specifically who they were and their traditional political Institutions, which will provide our committee's baseline structure.

While our committee will generally refer to "Vikings" or "Norsemen", the group of people who lived in modern Scandinavia, Denmark, Iceland, and parts of Russia during the Middle Ages, it is important to note that this group did not have any significant conception of group identity. The Viking "race", contrived by Western Europeans, was born from perceived cultural difference. Vikings were certainly united by many cultural, religious, and political practices, but different Viking communities spanned vast Northern Europe and as such also had many different practices and beliefs. Their contrived distinct identity derives from their non-Christian spirituality which labeled them as "uncivilized" peoples from unknown foreign lands in the eyes of Western Europeans.

Prior to the Viking Age was the Scandinavian Iron Age, which spanned from about 500 BC through the Viking Age in 1100 AD. The Iron Age, of course, was marked by the introduction of Iron metallurgy. At the beginning of the Iron Age, Scandinavians had been farming for about 3500 years, but with the introduction of Iron, farming practices were rapidly changing. During this time farms were expanding and becoming epicenters of regional power and the Longhouse was developed which allowed communities to cohabitate in these new regional centers. Farms were allowed to grow in part because of these new sturdy iron tools. However, Iron's importance extended beyond agriculture. New weapons, building equipment, and hunting tools, meant early

urban centers could expand, better ships could be built, and these ships could be used with the new weapons to conquer new lands.

As Scandinavian civilization expanded, it developed more distinct territorial divisions. During this time, Scandinavia was divided into several distinct territories with a small ruling elite at its head. Importantly, these territories were not defined geographically, but instead by political and social spheres of influence. These communities were also fluid, as shifting alliances to leadership created opportunities for social advancement.

Later in the Iron Age, at the onset of the Viking Age, these territorial divisions evolved into the Viking “Things”, Scandinavian government and lawmaking assemblies. Things were semi-democratic committees that existed at local, regional, and national levels. Meeting at regular periodic times, Things went on for days and were as much political assemblies as they were ceremonial, economic, and social. Community matters were discussed, laws passed, goods sold, and alliances formed. One could expect to see Ale being distributed, merchants passing through, marriages confirmed, along with the more serious political activities. However, formal membership engaged only a small section of society. They were populated by male heads of household and were led by chieftains, appointed by members of the Thing. While Things had power over many aspects of Scandinavian society, it is important to note that they had limited power of enforcement. While they could decree banishment and other penalizing policies, it was the role of the community and individual families to enforce these policies. Our committee will function as a consolidated Thing, drawing from disparate Viking communities.

During the Iron Age, archeological evidence indicates there was a destructive natural disaster that decimated Scandinavian populations. Now, with the improved technology and the imminence of food scarcity, migration and early raiding began. In the early Iron Age, Danish groups such as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes spread across the North Sea and into modern Britain where they eventually became “English”. Further, the Goths from Sweden spread over much of Europe. At this time, raiding also began and significantly increased the wealth

in the Scandinavian world. However, these raids were often privately funded or were more individually led by those hoping to seek out their own fortune or find necessary resources for their survival. More advanced alliances and raid organization, especially that which involved conquest, became more common during the Viking Age.

A byproduct of more advanced technology and migration was increased trade. During this time, Scandinavians were great producers of textiles, woodwork, furs, amber, honey, and metalworks. They began creating and participating in trading networks around Europe, especially traveling by river to Eastern Europe to sell their goods. Further, the Scandinavians interacted extensively with the Romans around this time, trading with them, and in some cases joining Roman legions to gain wealth. Generally, trade increased Scandinavian wealth especially for families who continued to increase their power.

Finally, during this time Runes were developed. Dating back to 350 AD, runes have been discovered on stone, wood, and bone. While legislature rules without written laws, runes were used for other cultural purposes such as ceremonies, burials, and during wartime.



## Maps and Geography

### Mapping Anglo Saxon England

At the beginning of our committee, Anglo Saxon England exists in a Heptarchy, meaning it is ruled by seven kingdoms. Following the takeover of Britain by the Anglo Saxon Germanic tribes in the 400s, there was a process of political consolidation between the tribes, leading to the rule of these seven kingdoms from about the end of the 5th century AD to the end of the 9th century AD, when the Vikings managed to destroy most of the Kingdoms. The seven kingdoms are as follows: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Wessex<sup>1</sup>.



*Map of Anglo Saxon England<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> The Historical Association. "Anglo-Saxons: A Brief History," n.d. <https://www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/3865/anglo-saxons-a-brief-history>.

<sup>2</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Heptarchy | Definition & Maps." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 19, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Heptarchy>.

## Anglo Saxon Kingdoms

Northumbria was one of the most important kingdoms in Anglo Saxon England. It lies between the Irish Sea and North Sea. To the north, its boundary was the Ayrshire Coast and the Firth of Forth River. To the south, its boundary is the River Ribble and Humber River. Its military strength was greatest in the 600s, prior to the Viking Age. However, during the Viking Era, its most significant contributions were intellectual and artistic. Its monasteries, Wearmouth and Jarrow, were epicenters of Christian intellectualism. Jarrow housed St. Bede and, in another monastery, Lindisfarne, the great Gospel Book was created<sup>3</sup>.

Mercia was an incredibly powerful kingdom, despite continuous dynastic power struggles. Its territory was continuously increasing upwards until the Viking Era due to successful military conquests. But, at the time of our committee, it was bounded by the frontiers of Wales, the River Humber, East Anglia, and the River Thames<sup>4</sup>.

East Anglia is home to the oldest town in England (Colchester) and has more significant regional unity. This unity is both historical but also physiographic. It is a low area almost entirely covered in glacial deposits. It has many shallow valleys covered by rivers, which drain into the North Sea. Not only is East Anglia renowned for its wool production, but its geography means it was great for agriculture and had many fishing ports<sup>5</sup>.

Essex is home to London but was the kingdom with the most political instability. For much of the Anglo-Saxon period, it was under the control of Mercia or had joint kings from different kingdoms. Later, Wessex took over from Mercia controlling much of Essex<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> ———. "Northumbria | Anglo-Saxon Kingdom, England." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 8, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Northumbria>.

<sup>4</sup> ———. "Mercia | Anglo-Saxon, Heptarchy, Wessex." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mercia>.

<sup>5</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "East Anglia | Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 31, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/East-Anglia>.

<sup>6</sup> ———. "Essex | England, Map, & History." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Essex-Anglo-Saxon-kingdom-England>.

Kent is the site of the first Anglo Saxon settlers and first Christian missionaries. Similar to Essex, by the time of our committee, Kent is predominantly under the control of Mercia and later Wessex<sup>7</sup>.

By the time of our committee, Sussex had been split up between many kings and was controlled by other Kingdoms, including Mercia. However, later on these kings were demoted to earls and ruled by their respective kingdoms. Starting in the 800s, this land was almost entirely taken over by Wessex<sup>8</sup>.

The final Kingdom, Wessex, is by far the most important. Over the course of our committee, they will continue to amass power and land. As the only kingdom that did not fall to the Vikings, Wessex, and its famous King Alfred, became ruler over all of Anglo Saxon England by the end of the Viking Age<sup>9</sup>.

### **Mapping Medieval Scandinavia**

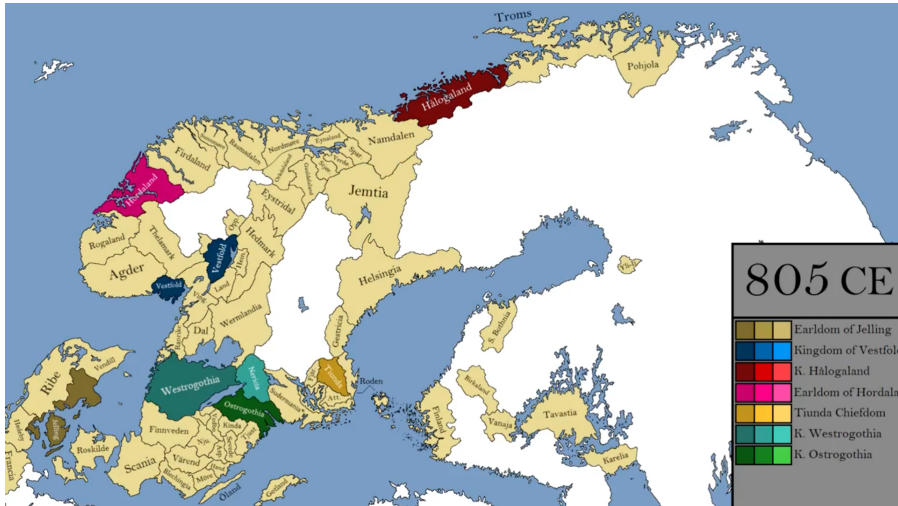
The areas of Medieval Scandinavia inhabited by the Vikings at the beginning of our committee are today called Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. However, at the beginning of the Viking Age in the 800s, this land was split up into many petty kingships that were constantly shifting power. Just as the

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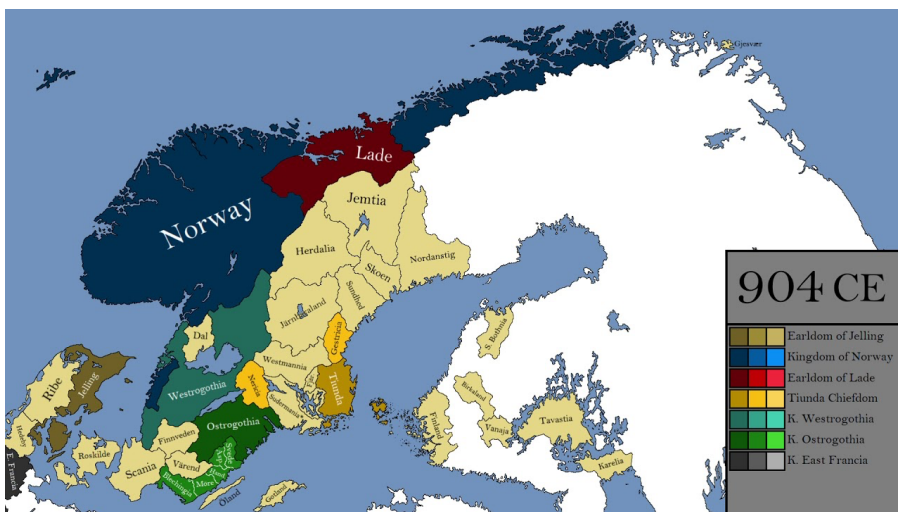
<sup>7</sup> ———. “Kent | Anglo-Saxon, Jutish, Roman.” Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kent-historical-kingdom-England>.

<sup>8</sup> ———. “Sussex | Anglo-Saxon, Saxons, Heptarchy.” Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sussex-historical-kingdom-England>.

<sup>9</sup> ———. “Wessex | Kingdom, History, Map, & Facts.” Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Wessex-historical-kingdom>.



