



Scandinavia

In northernmost Europe, between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, lies a region called **Scandinavia**.

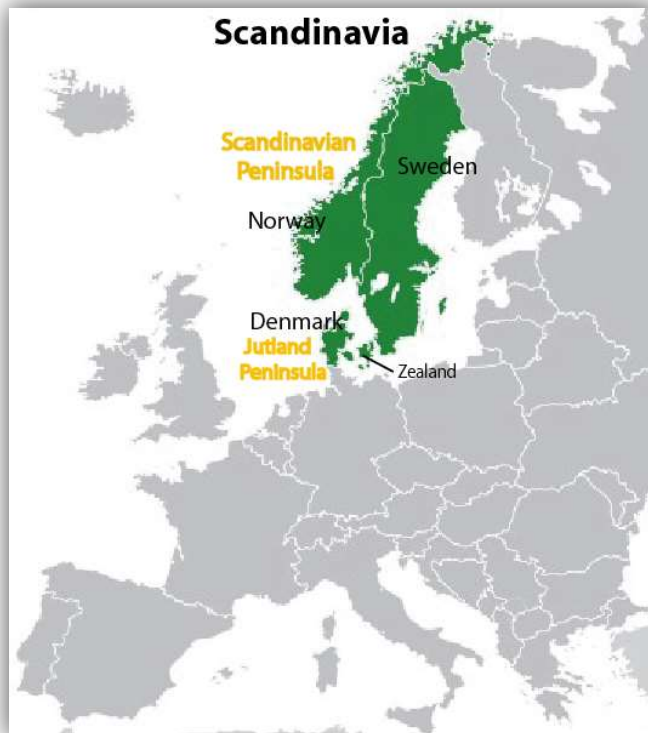
Scandinavia consists of three countries. The first two, **Norway** and **Sweden**, lie on the huge **Scandinavian Peninsula**. Part of the third country, **Denmark**, lies on the much smaller **Jutland Peninsula**. The rest of Denmark lies on

islands between the Jutland and Scandinavian Peninsulas. The largest of these **Danish Islands** is called **Zealand**. The capital of Denmark, **Copenhagen**, lies on the east coast of Zealand.

The climate of Scandinavia is very different from place to place. Northern Scandinavia lies within the **Arctic Circle**, where temperatures can be unbearably cold!

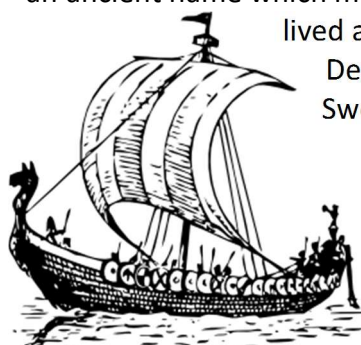
The **Arctic Circle** is the part of the globe above 66-1/2 degrees north latitude. Within the Arctic Circle, the sun never rises for part of each winter, and never sets for part of each summer.

Most Scandinavians prefer to live in southern Scandinavia, where the climate is much more bearable than the north. They especially like the coast, where warmth from the sea keeps temperatures from dropping too low. This is one reason why the **Vikings**, who came from Scandinavia, were such expert seamen.



Norsemen and Vikings

The natives of Scandinavia were called **Norsemen**—an ancient name which means simply “north-men.” Norse tribes lived all along the coasts of what are now Denmark, southern Norway and southern Sweden.



Wherever they lived, all Norsemen had two things in common. First, they all spoke an ancient language called **Old Norse**. Second, they all followed the ancient Norse religion— a warlike religion built around warrior gods. The greatest of all Norse gods was Odin, and the mightiest in battle was Thor.





The warlike Norse religion inspired some of the deadliest warriors of all time: the **Vikings**.

The Vikings were Norse raiders who always struck from the sea, at least at first. Even the very name “Viking” spoke of the sea; for it probably came from an Old Norse word that meant “sea journey.”

Just before 800 AD, the Vikings suddenly started raiding monasteries and villages all along the coasts of northern Europe. Viking ships appeared out of nowhere, landing where no one expected them to land. The mostly blonde warriors who strode ashore were uncommonly tall, strong and skilled. After killing everyone who stood in their way, the Vikings stole everything of value, loaded it aboard their ships and then disappeared! This was the beginning of the **Viking Age**— a time when Europeans lived in constant fear of raiders from the north.

