

## 11: Vikings!



Figure: Prow, Oseberg ship (CC-BY-SA Flickr user)

## Key Questions

- ▶ What was the extent and nature of North Germanic expedition culture?
- ▶ Who participated in these expeditions?
- ▶ What drove Scandinavians to travel abroad?
- ▶ What was the nature, and what is the timeline, of Anglo-Norse interaction?
- ▶ What are our written sources for Anglo-Norse interaction?
- ▶ How do Anglo-Saxons represent (their interaction with) the Norse in literature?
- ▶ How do later Icelanders represent the expeditions of their ancestors in literature?
- ▶ What are the motivations behind a text like Ælfric's *Life of St Edmund*?
- ▶ Is there direct archaeological evidence of Anglo-Norse violence?

# Part I: Movements

Part II: Motivations

Part III: Narrative Literature

Postscript: The Bones of History

# Etymology

- ▶ Old Norse *víkingr* “bay person”
  - ▶ ? fjord-dweller
  - ▶ ? bay lurker
- ▶ > Old English *wīcing*
- ▶ Sense: pirate, seaborne raider

NB: Old English sources more commonly refer to Scandinavian raiders and armies as *Dene* and *hæþenas*.

## The Viking Age



Figure: Lindisfarne Priory (CC-BY-SA: WMC user)



Figure: Bayeux Tapestry: Harold's death (public domain / WMC)

# Movements



Figure: Viking Voyages (CC-BY-SA Bogdan Giuscă)

## Contacts



Figure: "Allah Ring", Birka (CC-BY Gabriel Hildebrand)

## The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

ḥ.      ƿccclxxi.    Hcricōmfehene ƿonea  
dingum onpefeſcaxe. 7 þær ymbe. iiii. niht iudon  
ƿegen eorlaſ up. þa ge mette æþel ƿulſ ealdor  
man hie on ængla ſelda. 7 him þær ƿið geſeahc.  
7 ſigenam 7 heora ƿearð oþær þær ofſlagen  
þær nama ƿær Sidrac. Ða ymb. iiii. niht æfered  
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Figure: Peterborough [C] Chronicle s.a. 871 (public domain / [WMC](#))

# The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

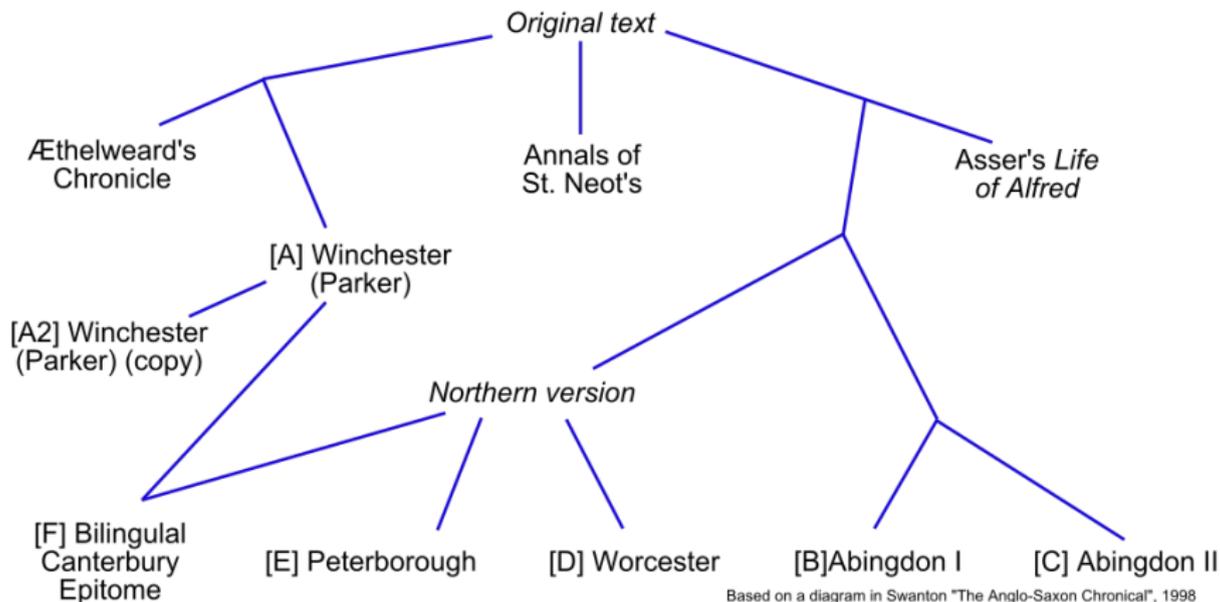


Figure: Chronicle Collation (public domain / WMC user)