Vikings were jockeying for power abroad, they were also jockeying for power at home. As we progress through history, however, we'll notice that a central theme is consolidation.<sup>10</sup>

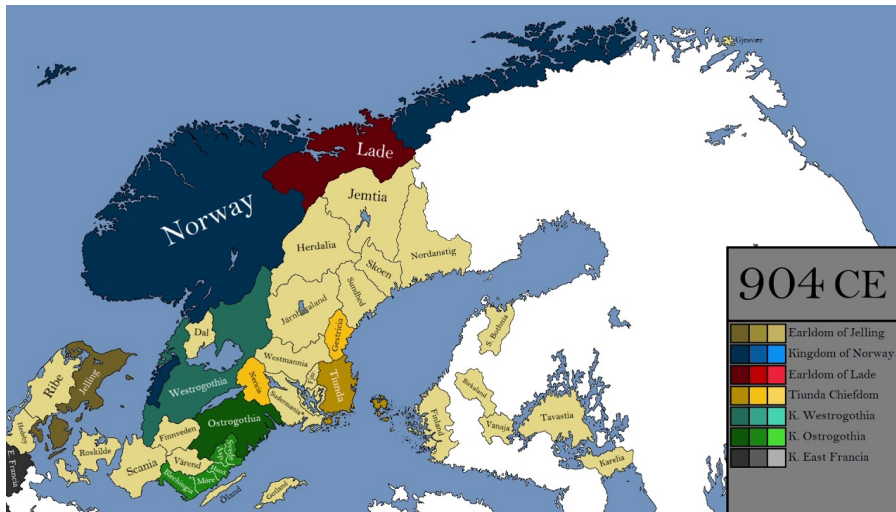


What is now Norway was the first country to consolidate. In the Battle of Hafrsfjord in 885 AD, King Harald Fairhair succeeded in

acquiring the land needed to unify Norway, though it would take much longer for it to be a permanent and stable political structure. Denmark began to unify in the 900s AD in Jutland under King Gorm the Old and his son Harald I. In the coming decades these kings would also do much to pick away at Norwegian territory. Sweden too began to unify during the 900s AD. While there is limited information about this unification, it is detailed in the literary epic Beowulf.

<sup>10</sup> Nokkentved, Christian, and Michael I.A. Linton. "History of Denmark | Flag, Map, Vikings, Facts, & Culture." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 21, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Denmark>.





Some questions that you should think about through these previous sections are how you will balance acquiring power abroad and at home, and whether you should

work together with fellow Scandinavians.

## History of the Problem

**Preamble:** The Viking Age, dated from ca. AD 793-1066, is marked by the expansionary movement of people, capital, goods, and warfare that is widely ubiquitous with the Vikings. These upcoming sections use this era of Viking history to explore the military developments of the Vikings—their motivation for expansion, their conquests, notable figures and battles, and the technological advancements achieved—and the political institutions of Vikings.

## Vikings and the Military

It must first be stressed that not all Scandinavians are Vikings, but all Vikings are Scandinavian. This must be noted because it serves to distinguish the activities that Vikings engaged in that notably put them in this classification, namely the activities of piracy, exploration, raiding, and trade. The people who engaged in these activities then came to be known as Varangians or Vikings, as we will be using in committee. The development of

the military prowess of these Vikings is explored in the following sections—please give particular attention to the pushes and motivations for military expansion, the people and civilizations that Vikings interacted with because of this exploration, and the advancements in technology and strategy during the Viking Age.

## Motivations For Exploration and Expansion

During the times of Antiquity, Scandinavia (referring to present day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) was marked by a relatively slow and stagnant economy and society. While many were skilled laborers, being able to produce crafts and work with metals, their agricultural development was not particularly prone to growth due to the harsh environment and difficulty of connecting goods to merchants.<sup>11</sup> This stagnant economy and society would experience a major and sudden change. One of the primary pushes towards exploration during the Viking Age was due to a population boom. Around the year 750, the Scandinavian climate became less cold, enabling agricultural capacity to expand and thus to feed more mouths. Scandinavia's population began to quickly grow, necessitating more food, which necessitates more land. The problem then became not only of meeting the sustenance needs of a community, but also of the lack of private, cultivable land. Families and individuals were growing both hungry and had no means from which to sustain themselves economically—the stressors of overpopulation were experienced all over.<sup>12</sup> Thus, this mounting pressure caused many Scandinavians to look abroad to find new opportunities.

While the sudden growth in population was one of the main pushes towards exploration abroad, many other factors have been identified by scholars to cause this change in Scandinavia. Two factors enabled the free movement of Vikings, an increase in iron supply and improved sea-fairing capabilities. Iron became more

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<sup>11</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.1) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

<sup>12</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.4) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

common in Scandinavia due to an increase in open mines<sup>13</sup>. The increased supply in iron was used to produce more effective weapons and new agricultural tools, which also enabled more land to be cultivated, both allowing more food to be produced but again only meeting the demands of an increase in population. While technological advancements will be further discussed, sea-faring capabilities of course enabled Vikings to accomplish traveling to begin with– through improved ship and sail design, the Vikings were able to get on their way to explore the world around them.

Political instability and prosecution are also among other factors. From the years 850 to 932, in modern day Norway, King Harald Fairhair attempted to unify Norway which in turn ended the role of many kings and earls. These rulers and their followers decided that places like the Faroe Islands and Iceland would be great destinations for their exile.<sup>14</sup> Settlement in one area could then also lead to further exploration in other neighboring areas due to the proximity. Such is the case for the exploration of Greenland from the Vikings; Icelanders of Norse descent used their seafaring skills to explore the North Atlantic, resulting in the settlement of Greenland.<sup>15</sup>

Others traveled with the aim of carrying out and expanding their professions and trades. Farmers would bring along their entire families, livestock, and all other personal belongings to establish and build up new communities along the islands of the North Atlantic. Seafaring offered new horizons for merchants to expand their markets, which as will be explained further, motivated the exploration of lands very far from Scandinavia.

Finally, it must be acknowledged the role of the Viking's concept of honor. For a Viking, their worth and status in society was determined by their preservation of their honor. Honor was both achieved and

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<sup>13</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.4) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

<sup>14</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. 2022. *Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. (pg. 25) <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=f63d55a0-289d-3c9f-8e7d-253991ced7d0>.

<sup>15</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. 2022. *Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. (pg. 26) <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=f63d55a0-289d-3c9f-8e7d-253991ced7d0>.

preserved through military aggression. The word *drengr* was the word used for warriors; prose, laws, runestones and more allude to the importance of being designated as a drengr, behaving in a drengr-like fashion was seen as very admirable.<sup>16</sup> Forming war bands and traveling from land to land, engaging in warfare (and coming out victorious), having your tales be recounted in heroic poetry, and engaging in raids were riches, land, and property are just many of the means through which honor was gained, all of which became deep-rooted in Viking history and culture.<sup>17</sup> Adding to this was the leading role that religion played in Viking culture, and that Odin was the god of war. Only the best fallen warriors, the drengr, were chosen by Odin to take part in his army in Valhalla to fight against the forces of chaos at the end of the world—this was the greatest honor a Viking warrior could achieve, which only added to the incentive to prove one's worthiness and skill in warfare.<sup>18</sup>

Altogether, it is through a culmination of external factors, modernizing developments, culture and religion, that come together in becoming catalysts for Viking exploration and expansion. The understanding of these catalysts can help explain how this committee came to begin settling in England, but it should not come to explain the motivations of this committee. While honor and violence were deep-rooted in Viking culture, such motivations will not take place during committee. Delegates are encouraged and advised to think of how to challenge the status quo of this history and think about how you can make it fit to the modern standards of today.

## Timeline of Conquests

With the backdrop of the motivations for expansion, the Vikings activity across multiple areas of the world becomes staggering. The following is a high-level overview of the journeys Vikings took during the Viking

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<sup>16</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. 2022. *Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. (pg. 46) <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=f63d55a0-289d-3c9f-8e7d-253991ced7d0>.

<sup>17</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. 2022. *Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. (pg. Pg. 46-48) <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=f63d55a0-289d-3c9f-8e7d-253991ced7d0>.

<sup>18</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. 2022. *Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. (pg. 50) <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=f63d55a0-289d-3c9f-8e7d-253991ced7d0>.

Age, with a closer examination on events for their relevance to this committee. These closer examinations will then also describe important battles, and notable figures.

The first appearance of Vikings in England is in 789, when three Viking ships arrived to the Isle of Portland. This first appearance was largely uneventful, with the Vikings only spending a short amount of time on the island before leaving. It seems to have been a more “explorative mission” for future expeditions.<sup>19</sup>

In 793, the Vikings would return to England, this time attacking Lindisfarne. Lindisfarne held huge importance for Anglo-Saxon England because of the strength of its religious identity and community. The monastery was very wealthy, and they had a strong monastic community that held a lot of political power across north-eastern England. When the Vikings arrived, they quickly exploited the city’s lack of defense by its seaports. They took control of the entire community without any opposition. The news spread across Northumbria, creating fear for what was to come to the region from the Vikings and beginning the image of the “pagan devils” that stuck in contrast to the Christianity of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Northumbria would be attacked again in 794 but this time the Norwegian Vikings faced strong opposition by the local communities, causing them to flee to not incur too many casualties for the already small amount of men that they brought for this expedition.<sup>21</sup> This expedition highlighted how early on, Vikings could not coordinate a large enough attack on any major area. Instead, they had to settle for attacking smaller, isolated religious sites where they would not encounter strong resistance. The smaller scale expeditions also meant that

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<sup>19</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.9) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

<sup>20</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.9) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

<sup>21</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.12) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

the outcomes were very limited in means and did not contribute to generating large amounts of wealth or land acquisition.

The Vikings also begin to pivot their expedition strategy, looking to other areas beyond England realizing that England would require a more concentrated military strategy and larger amounts of resources. In 798 Vikings raid the Irish Kingdom of Brega, and the southern city of France, Aquitaine. Charlemagne begins to take notice of Viking's increased military presence and organizes a formal coastal defense against the Vikings in 800. Regardless, the Vikings then attack Frisia (encompassing land in the Netherlands and northwest Germany), and reach all the way to the Byzantine empire, reaching the Paphlagonian coast around the 830s.<sup>22</sup>

It was not until 840 that the Vikings organized their first ever large-scale attack on England. Targeting the Kingdom of Wessex, the Scandinavian Vikings organized several different war bands to create one large army. They mobilized with 35 ships. Though the King of Wessex, Aethelwulf, moved against this incoming wave of Vikings, the Kingdom was defeated after three days of battle in the Battle of Carhampton in Somerset. This was the first major battle waged between the Scandinavians and Saxons.<sup>23</sup> The Vikings continued to attack and take resources away from the Kingdom of Wessex, though Aethelwulf tried with several smaller scale battles to push them away. But most importantly, the success of this Wessex incursion signaled to the Vikings that the Saxons were not strong enough to defend against seaborne attacks, and that if properly organized, the Vikings could succeed in England.

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<sup>22</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. n.d. "Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids." In . Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. xviii) [https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp\\_xviii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexyy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexyy55](https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp_xviii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexyy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexyy55).

<sup>23</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.12) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71eb55a1496c>.