Viking Ships

Viking ships came in two kinds: **longships** and **knarrs**.

A **longship** was a long, narrow vessel built for swift raids. The smallest longships were about 60 feet long, and carried crews of 25 – 30. The largest were twice as long, and carried crews of 100 or more.

Longships could be driven by sails, oars or both. Instead of simple rowing benches, Viking oarsmen sat on clever sea chests that were part seat, part storage locker.

Two special features made longships perfect for Viking raids. First, longships were **symmetrical** from front to back. In other words, their backs were shaped just like their fronts— which meant that if the Vikings needed to turn around quickly, then they could just turn in their seats and row the other way!

Second, longships’ bottoms were almost flat. This feature was key to the element of surprise! Flat-bottomed ships could sail along coasts and up rivers that were far too shallow for other ships. Since no one had ever seen ships in these waters before, no one expected the Vikings to land there. Flat-bottomed ships could also land on any beach, with no need for docks.



Vikings landing in England



A third special feature of longships was more decorative, but no less useful for war. Vikings often carved the prows of their longships in the shape of dragon heads! The Vikings loved dragons— partly because Norse legends were full of dragons, and partly because dragons terrified their enemies. Dragon-shaped prows were so common that most people called longships **dragon ships**. The sight of a dragon ship nosing onto a beach was enough to strike terror in any heart!

A **knarr** was a cargo ship built to carry supplies and trade goods. Knarrs were wider, deeper and shorter than longships. They could carry more weight than longships, but also were slower and harder to turn. With smaller crews and fewer oars than longships, knarrs depended on sails more than oars.

Viking warriors used many different weapons, from bows and arrows to spears, swords, battleaxes and pikes. Like their Saxon neighbors to the south, the Vikings favored a special kind of straight sword called a **seax**.

Viking Weapons

For defense, early Vikings carried round shields; while later Vikings carried kite-shaped shields. Their armor was usually chain mail, and their helmets were usually simple ones made of metal or leather.

Contrary to popular belief, no archaeologist has ever found a Viking helmet with horns! Most historians think that horned Viking helmets were only an artists' invention— a way to show the deep terror Europeans felt whenever they saw Vikings.

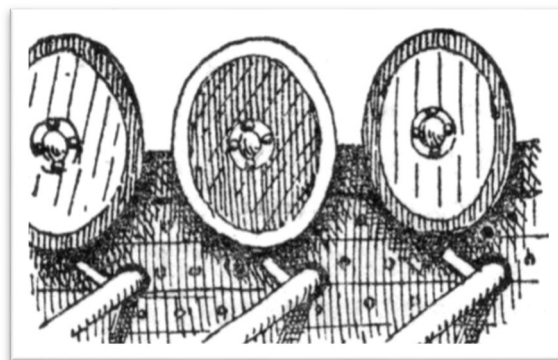
A **berserker** was a Viking warrior who fought in a mad, violent trance called the **berserker gang**. Berserkers fought like wild animals, with all the strength of bears, the speed of wolves and the viciousness of cornered beasts.

In English, a person who goes violently crazy is said to have “**gone berserk**.”

Many Viking families lived in special homes called **longhouses**. The usual longhouse was a long, strong building with a stone foundation, walls of stone or wood and a sod roof over a wooden frame.

Living in a longhouse was quite different from living in a modern-day house. One big difference was that longhouses combined home, storehouse and barn under the same roof! The family end held living space; while the barn end held animals, feed, tools and weapons. Wooden benches lined the walls of the family end. Covered with animal skins, these benches served as padded seats by day and warm beds by night. Most longhouses were also windowless— which meant that the only light inside came from the doors, the kitchen fire and a chimney hole in the roof.

Another big difference was that a single longhouse might hold several generations of a family at once— from grandparents down to parents, children and grandchildren, all living under the same roof with their animals!



Round Viking shields hung on the side of a longship



Helmet of a Viking buried in the 900s

Viking Longhouses



Modern-day reconstruction of a sod-roofed longhouse in Iceland

The harshness of Scandinavia placed harsh demands on Viking children.