## First Hostilities: Dorset

“ Her nom Beorhtric cyning Offan dohtor Eadburge. ⁊ on his dagum cuomon ærest III scipu, ⁊ þa se gerefa þærto rad ⁊ hie wolde drifan to þæs cyninges tune þy he nyste hwæt hie wæron, ⁊ hiene mon ofslog. Þæt wæron þa ærestan scipu deniscra monna þe Angelcynnes lond gesohton.

*(Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [A], s.a. 787) ”*

“ Here Beorhtric married Offa's daughter Eadburg. In his days there first came three ships, and then the reeve rode up to them and wanted to direct them to the king's palace because he did not know what they were, and he was killed. Those were the first ships of Danes that visited the land of the English. ”

## First Documented Raid: Lindisfarne

“ Her wæron reðe forebecna cumene ofer Norðhymbra land, 7 þæt folc earmlic bregdon, þæt wæron ormete þodenas 7 ligrescas, 7 fyrenne dracan wæron gesewene on þam lifte fleogende. Þam tacnum sona fyligde mycel hunger, 7 litel æfter þam, þæs ilcan geares on VI idus Ianuarii, earmlice hæþenra manna hergunc adilegode Godes cyrican in Lindisfarnaee þurh hreaflac 7 mansliht.

*(Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [D], s.a. 793; also in EF) ”*

“ Here violent omens came over Northumbria, and terrified the wretched people: there were terrible winds and flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the sky. Great hunger soon followed those omens, and a little later, on 8 January [*for June*], a heathen raid miserably laid waste God's church in Lindisfarne by means of robbery and killing. ”

## Selected Chronology of Viking Raids and Conquests (1)

c. 790	Dorset
793	Lindisfarne
794	Northumbria
794	Iona
795	Ireland, west coast
796	Ireland, all over
790s	Iona repeatedly (abandoned in 849)
799	Aquitaine
810	Frisia
820	Flanders
820	Aquitaine
832	Ireland: 120 ships; settlement
834-7	Dorestad x4
836	Flanders

## Selected Chronology (2; Focus: England)

- 835–50 England, esp. in the south
- 840 Dublin; became a Viking kingdom in 841
- 850–1 England: *first winter quarters*
- 851 England: *350 ships* attack from the Thames
- 865 England: Vikings settle in Kent, accept money for peace; a *micel here* (Ívarr the boneless) come to East Anglia, accept horses for peace
- 866 The *micel here* conquer York (a Viking kingdom until 954)
- 869 York Vikings take East Anglia, kill Edmund
- 871–86 wars for Wessex; Danelaw; peace 886–92
- 892–6 resumed wars for Wessex; (mostly) peace 897–904

“

Her Ceorl aldormon gefeaht wiþ hæþene men mid Defenascire æt Wicganbeorge 7 þær micel wæl geslogon 7 sige namon. 7 þy ilcan geare Eþelstan cyning 7 Ealchere dux micelne here ofslogon æt Sondwic on Cent 7 IX scipu gefengun 7 þa oþre gefliemdon, 7 hæþne men ærest ofer winter sæton. 7 þy ilcan geare cuom feorðe healfhund scipa on Temese muþan 7 bræcon Contwaraburg 7 Lundenburg 7 gefliemdon Beorhtwulf Miercna cyning mid his fierde 7 foron þa suþ ofer Temese on Suþrige, 7 him gefeaht wiþ Eþelwulf cyning 7 Eþelbald his sunu æt Aclea mid Westseaxna fierde 7 þær þæt mæste wæl geslogon on hæþnum herige þe we secgan hierdon oþ þisne ondweardan dæg 7 þær sige namon.

(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [A]) ”

“

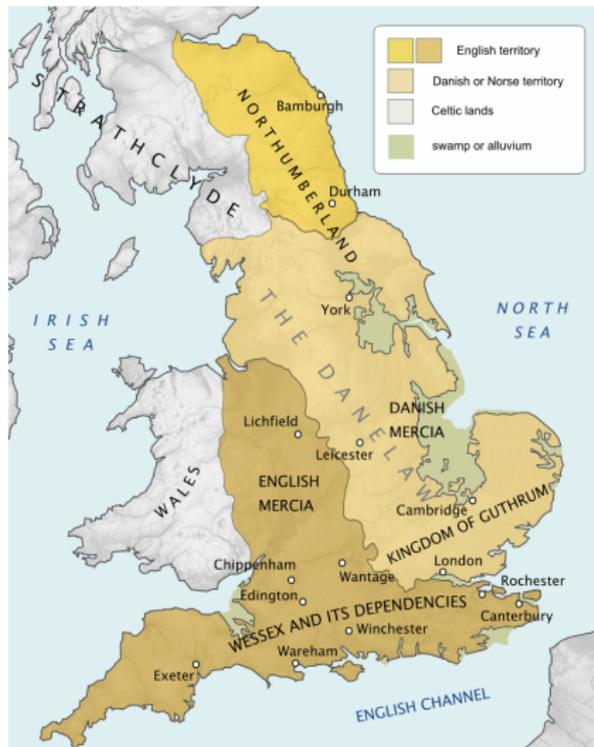
Here ealdorman Ceorl with the men of Devonshire fought the heathens at *Wicganbeorg*, and they caused great carnage and won the victory. In that same year, King Æthelstan and ealdorman Ealchere defeated a large fleet off Sandwich in Kent; they seized nine ships and put the others to flight. For the first time, heathens stayed the winter. In the same year, 350 ships came up the mouth of the Thames and laid waste Canterbury and London, and they put King Beorhtwulf of the Mercians to flight with his army. Then they went south across the Thames to Surrey. King Æthelwulf and his son Æthelbald fought them with the West Saxon levy at *Acleah*, and they caused the greatest carnage in a heathen army of which we have heard tell until this present day, and they won the victory there.

”

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## Selected Chronology (3; Focus: England)



- 899–927 Edward, Æthelstan, Æthelflæd retake Norse areas
- 927 Æthelstan captures York, becomes king of all England
- 937 Battle of Brunanburh against Dublin, Scotland, and Strathclyde
- 939–40 Northumbrians elect Óláfr, who temporarily captures northeastern Mercia
- 949–54 Northumbria ruled by Scandinavians

Figure: Danelaw (CC-BY-SA WMC user)

## Selected Chronology (4; Focus: England)

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 980      | Viking raiders return  |
| 991      | Folkestone, Sandwich, Ipswich, Maldon raided. "First tribute" £10,000                |
| 994      | Sveinn and Óláfr raid the south, exact £16,000 Danegeld. Æthelred settles with Óláfr |
| 997–1002 | Raiding raises £24,000 Danegeld  |
| 1007     | £36,000 Danegeld   |
| 1012     | £48,000 Danegeld   |
| 1013–14  | Sveinn becomes King of all England   |
| 1014–16  | Æthelred resumes rule  |
| 1016–42  | Cnut and his sons rule England   |
| 1042     | Cnut is succeeded by Edward the Confessor, son of Æthelred                           |
| 1066     | Battle of Stamford Bridge  |
| 1066     | Battle of Hastings   |



# Periodization of the Viking Age in England

## Rough

- c. 790–884 Early Viking Age
- c. 980–1066 Late Viking Age

## More Detail

- c. 790–850 Raids
- c. 850–886 Winterquarters, settlement, conquest, terms
- 892–954 Reconquest
- 980–1012 Invasions, Danegeld, second conquest
- 1013–1066 Dynastic warfare

Part I: Movements  
**Part II: Motivations**  
Part III: Narrative Literature  
Postscript: The Bones of History

# Could Some of These Have Been Causal Factors?

## Push

- ▶ Agricultural overpopulation
- ▶ Political exile
- ▶ Estate overpopulation
- ▶ Shortage of women

## Pull

- ▶ Wealth
- ▶ (Women)
- ▶ Social prestige

## Necessary Conditions

- ▶ Seaworthy ships
- ▶ Favourable climate

## Motivations: The Example of Haraldr *hárfagr*

“ When he had taken possession of regions that had newly come into his power, King Haraldr was very wary about landed men and powerful farmers and all those about whom he had misgivings that some sort of uprising was to be expected of them. He made them all do one or the other: join his service or leave the country; but the third option was to suffer harsh treatment or death, and some were maimed in their hands or feet. *(Egils saga ch. 4)* ”

# Could Some of These Have Been Causal Factors?

## Push

- ▶ Agricultural overpopulation
- ▶ Political exile
- ▶ Estate overpopulation

## Pull

- ▶ Wealth
- ▶ Women
- ▶ Social prestige

## Necessary Conditions

- ▶ Longship
- ▶ Climate

# The Viking Longship



Figure: Oseberg Longship (CC-BY-SA: Flickr user)

## Ohthere

He then continued due north as far as he could reach in the second three days. There the land turned due east, or the sea penetrated the land he did not know which — but he knew that **he waited there for a west-north-west wind**, and then sailed east along the coast as far as he could sail in four days. There **he had to wait for a due northern wind, because there the land turned due south**, or the sea penetrated the land he did not know which. Then from there he sailed due south along the coast as far as he could sail in five days. (*Orosius* 1.1, trans. Lund, *Two Voyagers*, 18–19)



Figure: Scandinavia  
(CC-BY-SA WMC user)

# The Viking Longship

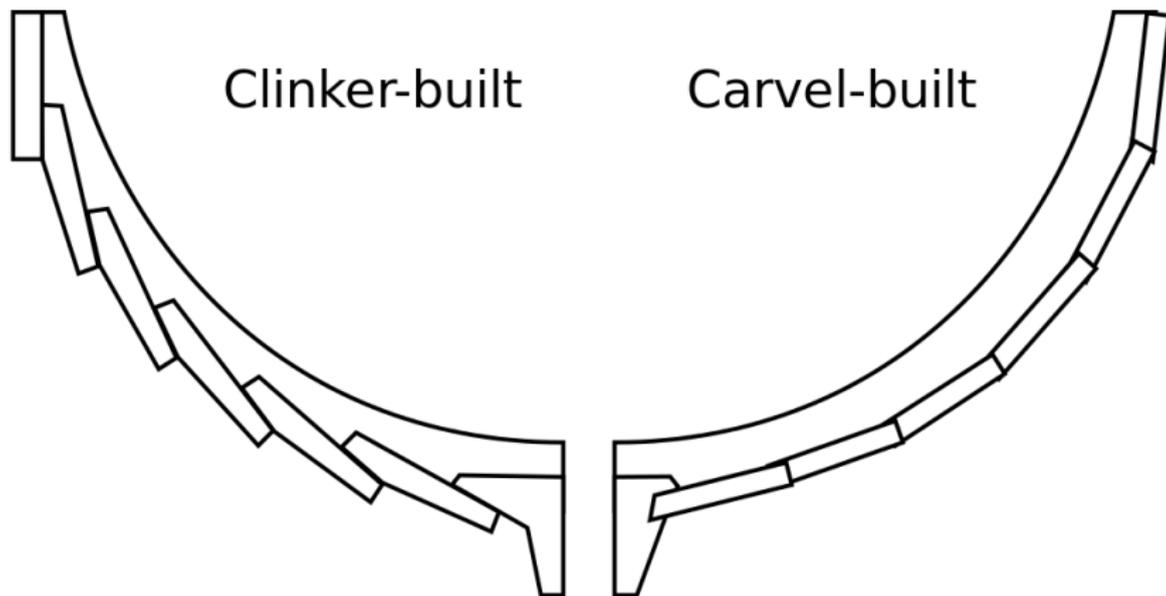


Figure: Clinker-Building (public domain / WMC user)

# The Viking Longship



Figure: Oseberg Longship (CC-BY-SA: Flickr user)

# Climate History

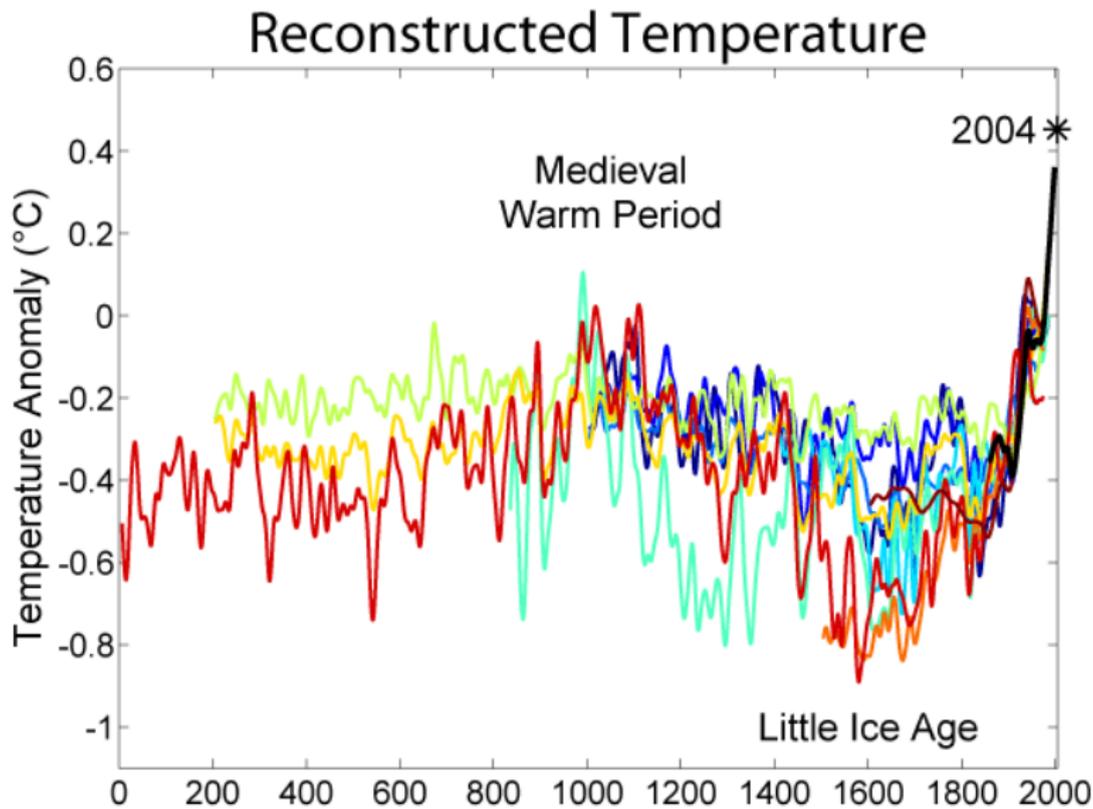


Figure: Medieval Warm Period and Little Ice Age (CC-BY-SA: Robert A. Rohde)

Part I: Movements

Part II: Motivations

**Part III: Narrative Literature**

Postscript: The Bones of History

## How to Depict your Enemy: *Maldon*

“  
96 Wodon þa **wælwulfas** (for wætere ne murnon) ”

“  
55 **hæþene** æt hilde. Feallan sceolon ”

“  
181 Ða hine heowon **hæðene** scealcas ”

## How to Depict your Enemy: *Ælfric's Life of Edmund*

- “  
26 Hit gelamp ða æt nextan þæt þa deniscan leode  
ferdon mit sciphere **hergiende and sleande**  
wide geond land **swa swa heora gewuna is.**
- 29 On þam flotan wæron þa fyrmestan heafodmen  
Hinguar and Hubba **geanlæhte þurh deofol.**
- [...]
- 39 And se foresæda Hinguar **færlice swa swa wulf**  
on lande **bestalcode** and þa leode sloh  
weras **and wif and þa ungewittigan cild**
- 42 and **to bysmore tucode þa bilewitan cristenan.** ”
- “  
95 and gemette be wæge þone **wælhreowan** Hingwar ”
- “  
106 Hwæt **þa arleasan** þa Eadmund gebundon ”

## Devout Resistance

“

65 ‘Behold, thou bishop, the poor people of this land  
are brought to shame, and it were now dearer to me  
that I should fall in fight against him who would possess  
my people’s inheritance.

[...]

75 This I desire and wish in my mind,  
that I should not be left alone after my dear thanes,  
who even in their beds, with their bairns and their wives,  
have by these seamen been suddenly slain. (trans. Skeat)

”

## Passive Resistance

“

Then Edmund the king, when Hingwar came,  
stood within his hall mindful of the Saviour,  
and threw away his weapons, desiring to imitate  
Christ's example, who forbade Peter

105 to fight with weapons against the bloodthirsty Jews.

(trans. Skeat)

”

“

869: 7 þy wintra Eadmund cyning him wiþ feaht, 7 þa Deniscan  
sige namon 7 þone cyning ofslogon 7 þæt lond all geeodon.

(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [A]) ”

# Relevant Old Norse Genres

## Genre

## Examples

Kings' sagas

- ▶ *Ágrip*
- ▶ *Haralds saga harðráða*

Sagas of Icelanders

- ▶ *Egils saga*

Legendary sagas

- ▶ *Jómsvíkinga saga*
- ▶ *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*
- ▶ *Ragnarssona saga*

Skaldic poetry

- ▶ *Knútsdrápa* by Sighvatr Þórðarson

Part I: Movements

Part II: Narrative Literature

**Postscript: The Bones of History**

## The Ridgeway Hill, Dorset Mass Grave: Facts

- ▶ 54 headless bodies
- ▶ 51 bodiless heads
- ▶ Mostly teenagers and twentysomethings from across Scandinavia; some 30s–50s
- ▶ Carbon-dated to c. 970–c. 1025
- ▶ Average stature
- ▶ Some physical robustness, esp. upper body
- ▶ High frequency of infection and impairment
- ▶ No clothes, weapons, armour, artefacts
- ▶ One instance of filed teeth
- ▶ Rough and multiple decapitation marks, different locations and angles, mostly from the front
- ▶ Trauma on hands/arms

## The Ridgeway Hill, Dorset Mass Grave: Speculation

- ▶ Decapitation by sword
- ▶ Formal execution?
- ▶ Multiple executioners?
- ▶ Untrained executioners and/or moving targets
- ▶ Hands untied or imperfectly tied
- ▶ Trophy skulls?
- ▶ One longship's crew — raiders? Mercenaries?
- ▶ 982 Portland raid?
- ▶ 998 Dorset attack?
- ▶ 1002 St Brice's Day Massacre?
- ▶ 1015 Dorset attack?
- ▶ 1016 Dorset attack?

→ National Geographic: *Viking Apocalypse*

## St Brice's Day Massacre

- ▶ Æthelred receives intelligence that Danes in England are plotting to kill him and his counsellors
- ▶ On November 13th, 1002, he orders all Danes in England killed
- ▶ St Friðuswīp's Church, Oxford, burned down after Norsemen sought refuge there; c. 35 male skeletons in their teens and twenties found there, scarred and stabbed
- ▶ Helped provoke Sveinn Forkbeard's 1003 invasion
- ▶ Actual extent probably limited to isolated places outside the Danelaw, possibly directed against mercenaries not civilians

# Museum Tips

- ▶ Oslo: *Vikingskiphuset*
- ▶ Roskilde: *Vikingskibsmuseet*
- ▶ York: *Jorvik Viking Centre*
- ▶ Uppsala: *Gamla Uppsala*
- ▶ Reykjavik: *Settlement Exhibition (“871 +/- 2”)*
- ▶ Reykjavik: *Árni Magnússon Manuscript Collection*
- ▶ Stockholm: *Historiska museet*
- ▶ *Birka*
- ▶ Oslo: *Norsk Folkemuseum*
- ▶ London: *British Museum*
- ▶ Newfoundland: *L'Anse aux Meadows*

# Deadline Approaching

## MA in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies



- ▶ 1-year and 2-year options
- ▶ No tuition fees
- ▶ First year in Reykjavik
- ▶ Third semester in Oslo/Copenhagen/Aarhus
- ▶ Application deadline: February 1st
- ▶ See [oldnorse.is](http://oldnorse.is)

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