There were still more incursions occurring after this battle, notably Vikings spent their first ever winter in Ireland in 840, the first ever raid on Spain was recorded in 844, both Paris and Hamburg were plundered in 845, a famous Viking, Bjorn Ironside, makes an expedition to Spain, North Africa, Italy, and France, and an attack on Constantinople is repelled in 860.<sup>24</sup> But with all of this activity, there are the Viking leaders that have conducted raids in England that are gathering together, coordinating their individual forces, people, and resources to create a land fleet that can invade England.

The army that was assembled came to be known as the “Great Heathen Army”, a name coined by the Saxons. The army was made up of several thousands of people (though the exact number is not known) across Scandinavia, the majority were Danes, but there were many from Norway and Sweden, and some later arrived via Francia<sup>25</sup> The army was originally led by the five sons of Ragnar Lodbrok, another legendary Viking who is a descendant of the Sigurd Ring the king of Sweden and carried out raids on Paris and Northumbria in 860. The five sons are Ivar the Boneless, Björn Ironside, Sigurd Snake-in-the-Eye, Halfdan, and Ubba. The goal of the Great Heathen Army was to take control of the four English kingdoms: East Anglia, Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex. To do so, they decided that rather than arriving through Wessex, they would begin through East Anglia and Kent. It was in 865, when the long-planned invasion became a reality.<sup>26</sup> The Great Heathen Army arrived in England,

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<sup>24</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. n.d. “Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids.” In . Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. xviii) [https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp\\_xviii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55](https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp_xviii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55).

<sup>25</sup>Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. n.d. “Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids.” In . Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. 126) [https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp\\_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55](https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55).

<sup>26</sup>Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. n.d. “Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids.” In . Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. 126) [https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp\\_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55](https://viewer-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflD=eds&lpid=lp_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexvy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexvy55).

beginning a long line of encounters between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons that would have huge effects on the political organization of England, culture, religion, and would test the resiliency and organizational structure of the Vikings.

While this committee will continue the timeline of the Great Heathen Army—in fact starting in 850, 15 years before the official launch of the Great Heathen Army in England—this timeline overview illustrates how varied and wide the goals and excursions of the Vikings reached. It thus follows that delegates should feel free to follow along a timeline that they find most interesting and that they would like to make their own, whether that be through the front room by directing resources outside of the Great Heathen Army, or in the back room through backroom arcs. It is ultimately the delegate with power over their journey.

## Viking Equipment, Tactics, Strategies, and Technological Advancements

It is only fitting to begin with the main component through which Vikings were able to become so ubiquitous beyond their shores, Viking ships. Viking ships are clinker-built wooden ships, with a keel, oars, and sail. They are specially designed to operate in shallow water and even large ships can be landed on gently sloping beaches—the rudder was also removable so that it was not damaged with the seabed.<sup>27</sup> Originally, Viking ships did not have a sail, they were instead rowed along. But with the development of the sail, Vikings were now able to go out onto open sea, thus allowing them to reach land all over the world.<sup>28</sup> It was thanks to the development of the keel that Vikings were able to equip their ships with a sail. Along the years, Vikings would refine their ship design

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<sup>27</sup> Kim Hjarðar and Vegard Vike. n.d. “Vikings at War.” Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. 136) [https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=c000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp\\_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+techno%3dlogy+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj](https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=c000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+techno%3dlogy+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj).

<sup>28</sup> Kim Hjarðar and Vegard Vike. n.d. “Vikings at War.” Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg.138) [https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=c000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp\\_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+techno%3dlogy+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj](https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=c000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch-ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+techno%3dlogy+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj).



to create broader, faster, and easily maneuverable seagoing ships. It should be emphasized that Viking ships are extremely quick.

Sailing from Denmark or southern Norway, it was possible to reach England through the North Sea in two or three days in good weather. Vikings would usually take larger ships called cargo ships, “*Knarrs*”, that were designed to carry good and heavy freight, and a lot of people. It had a capacity of about 60 tonnes, which meant that it could comfortably fit everything needed for the settlement of a new land (think livestock, raw materials, tools, etc.) and to take back any goods garnered from an expedition.<sup>29</sup> Navigation on the open sea was done without very formal navigational equipment like a magnetic compass or sea charts. Thus, it is likely that Vikings navigated through techniques of landmark navigation, latitude sailing, and celestial navigation. The main obstacle Vikings faced was the weather: any bad weather would steer a Viking off their course and would frequently lead to shipwrecks and being lost at sea. Vikings would then have no option but to abandon their plans and return home.<sup>30</sup>

With every Viking came a form of equipment that they carried. Weapons were more than just objects used in battle; however, they distinguished the owner’s social status, and many of the developments in arms at this time came from improving quality and ornamentation to symbolize a greater social status.<sup>31</sup> Specialized craftsmen forged these weapons, using the best materials they could acquire and controlling the temperature during the various phases of production. The weapons were usually swords, axes, shields, bow and arrows, spears,

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<sup>29</sup> Kim Hjarðar and Vegard Vike. n.d. “Vikings at War.” Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg.141) [https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=e000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp\\_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+technology+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj](https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=1468420&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=e000xna&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp_111&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fz7otg5i4fj%3flimiters%3dFT1%3aY%3febscohostsearchtext%3dViking+technology+&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=z7otg5i4fj).

<sup>30</sup> Tristan Mueller-Vollmer, and Kirsten Wolf. n.d. “Vikings : An Encyclopedia of Conflict, Invasions, and Raids.” In . Accessed July 28, 2024. (pg. 171) [https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp\\_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexyy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexyy55](https://viewer-ebscohost-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/EbscoViewerService/ebook?an=3197454&callbackUrl=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco.com&db=nlebk&format=EB&proflid=eds&lpid=lp_xvii&ppid=&lang=en&location=https%3a%2f%2fresearch.ebsco-com.proxy.uchicago.edu%2fc%2fjaglh%2fsearch%2fdetails%2fzhzbexyy55%3flimiters%3dNone&isPLink=False&requestContext=&profileIdentifier=ijaglh&recordId=zhzbexyy55).

<sup>31</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.147) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

and javelins. There was also a hierarchy for the weapon that one was able to acquire, with only the most prominent warriors using swords, and most others using axes.

Both on land or at sea, Vikings had similar tactics in preferring tight formations stretched out in a line. On land, this meant standing shoulder-to-shoulder creating “shield walls” for defense with spears, with archers in support of them. Then, there would be a sort of grid formed of Viking warriors, with notable columns. The columns allowed for flexibility in the moment, rapidly allowing either a stone wall defense of shields, or activating into aggressive tactics given the name of *svinefylkring*, “boar’s snout.” As mentioned, this looked similar to what happened at sea, with ships lined up and roped together facing the enemy. Then, all the fighting would happen at the front of the ship, with more Vikings ready to jump into the battle in the same columns.<sup>32</sup>

For the committee, it could be useful to think of the economy and social implications of weapons, with knowledge of tactics making you stand out as a strategizer among your peers.

## Political Institutions

What you may have picked up from the name of this committee, and its various presence throughout the background guide is the usage of the word “Thing.” Thing was the word used for an assembly of people, that largely resembles a democratic town hall, in that people gathered together in a prominent place, and carried out Viking’s system of justice and administration. Here, local disputes were resolved and binding laws were created. The Thing was presided over by a speaking leader, and also allowed for other chieftans to be elected. Things also served as a space for religious devotion and commerce.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have called Things as the “Viking Cradle of democracy” and this will surely be explored and tested throughout this conference. Though it is more accurate

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<sup>32</sup> Esposito, Gabriele. 2021. *Armies of the Vikings, AD 793–1066 : History, Organization and Equipment*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military. (pg.157) <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9fa16fc-d44a-39ef-9ecd-71cb55a1496c>.

<sup>33</sup> Ahlness, Ellen A. 2020. “The Legacy of the Ting: Viking Justice, Egalitarianism, and Modern Scandinavian Regional Governance.” *World History Connected* 17 (1). [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum\\_ahlness.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum_ahlness.html).

to spell the assembly as *Ting* as this is the spelling that was used in old Nordic, the pronunciation of the word is *thing* (which is where the English word comes from), thus the same spelling will be used for the sake of simplicity. The following sections will provide an overview of the political institutions found during the Viking Age, introducing basic but salient laws at the time, inter-Viking political interactions (namely, exploring more deeply the role of Things and other political institutions), how political institutions looked with interactions with Anglo-Saxons and the changes that occurred during conquest, and the economics of the Viking Age.

### **Structure of Law and Politics in the Viking Age**

The Viking Age is marked by a decentralization of power. Rather than having unified kingdoms with clear heads of power and political institutions, power was scattered across many people, called chieftains. Chieftains are warlords who lead a small group of people, usually raiding warriors.<sup>34</sup> Amassing many people was the sign of a powerful and respected chieftain. To obtain both the number of Vikings and respect needed to be a chieftain, they needed to be victorious in battle thus allowing them to obtain wealth and resources, which they could then generously disperse to their group. This system of loot and reward incentivized a cycle of generosity from the chieftain that was reciprocated with a larger number of people wanting to work under the chieftain. The main assets that were given out were silver and gold (since fiat money did not yet exist) and land.<sup>35</sup> Feasts were also very popular.

Historians have pointed out that while the Viking Age is characterized by the decentralization of power, the chieftain system does promote the consolidation of power. This was in fact the case and became noticeable by the increased size of Viking fleets. As chieftains amassed more power, land, and riches, and in turn a larger

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<sup>34</sup> “Viking Political Institutions.” n.d. *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog). Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-political-institutions/>.

<sup>35</sup> “Viking Political Institutions.” n.d. *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog). Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-political-institutions/>.

number of warriors, they could use these assets to mobilize on other chieftains and win over their resources. These powerful chieftains would later become kings. Denmark saw this process occur in eighth century AD, Norway in the tenth century, and Sweden in the thirteenth century.<sup>36</sup>

The rise of kings and kingdoms made sharp political distinctions with the ruling system of chieftains. For one, kings could no longer afford to engage in the same loot and reward system that they had done as chieftains. Instead, kings made clear and impersonal administrative and military structures that had a task to fulfill, and compensation that was awarded for the successful execution of the task. Vikings were no longer just warriors, but rather served a specialized role. Chieftains were also working with a large array of people from various backgrounds, and notably moved and roamed around to their newest quest. Kings on the other hand had to establish clear kingdom boundaries that delineated the extent of their rule. These clear boundaries then also facilitated who kings could tax, and that tax was then used, ideally, to raise and maintain an army for the kingdom's protection.<sup>37</sup>

The rise of kings and kingdoms brought in impersonal inter-Viking political interactions between subject and ruler. This was a clear break in the previous direct and friendly, bond/loyalty structure that maintained chieftains and warriors together. However, inter-Viking political interactions did change with the introduction of the Thing. Scandinavian culture largely promoted the adage of “an eye for an eye” which led to brutal and long-standing feuds between individuals, families, and clans. The severity of this norm threatened the progress and expansion of the Viking Age, especially as it relates to organizing large amounts of people. A community-supervised forum, the Thing, developed as a remedy for this issue.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Viking Political Institutions.” n.d. *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog). Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-political-institutions/>.

<sup>37</sup> “Viking Political Institutions.” n.d. *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog). Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-political-institutions/>.