The first demand came shortly after birth, when Viking leaders examined every child for birth defects. If a child appeared to have any problems, then its parents were not allowed to feed it. For the Vikings would not waste food on any child whom they feared might weaken their tribe.

Healthy Viking children started working at around age 5. Viking boys learned hunting, fighting, farming, shipbuilding and weapon-making. Viking girls learned mainly homemaking and farming—although some learned fighting as well.

A Viking boy of 15 or 16 was old enough to marry, start a family and take on all the responsibilities of an adult. Viking girls grew up even earlier, marrying at age 12 to 14.



Norse Mythology

Like ancient Greeks and Romans, ancient Norsemen invented flawed gods to explain the flawed world around them. The gods of Norse mythology were gifted with superhuman strength, wisdom and beauty. But they were also plagued with human weaknesses—things like greed, jealousy and wickedness. In the end, the Norse believed, the wickedness of certain gods would lead to a terrible battle that would destroy the whole world.

Most of what is still known about Norse mythology comes from a pair of books called the **Eddas**.

Although the Eddas weren't written down until the 1200s, they record myths far older than that.

The complicated universe of Norse mythology begins with nine worlds, all built around a mighty world tree called **Yggdrasil**. The nine worlds are divided into three levels: three heavens, four earths and two hells.

The highest heaven is **Asgard**, home to the greatest Norse god of all: the mighty, far-seeing **Odin**.

Odin is the god of war, wisdom and more.

Some of Odin's wisdom came from the **Well of Mimir**—one of three hidden wells that watered the world tree. To drink from the Well of Mimir, Odin had to gouge out one of his own eyes and sacrifice it to the well. This explains why Odin is a one-eyed god.

Fortunately, Odin has other ways of seeing. First, Odin has two clever ravens who gather news for him. One is called **Huginn**, or "Thought"; and the other **Muninn**, or "Memory." Second, Odin can see everything that is happening in all nine worlds—but only when he sits on **Hlidskjalf**, his magical silver throne.

Besides Odin himself, the god Norsemen loved most was **Thor**, Odin's son. The Vikings honored Thor, god of thunder, as the strongest and most battle-ready god in all of Asgard.

Like Odin, Thor owns magical objects which make him even mightier than he already is. The mightiest is **Mjolnir**—a throwing hammer so heavy



Odin seated on his throne *Hlidskjalf*, with his ravens *Muninn* and *Huginn* and his magical spear *Gungnir*

that no one in the universe can lift it, save only Thor. The best parts of Mjolnir's magic are that it never misses its target, and always returns to Thor's hand. Thor also has **Járngreipr**, a pair of iron gloves for gripping Mjolnir; and **Megingjörð**, a battle belt that doubles his strength!

Most of the trouble in the Norse universe comes from a mischievous character called **Loki**. Loki is a half-god, half-giant with the remarkable power to change into any shape he likes, from fly to fish to horse. At first, Loki uses his powers for simple mischief. Later, though, Loki turns to the worst form of mischief: murder.

The human world is called **Midgard**. Between Midgard and Asgard stands a rainbow-colored bridge called the **Bifrost**. A sleepless god called **Heimdall** stands constant guard over the Bifrost, making sure no human comes to Asgard uninvited.

The only way most humans are ever invited to Asgard is if they die glorious deaths in battle. Half of the Vikings who die this way go to **Fólkvangr**, a field ruled by a goddess named **Freyja**. The other half go where every good warrior hopes to go when he dies: **Valhalla**.

Valhalla is a victory hall where great warriors get to live with Odin himself. With a roof made of shields over a frame of spears, Valhalla is a warrior's paradise. Every day, the warriors of Valhalla test their skills in great battles and hunts. Any warrior who dies comes back to life by nightfall, when a great feast begins!

The point of all this fighting and feasting is to keep warriors fit for their last battle: a world-ending melee called the **Ragnarok**. On one side will fight the gods of Asgard and the warriors of Valhalla. On the other will fight Loki and his kin, the evil giants.

When it comes, the Ragnarok will be a battle with no winners.

- The greatest of all warriors, Thor, will manage to kill **Jörmungandr**— a giant serpent long enough to stretch around the world. But then, the serpent's poison will lay Thor low.

For such a heavy hammer, Mjolnir was a bit short-handed. This is because as Mjolnir was being forged, a pesky fly bit the blacksmith's bellows-turner on the eyelid— causing him to stop turning the bellows before Mjolnir was quite finished.

The “pesky fly” turned out to be the trouble-making, shape-shifting Loki in disguise.



A dwarf blacksmith forging Mjolnir while the bellows-turner and Loki look on



Thor tackling the world serpent, Jormungandr, during the Ragnarok

- An immense wolf called **Fenrir** will swallow Odin whole! But then, one of Odin's sons will tear Fenrir limb from limb.
- As for Loki, Heimdall will manage to slay him— but not without being slain himself.

In the end, a great fire will rage through all of the nine worlds, destroying everyone and everything. The smoldering ruins of Asgard, Midgard and the rest will sink into the sea, leaving only darkness.

The English names for four of the seven days of the week come from Norse gods:

- ❖ **Tuesday** is named for a god called Tyr.
- ❖ **Wednesday** is named for Odin, which is sometimes pronounced Woden.
- ❖ **Thursday** is Thor's day.
- ❖ **Friday** is named for a goddess called Frigga.

From Raiders to Conquerors

The Viking Age started in 793— when out of nowhere, a band of Vikings suddenly attacked a defenseless Christian monastery in the British Isles.

This first Viking raid happened on **Lindisfarne**, a small island just off the east coast of Scotland. The Vikings not only stole the monastery's treasures, but also killed many monks, and carried off others to sell into slavery.

One thing the Vikings learned from the famous **Raid on Lindisfarne** was that monasteries made perfect targets for their raids. For one thing, monasteries were filled with donated treasures. For another, most monks were completely helpless in a fight!

Exactly why the Vikings chose this time to attack, no one knows for sure. Some say that the Vikings had outgrown Scandinavia, and needed more room to grow. Others say that Scandinavia suddenly grew colder around this time, making it hard for the Vikings to raise enough food.

A **valkyrie** is a heavenly shield-maiden sent by Odin to watch over a battle in Midgard. When a great warrior dies a glorious death in battle, a valkyrie carries him up to Asgard.



Valkyries carrying slain warriors off to Asgard

Hnefatafl was a popular board game that ran much like a Viking raid. In the center of a checkered board stood a king, defended by a home army of about 8. Around the edges of the board stood a Viking army twice that size. The king tried to reach safety by running for the edges of the board; while the Vikings tried to surround the king.

Hnefatafl remained popular until a new game arrived to replace it: Chess.





Still others say that the Vikings needed no special reason to go to war. They were simply a warlike people— bloodthirsty savages who liked nothing better than a good fight!

Lightning raids like the one on Lindisfarne were only the beginning. As the Vikings grew more confident, they sent bigger raiding parties, striking targets farther inland. In time, they sent armies to conquer new lands for the Norse people.

By the 840s, Viking families were settling into new lands all over northern Europe. Wherever they settled— from Britain and France in the west all the way to Russia in the east— the incredibly tough Vikings changed the course of history.

Viking Explorers in the North Atlantic

The Vikings were more than just raiders and conquerors. They were also explorers and adventurers! While some Vikings fought for old lands in Britain and France, others searched for new lands not marked on any map.

The first new lands the Vikings discovered were the **Faroe Islands**, which lie about midway between Norway and Iceland. From the Faroes, they leapt on to **Iceland**; then farther on to **Greenland**; and then farther yet.



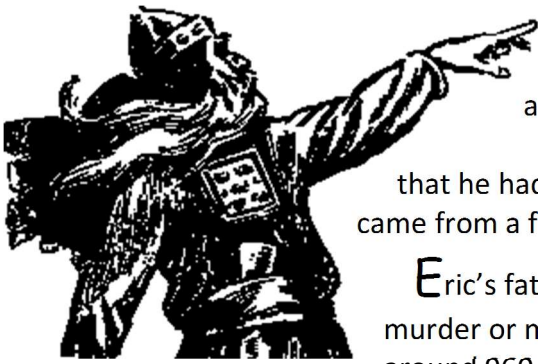
The great mystery is how the Vikings managed to find all these islands! After all, the North Atlantic is a very big place, and there are no signs pointing the way to the next island. Yet somehow, the Vikings managed to find distant islands that no one else had ever found. They also managed to keep finding those islands, going back to them again and again— all without compasses, sextants, star charts or clocks!