<sup>38</sup> Ahlness, Ellen A. 2020. “The Legacy of the Ting: Viking Justice, Egalitarianism, and Modern Scandinavian Regional Governance.” *World History Connected* 17 (1). [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum\\_ahlness.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum_ahlness.html).

Things had a hierarchy of organization, where they could be called up as a community, a province, or in rare cases as a national gathering. Local Things were then represented at higher-level Things, which also meant they could be quite large. Here, members of the Thing legislated laws, elected chieftains, and judged transgressors. The judge was referred to as the Lawspeaker, who also memorized the law.<sup>39</sup> Regional Things were crucial in creating an early representative system where conflicts could be resolved through communal agreement and clear structures, rather than brutal revenge and feuds.

Things were mainly constrained to remain on a regional level because of Scandinavia's geographical constraints. It was difficult to travel among the mountainous terrain. The regional organization also had the added advantage of effectively maintaining legal authority over trade expeditions. Vikings were traveling all over the globe, interacting with different customs and legal systems. The Thing structure, namely that it only depended on the agreement of the people presiding over the Thing, easily translated expedient, consistent, and legitimate rulings to wherever Vikings found themselves. This allowed regions in Scandinavia to uphold their laws for incoming Vikings, and for Vikings in other regions of the world to come to legitimate decisions. Maintaining a dispersed and large amount of regional-level Things also meant that it was nearly impossible to create a unified and universal punitive code. This meant that it was a Scandinavian's individual responsibility to present and follow through with a criminal case to a Thing, rather than having public prosecutors.<sup>40</sup>

Similar to contemporary politics, particularly in the US, Scandinavian society also just better trusted and valued the judgment of their region, rather than that of a fellow "kinsperson" farther away. Regional Things reflected that region's culture, religion, and values; thus, who better to judge what that would look like than a

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<sup>39</sup> Ahlness, Ellen A. 2020. "The Legacy of the Ting: Viking Justice, Egalitarianism, and Modern Scandinavian Regional Governance." *World History Connected* 17 (1). [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum\\_ahlness.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum_ahlness.html).

<sup>40</sup> Ahlness, Ellen A. 2020. "The Legacy of the Ting: Viking Justice, Egalitarianism, and Modern Scandinavian Regional Governance." *World History Connected* 17 (1). [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum\\_ahlness.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum_ahlness.html).

fellow neighbor. This added to a lot of variability to what laws were more valued than others, and what the punishment for misconduct and breaking of laws looked like. This variability was further complicated with the transition from paganism to Catholicism.

Overall, Things were a robust function of political life during the Viking Age, that brought stability and organization that was largely lacking under chieftains. The regional level of things allowed solidarity to be built up among Thing members, which created a bottom-up approach of building up a Thing, which meant that transition of powers did not create shocks in the region. Farmers held a lot of power in Things, largely because they presided over the region. But with the rise of kings and kingdoms, and thus the centralization of power, Things slowly faded away from the political life of Vikings and took on a much smaller or non-existent role. The shift towards centralized power would be slow, meeting a lot of resistance from regions who wanted the right to self-determination and did not believe in a unified people, but the transition would surely happen. Regardless, the structure of this committee lays its foundation as the Thing, and it is this model that delegates will have to leverage to advance their standing among others.

## The Economy

Complimentary to political institutions is the economy. The geographical constraints of Scandinavia, particularly its cold weather, made it difficult to develop large-scale agriculture which is the backbone of many developing economies. This required their economy to revolve around a long-distance trade economy that interacted with many nations for imports and exports. Vikings would obtain goods like timber, amber, and furs, and would trade them as far as Kiev, Bulgur, Constantinople, and Baghdad. Vikings would then receive silver coins, silk, glass, and other goods that they did not have access to. These long distances had to result in luxury

goods to make them profitable.<sup>41</sup> Silver was plentiful in the Islamic region because of silver mines found near Baghdad.

The large deposits of silver that are found now in Scandinavia that date to the Viking Age are largely from Baghdad during the Abbasid Empire. During the ninth century, Vikings likely reached Constantinople evidenced by trade declines in Baghdad at similar times, replaced by goods from the new empire.<sup>42</sup> Vikings were likely aware of the happenings of the Byzantine Empire, and were looking to stable markets to make the trips worthwhile. The influx of silver from these empires spurred the transition from a trade economy based on primitive “money” such as sheep or grain, to precious metals in various forms: lumps, ingots, and jewelry. By the ninth century, silver became the backbone of the Viking economy and could be widely found across Scandinavia.<sup>43</sup> The proliferation of silver meant that local trade began to flourish. Fishers began selling their catch directly to consumers. Artistry and crafting began to rise, and entire trading towns sprung up, particularly along the coast.<sup>44</sup>

Access to global imports was vastly important for Vikings. Glass was used to make beads for ornamentation, which made it a marker of one’s wealth and social status. The same was true for silk, as the finest silks from the Byzantine Empire and China were highly prized. Wine from Germany and France then also became important, particularly in feasts.<sup>45</sup> In return, Vikings were a huge player in global exports, particularly in furs. The thick furs found from unique species in Scandinavia like foxes, otters, beavers, and bears were not found in the southern regions of the world.

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<sup>41</sup> “Environment and Trade: Viking Age (Article) | Khan Academy.” n.d. Accessed August 14, 2024.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/medieval-times/environment-and-trade/a/environment-and-trade-viking-age>

<sup>42</sup> “Environment and Trade: Viking Age (Article) | Khan Academy.” n.d. Accessed August 14, 2024.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/medieval-times/environment-and-trade/a/environment-and-trade-viking-age>

<sup>43</sup> McKay, Andrew. 2020. “The Viking Economy: Trade in the Viking Age.” Life in Norway. October 2, 2020.

<https://www.lifeinnorway.net/viking-economy/>.

<sup>44</sup> McKay, Andrew. 2020. “The Viking Economy: Trade in the Viking Age.” Life in Norway. October 2, 2020.

<https://www.lifeinnorway.net/viking-economy/>.

<sup>45</sup> McKay, Andrew. 2020. “The Viking Economy: Trade in the Viking Age.” Life in Norway. October 2, 2020.

<https://www.lifeinnorway.net/viking-economy/>.

We expect that delegates will likely try to leverage the global trade that Vikings engaged in. However, it is still important to note that Vikings did place a lot of emphasis on their local economy, particularly in farming crops like barley and oats, and domestic animals such as cows, sheep, pigs, and goats. Of course, land owning was its own form of economy that promoted the development of land and trade and produced social hierarchies. Thus, we encourage delegates to engage with all levers of the Viking economy.

## Viking's Political Interactions Outside of Scandinavia

Viking socio-political interactions are often characterized as barbaric and distinct to what was happening in neighboring realms and the global south. As Vikings began to interact with different people, cultures, and institutions, the characteristics of Vikings would prove to be drastically different. However, some historians have argued that this sharp division between two geographically located cultures, Scandinavia versus Continental is exaggerated, and that the divisions are not in fact as sharp as thought.<sup>46</sup> The emphasis on the distinction between these two geographic cultures comes from historical attempts (largely successful) in painting the Scandinavian north as barbaric and backward to the happenings in Continental Europe. By the 8th century, Franks and Frisians (both encompassing large parts of Northwest Europe, particularly Frisians who dwelled in the northern coastal regions of the Netherlands and Germany) described Vikings with the terms of 'pagans' and highlighted their own people's Christianity.

But within this same time as the onset of the Viking Age, was the beginning of the Carolingian Expansion in Continental Europe. The Carolingian Expansion emphasized the unification of various European groups through Christianity, lacking other forms of socio-political markers that would signify a shared identity. Thus,

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<sup>46</sup> Croix, Sarah, and Nelleke IJssennagger - Van Der Pluijm. 2021. "CULTURES WITHOUT BORDERS?: Approaching the Cultural Continuum in the Danish-Frisian Coastal Areas in the Early Viking Age." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46 (3): 304–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1687332>.



the attacks on the Viking's own socio-political markers, namely religion, were used politically to create a distinction between peoples, showing that the north and south were in fact different, especially along religion. This was particularly important to emphasize to Frisians, who were not yet incorporated into the Carolingian Empire, which by extension proves how elusive a unified identity was during this time, and why the distinction between Scandinavians and Continental Europeans was not always clear. Historians thus argue that Vikings attacks on Continental Europe were on political fronts rather than cultural.<sup>47</sup>

However, Viking interactions with Continental Europe did have an impact on the trajectory of Viking history, namely in the Christianization of Vikings. The importation of Christianity was happening as Vikings continued to interact with people from Continental Europe. Slowly, more and more Vikings began to convert to Christianity, leaving behind paganism. The importance of this Christianization pronounced itself alongside the rise of kings and kingdoms. During the era of politics under chieftains, allegiance between chieftain and warrior was set on mutual obligation put forth by pagan sacrifice. Vikings would offer sacrifices to the gods in exchange for success in all aspects of life, most relevant in war. Thus, a chieftain would rely on their warriors maintaining the gods appeased. But this also meant that if the mutual obligation was broken, usually on the side of the warrior, they could just refuse to serve their chieftain. But with the rise of Christianity, the relationship between the ruler and the fighter changed to reflect language borrowed from Christianity. The warriors now served their ruler with unconditional devotion, never to be broken without punishment.<sup>48</sup>

The Christianization of Vikings also reflected in the proceedings of Things. As Things were reflections of the regions cultural and social norms, early Things in Norway began to reflect the rise of Catholicism. Punishments for criminal acts like murder had fines, 15 marks, and placed severe punishments for those found

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<sup>47</sup> Croix, Sarah, and Nelleke IJssennagger - Van Der Pluijm. 2021. "CULTURES WITHOUT BORDERS?: Approaching the Cultural Continuum in the Danish-Frisian Coastal Areas in the Early Viking Age." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46 (3): 304–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1687332>.

<sup>48</sup> "Viking Political Institutions." n.d. *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog). Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-political-institutions/>.

guilty. Things facilitated the introduction of Christianity, as it could carry out ‘the will of the divine’ and bring justice to perceived sinners and wrongdoers, raising the legitimacy of the Church.<sup>49</sup>

The political interactions that will be most salient to this committee will be between the Vikings and Britain. What is characteristic of English politics during this timeframe is how fragmented kingdoms in Britain were. They too were battling with a clear unification between its distinct regions. England was not yet England. This committee will engage with the politics that come from establishing stable political institutions in a region where that is not the case, and from an attacking force, the Vikings, where that is also not the case in the most modern sense of kingdom building. Historically, the Kingdoms of Wessex and Southwest Mercia made a treaty with the Vikings that allowed the English to live peacefully in their territories, while the Vikings began their rule in the Thames region.<sup>50</sup> Delegates can use the political interaction context explained in this section as a blueprint to how to contend with the polarity, or maybe lack thereof, between the British and Vikings. Crisis will challenge maintaining Viking political institutions intact while contending with external interactions coming from the new region that is being explored.

While Vikings are known for their raids, they have an incredibly rich and complex culture and society which not only dictated life overseas, but also the lives of many members of Viking society who remained in settlements at home.

## Norse Society: Social Structures

Norse Society was clearly stratified. At the top of the social hierarchy were the earls (Jarl). While Early in the Viking age these earls were chieftains and warlords who had won considerable wealth and thus had amassed

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<sup>49</sup> Ahlness, Ellen A. 2020. “The Legacy of the Ting: Viking Justice, Egalitarianism, and Modern Scandinavian Regional Governance.” *World History Connected* 17 (1). [https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum\\_ahlness.html](https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiillinois.edu/17.1/forum_ahlness.html).

<sup>50</sup> Niles, John D., and Mark Amodio. 1987. “Introduction: The Vikings and England.” *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (3): 279–83.

loyal followings, later in the Viking Age, these earls would become Kings and land was held by loyal, but subordinate earls.

However, most members of Viking society fell into the second social class, free men (Karlar). Free men fell under the protection of Viking law and held several positions in society. An extensive number of free men were farmers, who either worked their own land or the land of a wealthy earl. However, many free men were craftsmen, merchants, or warriors. For the Vikings, land was typically passed down to the oldest son, meaning the warrior class typically comprised unpropertied and unmarried youngest sons. Along with pressures relating to community wellbeing, raids were a means for these warriors to make individual fortunes and would have provided one of the only means of social mobility. Typically, these raiders would venture out for periods at a time, but return to their farmstead, bringing with them whatever they had plundered.

Finally, free Vikings owned slaves (Proelar), who were used for farm labor. One could become a slave because they were born one, captured in war, or because they went bankrupt. But, these slaves also were apart of an expansive slave trade existing across Asia and Europe at the time and would have been frequently bought and sold. Further, slaves were sometimes killed when their master died and buried alongside them to accompany them to the afterlife<sup>51</sup>.

## Norse Society: Food and Drink

Vikings had a food and drink culture heavily influenced by what foods and animals could flourish in Northern Europe. While the media depicts Vikings indulging in meat and mead, these were reserved only for special occasions. Especially mead, which was reserved for the elite and was viewed as a drink of the gods. Instead, Vikings primarily subsided on the following diet: Dairy products (milk, cheese, curds, whey), Grains (wheat, rye,

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<sup>51</sup> Norse Mythology for Smart People. "The Viking Social Structure - Norse Mythology for Smart People," October 5, 2017. <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-social-structure/>.

barley, oats), Fruits (strawberries, blackberries, crabapples), Nuts, Vegetables (peas, beans, cabbage, turnips), Fish (as well as eels, squid, seals, and whales), Meat (cows, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, chickens, ducks, seabirds). All this food was eaten fresh as salt was scarce, meaning there were limited means for food preservation. For drink, Vikings primarily made wines and ales, primarily drinking ale as it was much safer than water.

The Vikings could expect to eat their food in a number of different community-oriented formats. Many meals were eaten in a large family room twice a day, others were ritual feasts (such as weddings or business contracts), and others were the *sumbl*, the Viking drinking party.

## **Norse Society: Personal Hygiene and Dress**

Vikings are far from their televised grimy and boorish characterization. In fact, even Christian chroniclers noted their attention to personal appearance. Along with fine clothes and jewelry, they took care of personal hygiene. Clothing was typically made of wool, linen, and animal hides. Jewelry was often made of any available metal, from gold and silver to tin and copper. Further Most Vikings carried combs and washed themselves and their clothes weekly - something which many Anglo Saxons viewed as objectionable. The reason the Vikings took pride in their appearance was cultural. They believed that you went to the afterlife in the state you were before death. Hence, you should always dress how you would want to appear before the gods.

## **Viking Women**

While not much is known about women in the Viking Age, historic writings give us a small glimpse into their daily lives. Viking women certainly lived in a male dominated society, but they had many responsibilities that varied with class. Women on farmsteads were expected to cook and produce textile work, along with managing the farm and the rest of the household while their husbands were overseas on raids. This role extended to elite women, who were sometimes documented to take on their husband's fortunes and responsibilities following their deaths. and furthermore, it seems that as the Vikings traveled and settled abroad, Viking women

joined in these migrations, helping establish settlements. Other roles women would have played in Viking society have less documentation. Tradeswomen, for example, seemed to exist in urban centers across the Viking world, and were involved in commerce between different areas of Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Further, the even more contentious female Warrior has been illuded to in some later sources. While this has more limited evidence, it is possible that women were involved in raids alongside their male counterparts.

## Norse Cosmology

Norse Cosmology divided the world into nine realms. In the center of the universe is the world-tree, Yggdrasil, and the nine realms spread out from the branches, roots, and sides of the tree. The nine realms are as follows:

1. Asgard : Realm of the Aesir (one the two god families). Connected to the human world by a rainbow bridge called Bifrost, this is the realm of the heavens, inhabited by many in the Pantheon of gods. It is a celestial city surrounded by a great wall. Valhalla, the place warriors go when they die, is located in this realm.
2. Alfheim : Realm of the Bright Elves. This realm is also in the heavens and is ruled over by Freyr (a god from the other Vanir god family). These elves were thought to be magical creatures, whose brightness and beauty inspired art and music.
3. Jotunheim : Realm of the Giants, is a place beyond order. It is filled with chaos, magic, and untamed wilderness.
4. Midgard : Realm of the Humans. After the creation of the first humans, the gods realized that humans would be easy prey. They created Midgard for our protection.

5. Muspelheim : A realm of fire. The Fire-Giant Surtr, who will emerge at Ragnarok (the end of the world), inhabits this realm.

6. Nidavellir : Realm of the Dwarves, it lies below Midgard deep in the Earth. Here elves work in their forges, which provide the only light in this dark and smoky realm. The elves are known to be craftsmen and created mead and Thor's hammer, among other things.

7. Niflheim : The first realm, from which all life began. This is the realm of ice, mist, and snow, which no one inhabits. It is thought that below Niflheim is Niflhel, the land of the dead.

8. Svartalfheim : Realm of the Black Elves. Also dark places below the earth.

9. Vanaheim – Realm of the Vanir (the other of the two god families). These gods were associated with fertility and magic, hence, this realm was thought to be a fertile and pleasant realm filled with magic and light.







*Depiction of Valhalla<sup>53</sup>*

## Norse Mythology

### Norse Mythology: Mythology and Society

Viking mythology was heavily intertwined with everyday life. Vikings practiced *síður*, meaning custom or habit, which is the closest Old Norse term for religion. The Vikings didn't go to the equivalent of a church service, instead they would have many everyday rituals practiced anywhere from their home to the woods. The gods were venerated and called upon by everyone in the community. There were certain ritualistic "hot spots" that seemed to be dedicated to the gods. The Temple Uppsala in Sweden for example, was dedicated to Odin.

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<sup>52</sup> "The Prose Edda Index," n.d. <https://sacred-texts.com/new/pre/index.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Groeneveld, Emma, and Emil Doepler. "Norse Mythology." *World History Encyclopedia*, September 23, 2024. [https://www.worldhistory.org/Norse\\_Mythology/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Norse_Mythology/).

Other ways people honored the gods were numerous. There were periodic festivals, and other religious ceremonies such as weddings where people and animals were sacrificed to the gods. However, the polytheistic beliefs across the Viking world were dynamic. The nature of *síður* did change, especially during the onset of Christianity, where Christ was originally added to the Pantheon of gods and beliefs were integrated.

### **Norse Mythology: Worldview**

According to Viking Mythology, the world will exist in four phases: the world's creation, a dynamic phase where time begins, Ragnarok and the destruction of the world, and finally, the arising of the new world.

Specifically, in the beginning, there was only the tree Yggdrasil and the void of Ginnungagap, bordered by Muspelheim and Niflheim. As Muspelheim's fire melted Niflheim's ice, Ymir the giant and Audhumla the cow emerged into the world. Audhumla licked the ice and uncovered Buri, the ancestor of the gods, who had a son named Borr. Borr and the giantess Bestla gave birth to the first gods: Odin, Vili, and Ve. Meanwhile, Ymir gave birth to giants through self-fertilization. Odin and his brothers killed Ymir, and his blood drowned all giants except Bergelmir and his wife. Using Ymir's body, Odin and his brothers created the world and the first man (Ask) and first woman (Embla) out of an Oak and Elm. Finally, the nine realms and the world as we know it came into being.

Now that humans exist, the next phase, which is time, begins. Humans, gods, and animals will exist until Ragnarok. Along with the many previously mentioned elves, dwarves, and giants, this phase encompasses many formidable beasts. A dragon of death called Nidhogg chomps off the roots of the tree of Yggdrasil and the three fates (Norns), sit at the base of the tree and spin the lives of humans. The sea that surrounds the tree is inhabited by the Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, which twists itself around the world.

Ragnarok eventually begins. The earth will sink into the sea, a wolf called Fenrir will break free and devour the sun, and the Bifrost bridge between worlds collapses. While the gods are at war with formidable beasts and



the underworld, the Fire Giant Surtr starts a fire that consumes the world. Luckily, the world has a cyclical nature.

A new world with a new set of gods will eventually rise from the sea.

### **Norse Mythology: The Gods<sup>54</sup>**

Norse gods are a part of two separate families, the Aesir and Vanir families. The Aesir families are the gods primarily involved in war and government. Vanir gods are more focused on fertility, the harvest, and climate. Importantly, these two families have not always gotten along. At different periods of time the two families have been at war and according to mythology there have been many marriages and hostage exchanges to fuse the two families. Further, many Vikings would have worshiped female deities (Disir), elves, giants, and dwarves. Below you'll see a notable selection from the pantheon of Norse gods:

#### **Aesir Family**

**Odin:** Ruler of Asgard. God of war poetry and magic, he is famous for sacrificing one of his eyes to see all the knowledge in the cosmos. Female warriors called Valkyrae work for Odin, choosing the souls who will join him in Valhalla.

**Frigg:** Odin's wife, goddess of the sky, and wielder of the power of divination. Known for love, fertility, and fate.

**Thor:** Odin's son, god of thunder and protector of humanity. He is known for carrying his dwarf-forged hammer which can slay giants and break mountains.

**Loki:** god of mischief, a shapeshifter, responsible for the death of Baldr.

**Baldr:** Son of Odin and Frigg, god of light and purity.

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<sup>54</sup> "21 Norse Gods & Goddesses From Viking Mythology - Centre of Excellence," n.d. <https://www.centreofexcellence.com/norse-gods-goddesses/>.

Hodr: god of darkness. Baldr's twin brother.

Heimball: Odin's son and the guard of Asgard. He sits atop the rainbow Bifrost to warn the Pantheon of potential dangers.

### Vanir Family

Freyja: Associated with love, beauty, and fertility. She practiced a kind of magic called Seidr, which emphasized control, manipulation, and destiny.

Freyr: God of fertility. A symbol of prosperity and pleasant weather conditions.

### **Viking Sagas**

While runic writing was developed during the Viking era, written laws did not exist and there was no religious scripture. Instead, information was passed down orally. Thus, it can be difficult for scholars to study certain aspects of Viking culture, history, and religion. For this, scholars can turn to Viking sagas, written after the Viking Age. Sagas, typically epic prose, could cover histories, mythologies, and stories of daily life. While there were significant efforts to suppress these Sagas by Christian clerics, the stories have persisted and are culturally influential to this day<sup>55</sup>.

### **Anglo Saxon History**

While our committee is not directly focused on the lives of the Anglo Saxons, this committee will have many dealings with the different Anglo Saxon kingdoms and there will be an omnipresent tension between the Norse and Anglo Saxon cultures, during and around the onset of Danelaw in Britain. In order to understand the nature of these tensions, this section will cover Anglo Saxon culture and religion, focusing especially on the struggle between Christian and Pagan beliefs.

### **Subhead3 A Brief History of the Anglo Saxons \*\***

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<sup>55</sup> Mark, Joshua J. "Norse-Viking Culture." World History Encyclopedia, February 24, 2024. <https://www.worldhistory.org/collection/210/norse-viking-culture/>.

The Anglo-Saxon period in Britain is a period from the end of Roman rule in 400 AD to 1066 AD with the Norman invasion. In this committee we will be covering the Middle Saxon and Late Saxon periods, which roughly correspond to the Viking Age (793 AD - 1066 AD). The Anglo Saxons were one part of the wave of Germanic tribes that migrated to and took over much of Britain in the years following Roman withdrawal. While these tribes were originally independent and strictly Pagan, they eventually began to coalesce into the Kingdoms and slowly were absorbed into the Christian world.



An image of a king and his with<sup>56</sup>

### Anglo Saxon Society

Anglo Saxon society was organized into three main subgroups. These consisted of churchmen, fighting men, and the predominant group, working men. While in the beginning of the Anglo Saxon period, workers lived in shifting settlements, the middle Saxon period saw the creation of enclosures, closer livestock management, creation of the toft system, and settlement consolidation. The late Saxon

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<sup>56</sup> Leiden University. "The Early Middle Ages a 'Golden Age for the Elderly'? Not Quite!," February 14, 2019. <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2016/04/medieval-times-not-a-golden-age-for-the-elderly-in-england>.

period saw the creation of barns, mills, and most importantly locals indicative of high status dwellers. In all these eras, however, the extended kin group was the essential unit of production.<sup>57</sup>

As for the upper classes, tribal chieftains leading the settlements gradually consolidated, leading to the creation of thanes and Kings. Thanes ruled under the king, receiving a share of spoils from war, but essentially retained their kin group ties. Along with kinship ties, men of this class strongly emphasized courage and success in battle. Their identities came just as much from their warrior community. Significant to this warrior mentality was the preponderance of blood-feuds, meaning the tribes and later kingdoms were often at odds with each other.

While writing was originally Germanic, with the onset of Christianity came the Latin alphabet. By the late 800s, King Alfred had united the tribes against the Norse and was a significant patron of Latin literature. This helped unite Anglo Saxons in both language and literature, forming a distinct identity, which would be described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*<sup>58</sup>.

### **Anglo Saxon Women<sup>59</sup>**

There can be no doubt that Anglo Saxon women were subservient to men in Anglo Saxon society. Legal codes at the time uphold strict patriarchal norms limiting property ownership and overtly state women's reduced value. However, depending on social class, women still served in a variety of different roles. Noblewomen, alone, were expected to manage the household, supervise domestic activities, and oversee her children's education. Further, these women played an important role in negotiating marriages and alliances, especially because their own marriages were often used to forge alliances.

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<sup>57</sup> McLean, Assistant Professor John. "The Anglo-Saxons | Western Civilization," n.d. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-herkimer-westerncivilization/chapter/the-anglo-saxons/>.

<sup>58</sup> "Anglo-Saxon Culture," n.d. <https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/medieval/anglo-saxon.html#:~:text=The%20Anglo%2DSaxon%20social%20structure,called%20a%20%22comitatus%22>).

<sup>59</sup> The Anglo-Saxons. "Women in Anglo-Saxon England - the Anglo-Saxons," July 25, 2024. <https://www.theanglosaxons.com/anglo-saxon-women/>.

Women from lower class played a much different role. They worked in the fields, tended to livestock, and participated in trades to support their families. Often these trades involved the production of textiles. However, it was also possible for these women to participate in trade and commerce and own property, meaning they too had some independence and social mobility. As for women in religious orders, they were educated and could participate in church leadership.

### **Anglo Saxon Religion**

While Christianity was introduced to Britain with Roman rule in 43 AD, following takeover by the Anglo Saxons in 449 AD, the predominant religion became Germanic paganism.

The Christianization of Britain only began when Pope Gregory I dispatched a monk named Augustine to Kent in 597. Christians were able to slowly spread their religion by integrating Christ with the existent pantheon of Germanic gods. For some kings, you could find shrines to Woden and Christ alongside each other. Further, the decision to convert to Christianity was often done for political reasons. As Christianity slowly spread among the elite, a king may only be able to forge an alliance or coordinate a marriage if he converted. In 640, the Kentish King Eorcenberht commanded pagan idols be destroyed and that Lent be observed. Over the next several centuries, Anglo Saxon kings would attempt to convert the general population, but in reality steady conversion was galvanized by Irish missionaries who established many monasteries.

Over these centuries the Anglo Saxons acquired influential Saints such as Saint Cuthbert and their own tradition of monastic study, exemplified by St. Bede. By the Time of our committee when the majority of Anglo Saxons across classes were religious Christians, these saints would have been venerated and their relics treasured<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Crawford, Jack. "The Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England." TheCollector, March 5, 2024. <https://www.thecollector.com/christianization-anglo-saxon-england-germanic-paganism/>.



The Venerable Bede writing<sup>61</sup>.

## Religious Conflict

It may be easy to think that the Vikings and Anglo Saxons had a good deal of religious conflict. Afterall, the Viking Age was kicked off by the 793 raid of the Lindisfarne Monastery, and many of the ensuing raids were on religious establishments. However, the reason for these raids was tactical, not religious animosity. Monasteries were not only filled with holy objects made of precious metals, but they were also remote - typically far away from aid. Violence between the Anglo Saxons and Vikings had far more to do with the glory and resources that come with conquest and less to do with religion. However, that is not to say there did not exist some religious struggle. Over the course of the Viking Age, the dealings the Vikings had with the Anglo Saxon Kings and missionaries meant there was a slow shift towards Christianity. The struggle in the hearts and minds of some Scandinavians

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<sup>61</sup> "Episode 8: Simony With Lioba Geis (Germany) | Europe in the 11th Century," March 7, 2022. <https://shows.acast.com/europe-in-the-11th-century/episodes/episode-8-simony-with-lioba-geis-germany>.

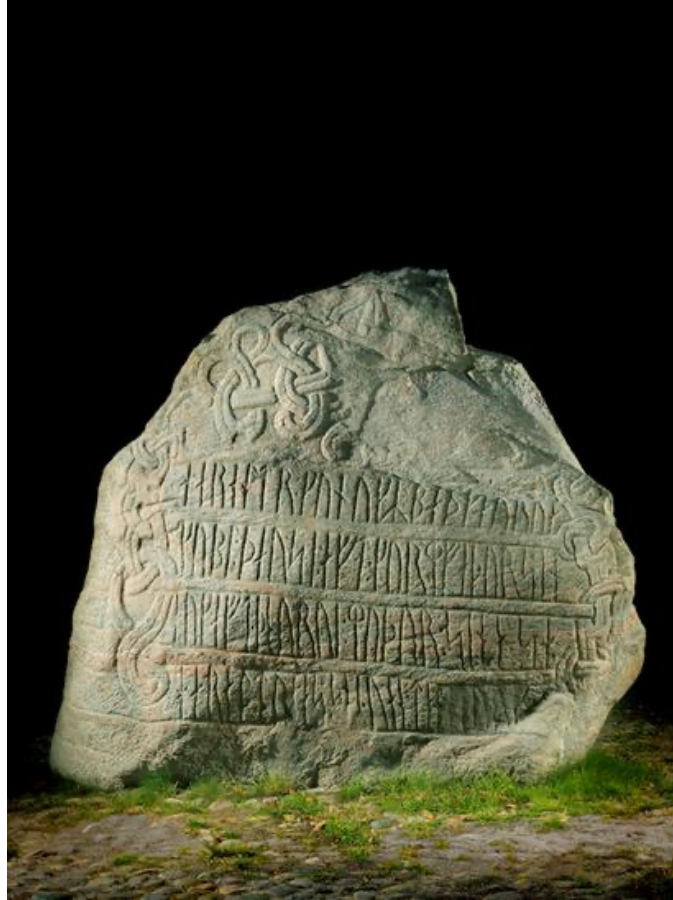
was acute. Many were compelled to convert to have economic or political relationships with the Anglo Saxons and many others were compelled by their rulers back in Scandinavia. The struggle to maintain their old traditions looked different in different areas of Scandinavia and at different points in time.

### **Scandinavian Country's Conversion to Christianity**

Conversion substantially began among the Vikings on their trips abroad. To trade and have any political relations with Christians, many Vikings either converted or went through a preliminary baptism called a prime signing. Conversion back in Scandinavia seems to have begun with missionary work in 830s Denmark with the founding of a church by St. Ansgar. However, this converted only a small number of Danes, especially because they feared benevolent land spirits would be frightened away by the church bells. Though a runestone has been found, inscribed by their first Christian King, Harald Bluetooth claiming to have converted the population, it wasn't until 960, that Priest Poppo was able to convert much of Denmark<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> National Museum of Denmark. "Christianity Comes to Denmark," n.d. <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/christianity-comes-to-denmark/>.



Jelling Stone<sup>63</sup>

Norway had a much more tumultuous conversion process. King Hakon the Good's (920-961) attempts to spread Christianity were wildly unpopular, nor were his successors tactics of destroying pagan temples. This conflict eventually came to head in the 986 battle of Hjörungavag in which the Christian King was defeated. It wasn't until the next Norwegian king, Olaf Trygvason (960–1000), that Christianity formally spread, owing to his aggressive campaign forcing most of Norway's coastal regions to convert.

Iceland's Christianization was much more peaceful. Following the threat of a civil war, the Icelandic government formally met to decide on a religion that would dictate Icelandic law. By 1122, they had formally

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<sup>63</sup> Metcalfe, Tom. "“Denmark's Salvation”? Runestones Hint at Viking Queen's Power." *Premium*, October 10, 2023. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/premium/article/viking-runestone-thyra-jelling-bluetooth-gorm>.



chosen Christianity. Sweden was the final Scandinavian country to convert. Olof Skötkonung (980–1022) was the first Christian king of Sweden, and was followed by several other Christian kings. However, in the 1080s there were many struggles between Christian and Pagan leaders. The rest of Sweden did not officially convert until 1220. This being said, for all these countries conversion was not a strict transition. Christ was slowly integrated with Pagan customs over the course of many centuries, spurred by Anglo Saxon relations, missionary work, and new laws suppressing pagan beliefs.

### **Viking Expansion Abroad:**

During the Viking Age, the Vikings had their eyes set on more than just expansion at home and in England. They traveled as far as North America<sup>64</sup> and Constantinople!

### **Iceland and the Atlantic Islands:**

According to The Book of Settlements, written in the 12th century, the first Icelandic settler, Ingólfr Arnarson, came to the island in 874 AD. While this date may not be exact, most historians believe the first wave of settlers arrived between 870 - 930 AD. This first wave included about 400 settlers who primarily settled around the current capital Reykjavík, but primarily came from Norway.

Along with Iceland the Viking also settled in Orkney, Faroe, Shetland islands, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man.

### **Greenland and North America:**

Greenland was settled by the Vikings when in 982, Eric the Red was banished from Iceland for manslaughter. In 985, when he returned to Iceland, he boasted of the merits of the land and convinced many

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<sup>64</sup> Kuitens, Margot, Birgitta L. Wallace, Charles Lindsay, Andrea Scifo, Petra Doeve, Kevin Jenkins, Susanne Lindauer, et al. "Evidence for European Presence in the Americas in Ad 1021." *Nature* 601, no. 7893 (October 20, 2021): 388–91. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03972-8>.

people to travel back with him. In the decades that followed there were two primary settlements, each with 3,000-6,000 people.

However, Greenland is not the only place the Vikings traveled in North America. Recent radiocarbon dating evidence suggests that the Vikings were in Newfoundland around the year 1021 AD. Vikings called North America Vinland and multiple accounts believe that Leif Ericson, son of Eric the Red, led a three year expedition to Newfoundland.

### **Ireland:**

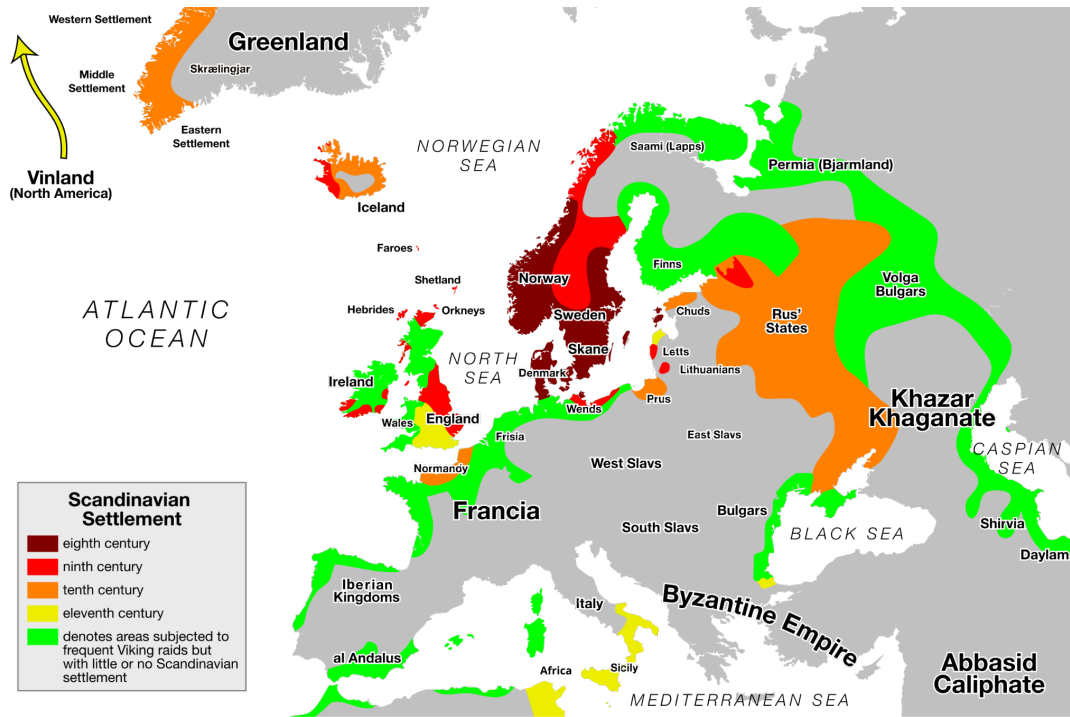
Scandinavian invasions of Ireland were incessant starting from 795. Though the native Irish had many successes, Viking settlements still arose in Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford.

### **The Carolingian Empire and France**

Despite many attempted raids, Viking settlement was never achieved in the Carolingian empire. These raids went on until the 10th century and the only successes seem to have been along the Seine River and one against Charlemagne. Farther south - in the Iberian Peninsula and on the Mediterranean coasts - the Vikings raided periodically but accomplished little.

### **Eastern Europe:**

During the 900s, the Vikings traveled to a settlement in the center of Russia. Though they were at one point dominant in areas like Kiev and Novgorod, they were rapidly absorbed into the surrounding population. While the Viking continued their raids east, there were few settlements in these areas. Ultimately, the farthest east the Vikings went was Constantinople in the 1000s, where they served as mercenaries in Constantinople.



*Map of Viking Expansion<sup>65</sup>*

<sup>65</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Viking Expansion." Wikipedia, August 3, 2024.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking\\_expansion#/media/File:Viking\\_Expansion.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_expansion#/media/File:Viking_Expansion.svg).

## CHARACTER BIOS

### Halfdan Ragnarsson

Halfdan is a viking shrouded in mystery and confusion. While his brothers, Ubbe and Ivar, and his father, legendary Ragnar Lodbrok, are known, the mystery begins with who his mother is. Some accounts name a Swedish princess, Thora Borgarhiort, as the mother while others name Áslaug. However, the name Áslaug gave her child is Hvitserk, so who is this figure, Halfdan or Hvitserk? Does the meaning of Hvitserk as “white shirt” go beyond a simple translation? While the two identities are sure to make for a confusing time, one thing for certain is that Halfdan has a close relationship with his brothers and has the political sway and capital to bring up an army, one might find that useful in these times.

### Ivar the Boneless

Brother to Halfdan Ragnarsson and son of legendary Viking Ragnar Lodbrok, Ivar the Boneless has made quite a legend out of his name. While little of his childhood is known, Ivar quickly began to appear in the history books when in 855 he occupied an isle near the River Thames. Later, with the “Danish king of Dublin” Olaf the White, Ivar participated in multiple battles for power in Ireland. He has a close relationship with his brothers, and is motivated by the idea of avenging his father who was killed in England. Ivar is notable for not believing in plundering, as many of his peer Vikings do, but rather looks for conquest. Yet conquest is the very thing that many Vikings are looking for at this very moment, so Ivar’s previous attempts at diplomacy and allyship evidenced with Olaf the White may become crucial in these moments.

### Guthrum

Guthrum is originally from Denmark and is regarded as a powerful Viking chieftain. His status as a chieftain is backed by his military prowess and strategic maneuvering and evidenced by his ability to amass a large

force with the “Great Summer Army.” However, there is a pressing personal matter that is tugging at Guthrum’s psyche, centered around his religious beliefs and Danish identity. Guthurm expresses an interest in further exploring Christianity, which would put him at odds with many of his peers in this Thing. It would also be a major shift away from his Danish upbringing, but what he hopes to find in Christianity could be great and may open many doors for him in the course of this Thing.

## Ingolf Arnarson

Ingolf was born some time in Norway. He and his foster brother, Hjörleif, were very close. So close in fact, that they went on Viking adventures together abroad. However, Ingolf and Hjörleif got into a regrettable blood feud that resulted in him losing his land. With nowhere else to go, he hopes to leverage his participation in this Thing for ulterior motives, namely to find a permanent settlement in a distant rumored land—some have whispered the name Iceland, though that is not an established name at this time. Ingolf has a large group of loyal people relying on him to finally get them to a new settled land, they care only about farming and living a calm life so their help in other areas may not so easily be called upon. Ingolf’s expert sailing skills and his fervent closeness to the Gods make him believe that anything is within his reach.

## Oleg the Wise

Oleg is a through and through wanderer and explorer. So much so that he, a Viking, ended up in what is now present-day Ukraine. These are not the usual places where Vikings are found, but Oleg is a visionary. Oleg succeeded his kinsmen Rurik as ruler of Novgorod, but then immediately went down the Dnieper River and seized control of Kiev and made it the capital of Novgorod. Oleg is not done, though, he continues to look towards the West and East to expand his scope. So expansive is his vision that it has the Byzantine empire on high alert. Oleg joins this council with an expansive mindset of the scope that the Vikings could have on the global stage, and he will not back down.

## Ása Haraldsdottir of Agder

Ása is a powerful figure in spaces that are often dominated by men, and she has shown that she is ready to make political moves by any means. She is the grandmother of Haraldr Fairhair, the first king of Norway, but has made quite the name for herself outside of this. She had her husband Gudrodr the Hunter removed from her life and traveled back to her father's kingdom in Agder (located in Norway) where she became queen regnant. She enters this council with an expansive view of advancing the sphere of influence that women have in Viking society, particularly in political spaces. It is also rumored that she desires to be buried with an exceptionally rich boat, the reasons why are not known.

## Guthfrith of Ivar

Guthfrith is of both Gaelic and Scandinavian birth and culture, making him a Hiberno-Scandinavian. He joins this Thing with his eyes on Dublin or Viking Northumbria (what is now considered Yorkshire.) He has an honored and historied lineage, as he is the grandson of Ímar, and has the backing of the Uí Ímair. The Uí Ímair have presence in the Irish Sea region and the Western coast of Scotland. Like any good Viking, Guthfrith has eyes set on land and the establishment of a kingdom, but there could be more opportunities elsewhere, and he certainly has a family lineage to call upon to reconsider his future and position in this Thing.

## Thorkell the Tall

Thorkell was born in Sweden and is a member of the Jomsviking warrior order. This membership to the order signals to Thorkell's shaky allegiances. The Jomsviking warrior order is for elite Vikings like Thorkell, and all highly devoted to the Old Norse Gods. But their devotion comes at a cost, or better said, they would fight in any cause in the name of the Old Norse Gods for the right price, even if that bidder was Christian. To add to the shaky allegiances, Thorkell, although Swedish, has amassed an army of friends that are mainly Danish. Yet this all

likely points to Thorkell's ability to work across the aisle towards various different groups and identities, a skill that will be extremely useful to make cunning deals and strategies in the future of Danelaw.

## Sigurd Snake-in-the-eye

Sigurd is the son of Ragnar Lodbrok, making him brothers with Ivar and Halfdan. However, Norwegian king genealogies have also managed to trace his ancestry back to Harald Fairhair, thus tying his ancestry to a legendary Germanic mystical ancestry, the Völsung. This makes Sigurd a possible descendant of Odin. While Sigurd has not let that thought get into his head, it speaks to how well connected he could be, and with some devoted practice, he could manage to tap into something all powerful. The Snake-in-the-Eye was given to him because he was born with a mark in his eye that resembled the ouroboros, an image where a snake or dragon bites its own tail. This could be a sign that Sigurd's dedication should not be that of a regular Viking, engaged in warfare, but could perhaps be honed into other interests such as alchemy or religion, which would certainly bring a refreshing perspective to this Thing.

## Rollo

Rollo was born in 860 but it is unclear whether he is of Danish or Scandinavian descent. Having left the company of King Harald I of Norway, he has set out as more of a pirate than a Viking to explore Scotland, England, and Flanders. As he looks towards his membership in this Thing, he is less interested in England and Danelaw, but is instead looking further South into France. He imagines gaining ground all the way to Paris, though he knows it will be a tough road to follow. This Thing could just be a stepping stone towards that goal, or Rollo may look to curb his expectations and work alongside his fellow Vikings to concentrate their efforts towards something not so challenging.

## Lagertha

Lagertha's legend is retold by the famous Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus. Lagertha is said to have joined forces with Ragnar Lodbrok army when he came to avenge his grandfather Siward, who was the King of Norway. Lagertha's skills in battle were quickly noticed and praised. She was seen as a fierce and brave warrior, earning her the respect and title of a shield-maiden for Norway. Lagertha's impressive abilities also led to Ragnar wishing to ask for her hand, but Lagertha showed disinterest, and even set out a hound and bear outside of her home which ended up attacking Ragnar. Lagertha sets a model for women warriors and could use this foundation as a platform to bring in new identities and ideas to this Thing.

## Eric Bloodaxe

Originally Eric Haraldsson, Eric Bloodaxe is the son of the Norwegian King, Harald Fairhair and is of Scandinavian descent. While Eric spent his childhood occupied by a career of international piracy, sailing around the Baltic Coast and the British Isles, taking trading ports, this is not how he earned the name Bloodaxe. Eric currently has his eyes set on the Norwegian throne and is willing to try and kill his brother, Haakon the Good, to achieve this title. His plans should he win the throne - we have not idea - who knows if Eric has even thought that far. Regardless, ruthless both in battle and as a ruler, Eric Bloodaxe displays all the qualities that will make him a great ally, but a fearsome enemy. Longterm, he also has his eyes set on ruling a part of England and he won't tolerate Christians or fellow Vikings getting in his way.

## Haakon the Good

Originally Haakon Haraldsson, Haakon the Good is the younger brother of Eric Bloodaxe and his other son in the line of succession for the throne of Norway. Haakon has a vastly different leadership style than his brother Eric. Haakon earned his name "Good" because wants to win over the support of the landowners by giving up the rights to taxation claimed by his father. Further, Haakon is warming to the idea of Christianity and may



want to introduce it to the Norwegian people. Though he is more popular than Eric Bloodaxe and has the political and militaristic support of many important landowners, Haakon the Good must be careful—Eric has it out for Haakon.

## Harald Bluetooth

Originally Harald Gormsson, Bluetooth is the son of Denmark's former king, Gorm the old. Following his father's death Harald was made king and has proven to be hugely impactful. His name, however, has nothing to do with his successes, rather, it is because he supposedly had a bad dark blue tooth. During his reign, Bluetooth has overseen the construction of many public works, including fortifications and bridges, which solidified his military and economic control over the region. Long term, Harald has many potential goals. Militarily, he's looking to use his amassed power to unify Jutland and Zealand. Harald has also been introducing Christianity to Denmark. He hopes to spread it to other parts of Scandinavia and knows he can strategically overcome resistance. During his reign, Bluetooth has also created the Jelling Runestones, which contained some of the limited writing we have from this period. You might be thinking - Christianity and a written language?! Some fellow Vikings are indeed worried that Harald is on a quest to totally Anglicize Scandinavia. Unfortunately, Harald is politically adept enough that he hasn't clarified if these are his plans.

## Guthred

Guthred Hardacnutsson, at the time of committee, is still a destitute servant. However, he has incredibly strong ties to the Community of Saint Cuthbert, though no one is sure whether he is a Christian. It seems very likely that Saint Cuthbert will help Guthred escape destitution by aligning him with wealthy powerful figures. From there, Saint Cuthbert community intends on extensively aiding Guthred in his rise to power. They won't stop at the potential leader of Viking York, they hope that eventually he can become the King of Northumbria.

Not only will they help him achieve these great lengths, they intent to help him retain his power, offering military aid for attacking armies. It really makes you wonder why Saint Cuthbert holds Guthred in such high regard.....

## **Bjorn Ironside**

While Bjorn Ironside was recently expelled from Denmark, as he is one of the younger sons of the current king, Ragnar Lodbrock, this exile is only the impetus to Bjorn's acquisition of power. Bjorn has his eyes set on Francia, especially Paris, where he plans to work with others to lay siege to Paris. As he anticipates great success, sources tell us that next he has his eyes set on the Mediterranean and Rome. However, Bjorn ultimately wants to head home to Scandinavia. We'll have to see if survives his time abroad and is successful enough to found the Swedish Munso Dynasty, of which he would be the first king.

## **Sister Thyra the Redeemed**

Sister Thyra has a very complicated past. Born in Denmark, Sister Thyra encountered a missionary as a teenager and they formed a close friendship. Overtime, Sister Thyra became a more devout Christian and realized it was impossible for her to follow her faith in a pagan society. Following this realization, she moved to Wessex and joined a convert where she was been practicing her faith ever since. However, King Alfred of Wessex has called for her help in engaging in diplomacy with the Vikings. She joins the "Thing" as a translator diplomat who will be essential in the coming conflicts. However, Sister Thyra is in a complicated position. She ultimately wants peace, but knows the Vikings are more likely to convert to Christianity if they form alliances overseas. Further, she's always been a bit uncomfortable with British demonization of the Vikings. She remembered her previous life well and still looks fondly on much of her upbringing.

## **Hastein**

Halstein is an incredibly powerful Viking Chieftain, known for making many raiding voyages. He has his eyes set on traveling the world - as a great voyager, sky's the limit! We might find him in Spain, the

Mediterranean, France, or Britain. Who knows what journey he's planning. While Halstein is a Viking at heart, it is important to note that he has historically had shifting alliances. With eyes on Francia, he's currently allied with the King of Brittony, and long term, is weighing a baptism for him and his children as that might advance his future position in England. However, to Halstein these considerations are perfectly compatible with his end goals as a powerful Viking chieftain. He can still maintain pagan beliefs and ally himself with the Great Heathen army, which may be necessary for gaining land in Britain, especially Mercia.

## Harald Fairhair

Father of Eric Bloodaxe and Haakon the Good, Harald Fairhair is considered the father of Norway because he is the first king of the consolidated territory. However, Harald soon hopes to step down in his position as king and is concerned by the conflict among his many sons - Haakon and Eric are two or twelve. Harald hopes for the success of the Great Heathen Army and will attempt to balance politics at home with aid to the Thing and Vikings abroad. As one of the older members of the committee, he is considered very wise and will be sought after for political advice.

## Sweyn Forkbeard

Sweyn Forkbeard may be the son of Harald Bluetooth, the current King of Denmark, but he has major issues with his father. Sweyn was a highly competent military commander, politician, and diplomat. These skills means he has deftly amassed power and is considering using it to overthrow and exile his father. His connections to the Swedish throne could surely aid him in this venture and in future conquests in Scandinavia. If he's ever in power, Sweyn has fantasized about undercutting the power of the priests in the country. He is far less fond of Christianity than his father, though part of him knows Christian practice needs to be tolerated to some extent. But this isn't all, Sweyn has his eyes on Norway and England. He's considering joining the Great Heathen army to amass land in England. Norway, though currently farther out of reach, could be invaded if he advances enough

power. Clearly these are a lot of goals - Sweyn will need to make some tough decisions about whether he can do it all or must prioritize.

## **Aud the Deep-minded**

Aud the Deep-Minded, also known as Unn, is soon to be a notable settler of Iceland. The daughter of Norwegian hersir Ketill Flatnose and Yngvid Ketilsdóttir, she is married to Olaf the White, King of Dublin. However, Olaf and her son are soon to pass away. Hence, she plans to commission a ship and lead her family and thralls on a voyage from the Hebrides to Iceland. Known for her leadership and resilience, she hopes to claim land in Dalasýsla, grant freedom and land to her thralls, and establish a Christian legacy in Iceland. While primarily involved in Icelandic politics, Aud will be an important ally, and her land aspirations mean she is someone to keep an eye on.

## **Þorbjörg Lítilvölva**

Þorbjörg lítilvölva (pronounced THOR-byorgh LIH-tihl-vuhl-vah) is a renowned seeress in Greenland. Known as the "little völva," she was the last surviving sister of nine prophetically gifted women. During harsh winters, she travels between farms where her presence is eagerly sought for her prophetic abilities. She conducts rituals, including a significant ceremony where she required the singing of ward songs by a Christian woman named Gudrid, leading to successful predictions about the community's future and individual fates. In our committee, Þorbjörg's advice is essential. She will have the power to predict the future, bring good omens, and interpret the signs of deities. While her prophetic ability is indeed impressive, it has an accuracy rate of about 75%. This complicates her role. She won't always be correct, and it is impossible to know if she is even telling the whole truth.

## Eadwyn Shieldbreaker

Eadwyn Shieldbreaker certainly has a complicated past. Born in East Anglia, she always felt trapped by the rigid expectations of Christian women of her time. While she wanted to sword fight with her brothers and eventually become a knight, these desires only ever resulted from ridicule from her family and peers. After her father attempted to marry her off to a man she despised, she knew she had to escape. She couldn't go elsewhere in England where she knew she would never be excepted, so instead she settled in Sweden. The Vikings were universally impressed by her determination and she eventually joined the Jomsviking warrior order and has vowed to remain an independent woman for the rest of her days. In committee she plays an important role as diplomat and translator, which will be vital in the conflicts to come. However, she is not a peacemaker. Eadwyn does not have fond memories of her past, so she doesn't find it difficult to fight against the English.

## Ubba Ragnarsson

One of the sons of Ragnar Lodbrock, Ubba Ragnarsson was a fearsome warrior. Prior to joining and helping to lead the Great Heathen Army, Ubba had conquered extensive amounts of land in Frisia. He was called from Frisia to help lead the Army and plans to participate extensively in all the Battles across the British kingdoms. Ubba hopes he can acquire land in England, expanding beyond his holdings in Francia. Ubba will be an important ally in the Thing and hopes he can work with his brothers to build a successful Viking alliance. He has far less tolerance for infighting.

## Gunnar Hámundarson

At the time of this committee, it is unknown where Gunnar was born, it is rumored that he is from a distant island, though the name is unknown to man. Beyond a warrior, Gunnar is an athletic force. He is dominant in many athletic traits; the word is out there that he can jump his own height, even with a full set of armor, and in any direction. He is cunning with a sword, can toss a stone meters away, is skilled with a bow, and

a master in the water. He is better equipped for the Olympics than he is battle. And in fact, Gunnar avoids disputes whenever possible, instead aiming to settle any problem with soft-spoken diplomacy. His insight into problems is profound, he is a wise man though many may not listen. As a side-gig, Gunnar is a model. With such a presence, Gunnar could possibly serve as an ambassador for something other than battle, directing the energy and efforts of this Thing towards games and activities—though if needed, Gunnar will not be bested.

## **Rognvald Eysteinsson**

Rognvald is a Norwegian Viking, a part of a very powerful network of Vikings in the House of Eysteinsson that has close connections to Harald Fairhair, the powerful King of Norway. He is the founding Earl of the northernmost part of western Norway, known as Møre. Yet, despite the status and the vast amount of land he owns, he is looking to expand his gaze towards new land, particularly the coasts of Scotland, and the Shetland Islands. He certainly has the means to do so and the powerful connections, but the goals may not be entirely in line with what the Thing wishes to do. Beyond Scotland, it is also rumored that he is looking towards Spain and Northern Africa. It is unknown where the winds will take him.

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