The first Viking leader in **Iceland** was **Ingólfr Arnarson**, who built the first settlement there around 874. Arnarson was the first to realize what a treasure Iceland was— a luscious place filled with fish, seals, walrus and good farmland. When the Vikings back home heard of Arnarson's treasure, they couldn't move there fast enough. Just 50 – 60 years after Arnarson first moved to Iceland, Viking settlers had already claimed all of the best farmland there.

Fifty more years passed before the Vikings moved on to their next big find: **Greenland**. **Eric Thorvaldsson**, also called



Vikings landing in Iceland



Eric the Red, built the first Viking settlement on Greenland around 986.

There are two possible explanations for Eric's nickname. One is that he had fiery red hair. The other is that he had a fiery temper— for Eric came from a family of convicted killers!

Eric's father, Thorvald Asvaldsson, had been banished from Norway for murder or manslaughter. This is why Thorvald moved his family to Iceland around 960. Twenty-two years later, Eric was convicted of the same crime, and sentenced to three years' banishment.

Eric made good use of this time— for it was during those three years that he found and explored Greenland.

Actually, the name "Greenland" started as an advertising stunt. The moment his three years were over, Eric was back in Iceland looking for settlers to build a colony. To make his island sound more attractive, Eric called it "Greenland"— even though it was really less green, and far more covered with ice, than Iceland was. By this time, though, most of Iceland was already taken— which meant that Eric found plenty of Vikings who were ready to try their luck somewhere else.

Sad to say, luck was hard to find on Greenland. Of the 20 – 30 ships that sailed with Eric in 986, only 14 survived the hard journey. And the ones that did survive found Greenland to be far less green than Eric had promised. The few colonies the Vikings built on Greenland never prospered like the ones on Iceland did. Most of Greenland was simply too cold!



Leif Ericsson, son of Eric the Red, was to become the most famous Viking of all.

Like his father, Leif Ericsson was a skilled seaman. Leif's first long sea voyage took him from Greenland to Norway— probably to beg the King of Norway for help. If the colonies on Greenland were to survive, then they would need more help than the king had sent so far.

By this time, the King of Norway was a Christian. So Leif became a Christian as well— either because he believed the gospel, or because he wanted to please his king. Either way, the king sent at least one kind of help to Greenland. Thanks to Leif's trip, Greenland received its first Christian church!

Leif's trip to Norway also led to the greatest discovery of his life. One version of Leif's story says that on his way home from Norway, a heavy storm blew him off course. When the big storm finally blew over, Leif found himself sailing along the coast of a place no other European had ever seen: **North America**.

After exploring this unknown coast for some time, Leif named part of it **Vinland**, or "Vine-land"— after the plentiful grape vines he found there. He also built a temporary colony there for the winter. Just where Leif built his colony, no one knows for sure; but the best guess is somewhere in Newfoundland, Canada.



"Leif Ericsson discovers North America" by artist Christian Krohg

The few Vikings who tried to settle in Vinland had even less luck than the ones on Greenland did. Leif's brother, Thorvald Ericsson, died with an arrow in his chest— fired by angry Native Americans whom the Vikings called **Skraelings**. The death of Thorvald Ericsson brought an end to the Viking colonies in Vinland. Although other Vikings returned there to gather grapes and wood, none settled there permanently.

The *Skraelings* were probably ancestors of the **Inuit**, a Native American people who still live in northern Canada.

A long time later, the Viking colonies on Greenland failed as well. As time went on, more and more Vikings gave up on frozen Greenland. By about 1400, the Vikings had all moved back to Iceland or Scandinavia.

The East-West Schism

The rise of Islam destroyed most churches in the East. By the end of the **Rashidun Caliphate** in 661 (Chapter 7), only one great Christian city remained in all of the East. This was Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire.

Meanwhile, Rome was still the leading Christian city in the West.

Over time, the churches of East and West grew different from one another. One big difference was that Western priests spoke Latin in church, while Eastern ones spoke Greek. Another was that Eastern priests were allowed to marry, while most Western ones were not. East and West also argued over how to worship— what to read, what to say and what to sing, as well as how to use icons and relics (Chapter 5).

Oddly enough, one of the biggest disagreements between East and West started over a single word: *filioque*.

Filioque is a Latin word that means “and from the Son.” Around 400 AD, some Western churches started adding *filioque* to the **Nicene Creed** (Chapter 2). Without the *filioque*, the Nicene Creed read:

“I believe... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father...”

With the *filioque* added, the Nicene Creed read:

The **Nicene Creed** is an important statement of faith that describes the three persons of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Chapter 2). This creed was first written by the Council of Nicaea in 325, and expanded by the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Leif Ericsson discovered North America around 1000 AD— nearly 500 years before Christopher Columbus discovered the West Indies! So why do most people know more about Christopher Columbus than they do about Leif Ericsson?

The failures of Vinland and Greenland explain why. When the Vikings left North America, Leif Ericsson's colonies faded from memory. But Columbus' colonies thrived. The Spanish spread out all over the West Indies, Middle America and South America, building one of the richest empires the world has ever seen (Chapter 25).



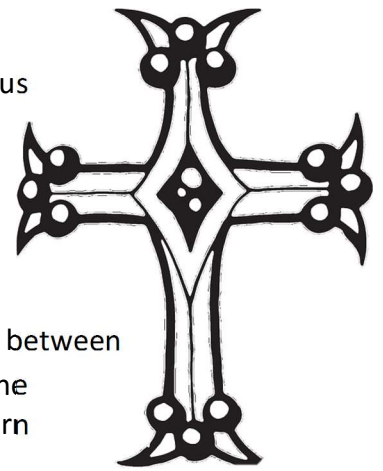
“I believe... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father **and from the Son...**”

The difference was small, but important. Western Christians liked the *filioque*. To them, it was another way of saying that Christ the Son was God, just

like God the Father. This was important to Western Christians, especially after Arius tried to say that Christ was less than God (Chapter 2).

But Eastern Christians hated the *filioque*. To them, it seemed to say that the Holy Spirit was less than God. Besides, adding the *filioque* was bad manners. The Nicene Creed was one of the most important statements of faith ever written; and yet the West had changed it without even asking the East!

The argument over the *filioque* was only part of a much bigger argument between Rome and Constantinople. The popes of the Church of Rome saw themselves as the leaders of all Christian churches, not just Western ones. The East disagreed. Eastern churches followed a different leader: the **Patriarch of Constantinople**, whose headquarters was the great **Hagia Sophia** (Chapter 4).



The **Patriarch of Constantinople** was the head of the Church in the East, just as the Pope was the head of the Church in the West.

A **schism** is a church split.

The argument over which was higher, pope or patriarch, was the biggest argument of all. This was the argument that led to one of the biggest church splits of all time: the **East-West Schism**, also called the **Great Schism**.

The argument came to a head in 1054. That was when **Pope Leo IX** sent his favorite secretary, **Cardinal Humbert**, to Constantinople for a big meeting with **Patriarch Michael I Cerularius**. Basically, the cardinal told the patriarch that he had no choice. If he wanted to be a Christian, then he would have to obey the pope, just like every other Christian in the world!

Naturally, the patriarch didn't see it that way. After a big argument, the cardinal stormed out of their meeting in a rage.

What happened next broke the last tie between the churches of East and West.

In July 1054, Cardinal Humbert marched into the Hagia Sophia and laid a **papal bull** before the patriarch. Upon opening this papal bull, the patriarch learned that the pope had just **excommunicated** him. In other words, the Patriarch of Constantinople was kicked out of his own church! By order of the pope, all Christians everywhere were to cut ties with the patriarch. Most importantly, no Christian church was to serve the patriarch Holy Communion.

Naturally, no one in the East obeyed this papal bull. Instead of excommunicating their patriarch, the churches of the East excommunicated Cardinal Humbert!

From then on, the churches of East and West went their separate ways. Churches that followed Constantinople became **Eastern Orthodox** churches; while churches that followed Rome became **Roman Catholic** churches. The two have remained separate ever since.

A **papal bull** is a sealed letter containing important statements or instructions from the pope.

To **excommunicate** someone is to cast him out of the Church, cutting him off from Holy Communion.



Patriarch Michael I Cerularius seated on his throne at the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople