

Chapter 8

The Vikings

GEOGRAPHY FOCUS

THREE NORTHERN EUROPEAN PENINSULAS



Scandinavia and Fenno-Scandia

The Scandinavian Peninsula is large northern European peninsula that contains the modern-day nations of Norway, Sweden and part of Finland. Only northern Finland lies on the Scandinavian Peninsula; the rest lies on a larger peninsula called Fenno-Scandia, of which the Scandinavian Peninsula is part.

These bodies of water all but surround the Scandinavian Peninsula:

- To the southeast lie the Gulf of Bothnia and the Baltic Sea;
- To the southwest lies the North Sea;
- To the northwest lies the Norwegian Sea; and
- To the north lies the Barents Sea.

Jutland

Just south of the Scandinavian Peninsula, keyed into a niche between southern Norway and southern Sweden, lies a much smaller peninsula called the Jutland Peninsula. The modern-day nation of Denmark occupies most of the Jutland Peninsula; Germany occupies the peninsula's southern end.

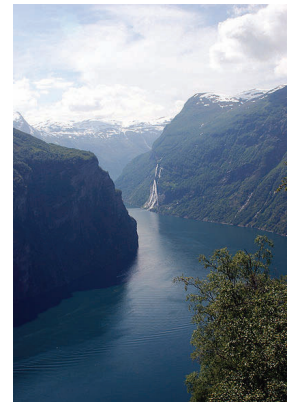
These bodies of water all but surround the Jutland Peninsula:

- To the west lies the North Sea;
- To the northwest lies the Skagerrak Strait;
- To the northeast lies the Kattegat Bay; and
- To the east lies the Baltic Sea.

The large islands east of the Jutland Peninsula also belong to Denmark. The largest of these islands, the one closest to Sweden, is named Zealand. Denmark's capital city of Copenhagen lies on Zealand's eastern edge.

Other interesting facts about Scandinavia and Jutland:

- A steep-sided mountain range called the Scandinavian Mountains forms a natural border between northern Norway and Sweden.
- To the northwest, arms of the Scandinavian Mountains stretch far out into the Norwegian Sea, enclosing long, steep-sided inlets known as fjords.
- About one fourth of the Scandinavian Peninsula lies within the Arctic Circle. The Arctic Circle is the far northern circle of the globe within which, for at least one summer day each year, the sun never sets— and, for at least one winter day each year, the sun never rises (see Chapter 14).



Geiranger Fjord

MEDIEVAL HISTORY FOCUS

THE VIKINGS

DEFINITIONS: Norse, Nordic and Norsemen

The word “Norsemen” means “northmen,” and refers to the people of far northern Europe— mainly Scandinavia and the Jutland Peninsula. These people are also called “Norse” or “Nordic.” Most ancient Norsemen had two things in common: (1) They spoke an ancient language called Old Norse, and (2) They believed in an ancient Norse mythology centered around warrior gods like Odin and Thor.

CRITICAL CONCEPTS: Vikings and the Viking Age

Vikings: The Vikings were seafaring raiders and conquerors who came from the Scandinavian and Jutland Peninsulas, mainly from the territories that now belong to Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The word “Viking” probably came from an Old Norse word that meant “sea journey.”

The Viking Age: The Viking Age was the era when the Vikings raided and conquered territories all over coastal Europe and beyond. The Viking Age began around 793, when early Viking raiders plundered a defenseless monastery at Lindisfarne in the British Isles (see below); and it ended around 1066, when the Vikings who had settled in Normandy, France crossed the English Channel and conquered England (The Norman Conquest, see Chapter 9).

The Vikings in Scandinavia

The Vikings were not the first group of invaders who left the far north in search of new homes farther south: Germanic tribes like the Goths and the Burgundians also came from Scandinavia. The Vikings, the Goths, the Burgundians and several other groups of tribes all sprang from the same ancestors, and shared the same Norse mythology. However, when those other tribes migrated into central Europe, the Vikings’ ancestors remained behind in Scandinavia.

Early Viking Raids

During the late 700s, the Vikings began crossing the North Sea to launch their first raids against undefended targets in the

Nicholas Roerich, “Guests from Overseas”



British Isles. Different people have offered different possible reasons for these raids:

- Some say that the Vikings were a warlike people who craved battle and conquest. Their Norse mythology taught them that the best way to earn honor was through victory in battle.
- Some say that the Vikings were alarmed when Charlemagne defeated and Christianized their neighbors to the south, the Saxons (see Chapter 7). The Vikings fought to make sure that Charlemagne couldn't defeat and Christianize them as well.
- Some say that the Viking population had become so large that frigid Scandinavia, with its short growing season, could no longer feed them all.
- Some say that Scandinavia's climate had grown colder than before, making it difficult for the Vikings to raise enough food to feed themselves.



The Danes invade England

When the Vikings first began raiding coastal targets around Western Europe, they didn't intend to stay: Their plan was to capture as many treasures as they could, then carry their captured treasures back home to Scandinavia, where they would either use them or sell them. Their method depended upon surprise:

1. First, the Vikings sailed and/or rowed swiftly toward their targets, their grimly decorated sails appearing on the horizon like omens of a terrible doom.
2. After landing their ships, they quickly overwhelmed their targets' few surprised defenders, killing or maiming any who dared to stand in their way.
3. Next, they stole everything that they could possibly use or sell, especially valuables, slaves, young women and food.
4. Finally, they disappeared back over the sea before anyone could organize a defense against them.

The Vikings soon learned that Christian monasteries were excellent targets for their raids, for two reasons: (1) Because they were full of valuable donated treasures, and (2) Because most monks were defenseless.

FASCINATING FACTS: The Viking Raid on Lindisfarne

Lindisfarne is a tidal island— that is, an island that is connected to the mainland only at low tide— that lies off Great Britain's northeast coast, not far from Edinburgh, Scotland (see map). After Columba brought Christianity to Scotland (see Chapter 3), missionaries from Iona built a new monastery atop a high, rocky hill on Lindisfarne. Like Iona, Lindisfarne became a "Holy Island," a place where devoted missionaries studied to prepare themselves for mission work.

If the Vikings knew of Lindisfarne's reputation as a Holy Island, they ignored it. In 793, Viking raiders landed on Lindisfarne, then proceeded to (1) Attack the monastery's monks, (2) Slaughter the monastery's livestock, (3) Steal the monastery's treasures, and (4) Destroy the monastery's buildings. The Vikings killed many monks, and sold others into slavery. When Christians all over Europe heard about the Viking raid on Lindisfarne, they were stunned that the savage, uncultured Vikings had dared to attack such a holy place.



Two years later, the Vikings attacked Iona as well. It may have been a Viking raid that convinced Iona's monks to send the Book of Kells back to Ireland for safekeeping (see Chapter 3).

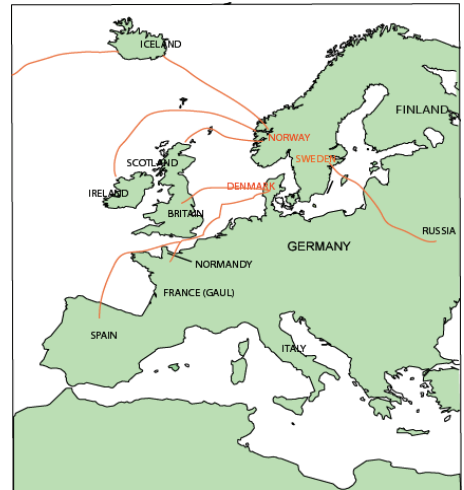
Lindisfarne Castle on Holy island



From Raiders to Conquerors

In time, the Viking raiders grew confident enough to raid targets farther inland, especially in the British Isles. Since the Britons had no united government at the time, there was no single king who was strong enough to fight off the Vikings— except for Alfred the Great of Wessex (see Chapter 9). Wealthy kings sometimes bought temporary protection from Viking raids, bribing the Vikings to stay out of their kingdoms for a year; but after that year had passed, the Vikings would return to demand larger bribes.

In time, the Vikings began to send larger raiding parties, followed by invasion armies. Eventually, the Vikings began to settle down in the new territories that their armies had conquered for them. The table below lists some territories where the Vikings settled during the Viking Age:



<u>Territory:</u>	<u>Settled By Vikings From:</u>	<u>Viking Leader(s):</u>
Ireland	Norway	Thorgest, Olaf, Ivar
Scotland	Norway	Harald Fairhair, Eric Bloodaxe
Iceland	Norway	Ingólfr Arnarson
Kievan Rus (Russia)	Sweden	Rurik the Viking
Greenland	Iceland	Erik Thorvaldsson (Eric the Red)
Normandy, France	Denmark	Rollo the Viking
The Danelaw (northern England)	Denmark	The Great Heathen Army
England	Normandy	William the Conqueror

FASCINATING FACTS: Viking Weaponry



Viking warriors used a variety of weapons and armor, including:

Bows and Arrows	Spears	Battleaxes
Seaxes (Machete-like knives)	Swords	Pikes

The quality of a Viking warrior's gear often depended upon his wealth. Since most Viking warriors were also farmers and hunters, nearly all of them had at least a bow, an ax and a spear. Wealthier Vikings added swords to their personal arsenals; and the wealthiest purchased engraved, named swords.

For defense, Viking warriors used metal or leather helmets, chain mail and round shields called kite shields. Contrary to the popular cartoon image of Vikings, no archaeologist has ever discovered a Viking helmet that was decorated with horns. Most historians now believe that artists invented the idea of horned Viking helmets to make their pictures of the Vikings seem more romantic.

FASCINATING FACTS: Berserkers

Berserker Plaque

A berserker was a Viking warrior who fought under the influence of a mad, violent trance called the *berserker gang*. When the *berserker gang* came over them, berserkers fought like wild men, killing everything in their paths. When berserkers joined a battle, they became more like wild animals than men: They had the strength of bears, the speed of wolves and the viciousness of cornered beasts. According to Viking legend, some berserkers magically transformed into bears or wolves during battle.

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



Viking Longhouses

Most Vikings lived in large, highly practical dwellings called longhouses. The longhouse combined the functions of home, barn and workshop under a single roof: (1) The family end of the longhouse held a kitchen and living space; (2) The barn end held farm animals and their feed; and (3) A storehouse section held tools and weapons.

FASCINATING FACTS about Longhouses:

Photo courtesy of Malene Thyssen: Reconstruction of a Viking house from the ring castle Fyrkat near Hobro, Denmark

- Longhouses often housed all of a family's generations at once, from grandparents to parents to children and grandchildren. If the family was wealthy enough to have servants, then the servants lived in the longhouse as well.
- A single longhouse might house as many as 15 - 20 people. Family members who wanted more privacy sometimes curtained off private sections of the longhouse.
- Most longhouses were strong buildings with foundations of stone, walls of wood or stone and roofs of sod. Longhouse roofs had holes in the center to allow smoke from the fireplace to escape.
- Because most longhouses had no windows, the only light inside came from the doors, the chimney hole and the fire.
- The Vikings often lined their longhouses' walls with wooden benches covered with animal skins. These padded benches served as seats by day and as beds by night, and they also stiffened the longhouse walls.
- The Vikings crafted large wooden chests to hold the family's weapons, treasures and other possessions. Wealthy Viking families could afford beautifully carved wooden chests.



Viking Family Life



Faroe stamps 515, 516 and 517: Everyday life in the Viking Age

The dividing line between male and female duties stood at the longhouse door.

- **Viking men** were responsible for everything outside the home: farming, hunting, fishing, fighting, maintaining the home and so on. They also spent a lot of time away from home on long Viking expeditions and raids.
- **Viking women** were responsible for everything inside the home: making clothes, preparing food, keeping house, caring for children and tending farm animals.
- **Viking Children:**

Community Inspections: Any infant born to a Viking family had to pass a community inspection to prove that he or she would strengthen, not weaken, the community. If the community judged a child to be deformed, disabled or sick, then the community would not waste food on that child; it was left to die. If, however, the community judged the child to be healthy and strong, then the family fed the child, gave him a name and sprinkled him with water. With these rituals, the newborn Viking earned a share of his family's inheritance and became a full member of the Viking family.

Patronymics: Most Vikings had two names, a given name and a patronymic. The given name was the name the Viking's parents chose for him, and the patronymic was the Viking's father's name. For example, Eric Thorvaldsson means "Eric son of Thorvald," and Leif Ericsson means "Leif son of Eric." In certain Viking-settled nations, including Russia and Ukraine, patronymics are still common today.

Other interesting facts about Viking children:

- Viking parents expected their children to begin working and contributing to the family when they were about five years old.
- Viking boys learned all sorts of skills, including farming, fighting, shipbuilding, navigating and the making of Viking weapons.
- Viking girls learned mainly homemaking and farming skills— although the Vikings may have trained some of their girls to become warrior shield maidens like the Valkyrie shieldmaidens of Norse mythology (see below).

- Viking families often created alliances with other families by arranging marriages between their children.
- Viking parents expected their girls to marry between the ages of 12 - 14, and their boys to marry between the ages of 15 - 16. At age 16, Viking boys became full-grown Viking men and took on adult responsibilities.

Peter Nicolai Arbo, "Shieldmaiden"



Example of fiddlehead prow

Viking Ships

The Vikings owed some of their success as raiders and conquerors to the skill of their shipbuilders. Viking ships were the fastest, lightest, most reliable and most versatile ships of the Viking Age. They were also the most fearsome ships of their age: The sight of square-sailed, high-prowed, dragon-decorated Viking longships appearing on the horizon was enough to strike terror into hearts all over Europe.

Most Viking ships were either longships or knarrs.



Example of dragon prow

Longships

Longships were long, light, fast vessels designed for Viking raids and other military missions. The smallest longships were about 60 feet long, and carried crews of 25-30; while the largest were about 120 feet long, and carried crews of 100 or more. Although their designs varied, most longships had these things in common:

- Longships were symmetric from front to back, with high prows (fronts) and equally high sterns (backs). Their symmetry meant that they could reverse direction quickly, without making wide turns. When a longship ran into ice, rocks or other hazards, its oarsmen simply turned around in their seats and rowed in the opposite direction.
- Both prow and stern were often decorated with fine carvings. Some Viking prows were carved into fiddleheads like violin headstocks; while others were carved to resemble dragons from Norse mythology. Because of these dragon prows, the Vikings' enemies often called longships "dragon ships."
- Longships were nearly flat-bottomed, which gave them two advantages: (1) They could sail in the shallow waters of coastlines and rivers; and (2) They could land almost anywhere, without the need for docks and harbors. These advantages made longships ideal for quick raids against coastal targets.



Replica of a Longship

- Longships could be driven by sails, oars or both. Instead of sitting on rowing benches, Viking oarsmen sat

on specially designed sea chests that served as both rowing seats and storage lockers.

Knarrs

Knarrs were cargo ships designed to carry trade goods and supplies. Knarrs were wider, deeper and shorter than longships— which meant that they could carry more cargo than longships, but were also slower and less maneuverable than longships. With fewer crewmen and fewer oars to propel them, knarrs were more dependent upon their sails than longships were.

Replica of a Knarr



FASCINATING FACTS: Clinker-Built Hulls

Photo courtesy of Karamell: Clinker-built Hulls

There are two ways to plank a wooden ship's hull: by butting the planks' edges against one another, or by overlapping the planks' edges. Hulls with butted planks are called carvel-built, and hulls with overlapped planks are called clinker-built. Carvel-built hulls rely on sturdy frames for strength, while clinker-built hulls take more of their strength from their planking.

The Vikings preferred clinker-built hulls. They fashioned their planks by ripping— that is, by carefully splitting long logs into thin slices. Then they overlapped their planks all along their edges, fastening them together with dozens of copper or iron rivets. To seal their clinker-built hulls against leaks, Viking shipbuilders used caulking that they made out of tar-soaked moss.

Funeral Ships

Wealthy Vikings sometimes used longships as funeral ships for their dead. Because longships were such important symbols of Viking power, they made fitting memorials for honored warriors and nobles. The Vikings may have hoped that these honored dead could use their funeral ships to sail on into the afterlife.

To prepare an honored Viking for a longship funeral, the Vikings arranged his or her body aboard the ship, then surrounded it with

grave goods. These grave goods included all of the things that the dead might need in the afterlife, including weapons, armor, food, clothing and more. At some funerals, the grave goods even included living slaves who sacrificed their own lives in case their masters needed help in the afterlife.

After these preparations were complete, the Vikings finished the funeral in one of three ways: They either (1) Sailed the funeral ship out into the open sea, where storm and sea eventually sank it; (2) Burned the funeral ship; or (3) Buried the funeral ship inside a large earthen mound called a tumulus.

Viking funeral



NORSE MYTHOLOGY

The Vikings were polytheists who believed in a long list of Norse gods. Like the Vikings themselves, the Norse gods were warriors who lived to earn glory in battle. Like Greek and Roman gods, Norse gods blended godlike powers and wisdom with human treachery and weakness: The Norse gods deceived one another, fought with one another and even killed one another.

The Eddas

Most of what is still known today about Norse mythology comes from a pair of books called the Eddas. Both Eddas, the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, were written in Iceland during the 1200s; but they both record legends that are far older than that, tales and myths that the Vikings handed down orally for centuries before they had a written language.



The Eddas

Yggdrasil and the Nine Worlds

There are several races of intelligent beings in the Norse universe: In addition to the gods, there are giants, elves, dwarves, men, demons and more. Each race lives in its own world, and only the gods may travel from world to world with ease.

There are nine worlds in the Norse universe, all arranged around a mighty Tree of Life named Yggdrasil. The nine worlds around Yggdrasil are divided into three levels:

- The highest level contains three heavenly worlds: (1) Asgard, world of a family of gods called the Aesir (Odin's family); (2) Vanaheim, world of a family of gods called the Vanir; and (3) Alfheim, world of the Light Elves.
- The middle level contains four earthly worlds: (1) Midgard or "Middle Earth," world of the Humans; (2) Jotunheim, world of the Giants; (3) Swaralfheim, world of the Dark Elves; and (4) Nidavellir, world of the Dwarves.
- The lowest level contains two hells: (1) Helheim, world of all who die inglorious deaths; and (2) Muspelheim, world of Fire Giants and Demons.



Yggdrasil, the Viking World Tree

Other interesting facts about the Nine Worlds:

- A fiery, rainbow-colored bridge called Bifröst connects Midgard, world of the humans, to Asgard, world of the gods. A far-seeing, far-hearing god named Heimdall guards the Asgard end of Bifröst bridge.
- An eagle lives in Yggdrasil's topmost branches, and an evil serpent named Nidhogg gnaws at Yggdrasil's lowest roots. The eagle and the serpent hate each other so much that they are forever insulting one another. Whenever one insults the other, a gossip-loving squirrel named Ratatoskr scurries up or down Yggdrasil to make sure that everyone has heard the latest insult.

Heimdallr standing at Bifrost, blowing Gjallarhorn



Odin

Odin, god of war, wisdom and more, was the mightiest and wisest of Asgard's gods. Odin gained much of his wisdom by drinking from the Well of Mimir, one of the wells that watered the world tree Yggdrasil. Unfortunately, Mimir's wisdom came at a price: In order to drink from the well, Odin had to gouge out one of his own eyes and sacrifice it to the well. From that moment on, Odin was a one-eyed god.

Fortunately, Odin had other sources of news besides his one eye:

1. Odin had two ravens, one named Huginn ("Thought") and another named Muninn ("Memory"), who brought him news of the world.
2. When Odin sat in his silver throne Hlidskjalf, his one eye could see everything that was happening in all of the Nine Worlds.



Odin

Odin also had several other magical possessions, including:



Odin's Eight-Legged Horse

- Gungnir, a deadly spear that (1) never missed its target, (2) always killed Odin's foes and (3) always returned to Odin's hand.
- Sleipnir, an eight-legged horse that could fly as easily as it could gallop.
- Draupnir, a beautiful golden ring that produced eight identical copies of itself every nine days.

Odin was the father of Thor, Baldur and several other gods.

Thor

Thor, god of thunder, was the strongest and most battle-ready of Asgard's gods. Thunder and lightning issued from the wheels of Thor's goat-drawn chariot as he guided it across the sky. Mighty Thor had three magical possessions that made him even more formidable:

- Mjolnir, a war hammer that (1) never missed its target, (2) always killed Thor's foes and (3) always returned to Thor's hand. For such a heavy hammer, Mjolnir was a bit short-handled. This was because when a dwarf blacksmith was creating it, a troublemaker named Loki turned himself into a fly and bit the blacksmith's bellows-turner on the eyelid, causing him to stop turning the bellows.



- Járngreipr, a pair of iron gloves that Thor used to grip Mjolnir.
- Megingjörð, a battle belt that doubled Thor's already tremendous strength.



Thor, God of Thunder

Loki

Loki was a deceitful, mischief-loving giant/god who grew more evil with each passing day. One of Loki's godlike powers was especially helpful in deceiving others: He had a magical ability to transform himself into all

sorts of animal shapes, from biting fly to salmon to horse.

With his first wife, the shape-shifting Loki had three children:

1. Fenrir, a fierce wolf who grew so large and strong that he was a threat to every god in Asgard. A god named Tyr managed to imprison Fenrir by tying him with a magical, dwarf-made leash; but as Tyr did so, Fenrir bit off one of his hands.
2. Jörmungandr, a fearsome, poisonous serpent who grew so long that he could stretch himself all of the way around Midgard and bite his own tail. Thor and Jörmungandr became deadly enemies.
3. Hel, the goddess who ruled Helheim. Helheim was a place for Norsemen who died inglorious deaths— deaths of disease, old age or treachery. The dead hated the gods of Asgard for imprisoning them in Helheim.



Loki

TAWDRY TALES: How Loki Killed Baldur

Odin and his wife Frigga had a kind, wise, handsome son named Baldur who was beloved by every god in Asgard— every god, that is, except the evil trickster Loki, who was jealous of Baldur.

One night, both Frigga and Baldur had an ominous nightmare in which they saw Loki's daughter, Hel, leading Baldur down into Helheim, world of the inglorious dead. Desperate to save her beloved son from death, Frigga launched a bold plan: She would force every living and non-living thing on earth— every god, giant, elf, dwarf, rock, metal and plant— to swear that it would never harm Baldur. When Frigga had finished collecting her oaths from every race and material on earth, she felt quite certain that Baldur was safe from death. Baldur's sudden invulnerability even led to an amusing game among the gods: They loved to fire arrows and spears at Baldur, knowing that every weapon

would miss because every material on earth had sworn not to harm him.

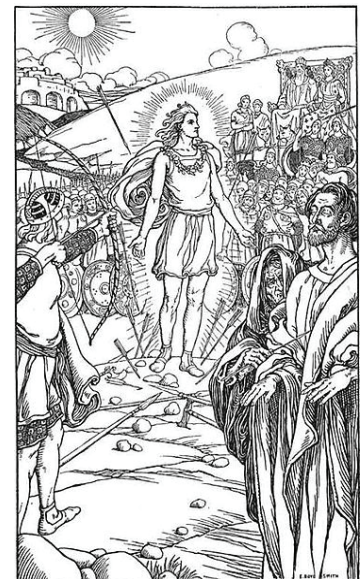
The jealous Loki enjoyed firing arrows at Baldur too; but unlike the other gods, Loki didn't want his arrows to miss. By disguising himself as a woman and plying Frigga with questions, Loki soon found a way around her oaths. Confidentially, Frigga told the disguised Loki that there was one species of wood that had not sworn a vow to protect Baldur: Mistletoe. In her haste, Frigga had judged that spindly mistletoe was no threat to Baldur, so she hadn't bothered to collect mistletoe's oath.

As soon as Loki learned this, he made an arrow of mistletoe. Next, he gave the arrow to Baldur's blind brother Hodur, who had been upset because his blindness had stopped him from joining in the game that all of the other gods were playing. Finally, Loki helped blind Hodur aim his bow at Baldur's heart. When the mistletoe arrow struck Baldur, the beautiful young god fell dead.



Hodur Shooting the Arrow

Elmer Boyd Smith,
"Each Arrow Overshot His Head"



Odin and Frigga made one more desperate attempt to save dead Baldur's life: They made Hel promise that if every living creature on earth would cry for Baldur, then she would release Baldur from Helheim. In response to Odin and Frigga's pleas, every creature on earth cried for Baldur— every creature, that is, except a single giantess who lived alone in a cave. Since the lone giantess refused to cry for Baldur, he had to remain in Helheim. Some say that this lone giantess was, once again, Loki in disguise.

After this and many, many other misdeeds, the gods finally imprisoned Loki by binding him with ropes

made from one of his dead son's intestines.

The Valkyries

The Valkyries were helmet-wearing, spear-wielding, flying-horse-riding shieldmaidens whom Odin often sent to watch over battles in Midgard. If Odin had decided who should win the battle, then the Valkyries caused the losers to fall. Then the Valkyries carried the slain warriors up to Asgard, where they ended up in one of two places:

1. Fólkvangr, a field ruled by the goddess Freyja; or
2. Valhalla, a victory hall ruled by Odin.

Valhalla

Valhalla was a victory hall where half of the warriors who died glorious deaths in battle went to live in the presence of Odin. Odin's Valhalla was a warriors' paradise with rafters made of spears, a roof made of shields and 540 enormous doors.

By day, the honored warriors who lived in Valhalla held great hunts and battles to test their strength and skills. Any warrior who died in one of these battles was revived by nightfall, when the feasting and celebration began. All of these fights and feasts were designed to keep the warriors' bodies and spirits in shape for their last battle—the dreaded Ragnarok, in which the prophets foretold that Asgard would fall.

Ragnarok

Norse prophets foretold that a terrible battle called the Ragnarok would bring about the end of the world. The sign of the Ragnarok's coming would be three long, harsh winters with no summers in between.

At the end of the third such winter, all of the gods' worst enemies would break out of the prisons that the gods had fashioned for them: Fenrir the wolf,

Jörmungandr the serpent, Loki, the giants, the dead in Hel and others would all rise up to attack the gods of Asgard. The warriors of Valhalla would come to the gods' defense, 800 of them abreast marching out of each of Valhalla's 540 massive doors.

Emil Doepler, "Walkyrien"



Emil Doepler, "Walhall"

Battle between Thor and Jörmungandr



The Ragnarok would be a battle without winners:

- Fenrir would swallow Odin; but then one of Odin's sons would tear Fenrir apart with his bare hands.
- Thor would slay the poisonous Jörmungandr; but afterward, Thor would manage to take only nine steps away from the serpent's dead body before the poison in his wounds would kill him.
- Loki and Heimdall would slaughter one another.

At the end of the Ragnarok, a great fire would rage through all of the Nine Worlds, destroying everyone and everything. As the fire burned itself out, the smoldering ruins of Asgard, Midgard and all of the rest would slowly sink into the sea. Later, a new world would be reborn, one in which there would be neither trickery nor sorrow.



A scene from Ragnarök

FASCINATING FACTS: Naming the Days of the Week

In English, the days of the week are all named for either heavenly bodies or gods, and four of the seven days are named for Norse gods:

<u>Day:</u>	<u>Named For:</u>	<u>Day:</u>	<u>Named For:</u>	<u>Day:</u>	<u>Named For:</u>
Sunday	The Sun	Monday	The Moon	Tuesday	Norse god <u>Tyr</u>
Wednesday	Norse god <u>Odin</u> (Woden)	Thursday	Norse god <u>Thor</u>	Friday	Norse goddess <u>Frigga</u>
Saturday	Roman god Saturn				

FASCINATING FACTS: Runestones

Photo courtesy of Berig: Runestone

A runestone is a standing stone engraved with runes— that is, letters from the old Scandinavian alphabet— and illustrations. The Norsemen erected most of their runestones as grave markers, but they also used them to mark property lines and to memorialize special events.



FASCINATING FACTS: Hnefatafl

Hnefatafl was a board game that became popular during the Viking Age, spreading wherever the Vikings spread. The game was played on a checkered board between two teams of unequal strength: In the center of the board were a king and 8 - 12 defenders, while on the outside of the board were 16 - 20 attackers. A game of Hnefatafl was like a Viking raid: The king of the smaller army tried to run to the outside of the board for safety, while the larger army of Viking raiders tried to surround and capture the king.

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



VIKING EXPLORERS IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

The Vikings were more than mere raiders and conquerors; they were also explorers and adventurers, and many of them were gifted seamen and navigators. In search of adventure and new lands, Viking explorers sailed west: first to the Faroe Islands (halfway between Norway and Iceland); then to Iceland; then on to Greenland and even the easternmost parts of North America.



FASCINATING FACTS: Viking Navigation

There are two mysteries about the Vikings' journeys from Norway to far-off islands like the Faroes and Iceland: How did Viking explorers find these islands in the first place, and how did Viking navigators lead fleets of ships loaded with colonists back to these islands again and again? The journey from Norway to the Faroe Islands covers about 300 miles of trackless, featureless ocean; and the journey from the Faroes to Iceland covers another 300 miles. Since the Vikings didn't have technologies like magnetic compasses, sextants, star charts and timepieces, what technologies did they use to guide their ships safely across those wide distances?

Different people have offered different theories about the Vikings' navigation technology:



Norseman landing

Seamanship: As experienced seamen, the Vikings came to understand the prevailing winds and currents in their part of the world at different times of year. Their native feel for the sea helped guide their ships.

Birds: The Vikings may have learned about the Faroe Islands and Iceland by watching migrating birds, who knew about the islands long before any human knew.

Some Vikings used caged birds for navigation. On a journey from the Faroe Islands west to Iceland, one Viking reported taking along three caged ravens, then releasing them one at a time:

1. The first raven, released only a few days into the journey, could still sense the Faroe Islands; so it flew back east.
2. The second raven, released a few days later, could sense no land in any direction; so it settled down on the safety of the ship's mast.
3. The third raven, released later yet, sensed Iceland; so it flew west, and the Vikings used its flight to set their course.

Sun Discs: The Vikings may have created sun discs that allowed them to measure the sun's angle of elevation. By keeping track of the sun's angle, Viking navigators could tell if they were traveling too far north or south.

Sun Stones: The problem with using the sun for navigation is that the skies over the North Atlantic are often cloudy. However, some believe that the Vikings used a crystal "sun stone"— perhaps calcite, perhaps

cordierite— that polarized the sun’s rays, allowing Viking navigators to know exactly how high the sun was even when clouds blocked it from view.

Iceland

A Viking named Ingólfr Arnarson established the first permanent settlement on Iceland around 874. As a site for his settlement, Arnarson chose a natural bay near Iceland’s southwest corner. Centuries later, that bay became the site of Iceland’s capital city, Reykjavik.

The Vikings took an immediate liking to Iceland, for three reasons: (1) Because it was rich with fish, seals and walrus; (2) Because it had plenty of good farmland; and (3) Because no one had claimed any of that farmland— although the Vikings’ arrival may have pushed a few Irish monks off the island. Iceland became so popular that within 50 - 60 years of Arnarson’s arrival, Viking settlers had claimed all of Iceland’s farmland.



Raadsig, “Ingolf”

Greenland

Around 982 AD, a group of Viking settlers led by Eric the Red became the first to colonize a vast, unknown island that lay even farther west than Iceland.

VICTORIOUS VIKINGS: Eric Thorvaldsson (Eric the Red, 950? - 1003?)



Around 960, a judge banished a wealthy Viking named Thorvald Asvaldsson from Norway for the crime of murder or manslaughter. Forced to leave Norway, Thorvald took his family and moved west to Iceland. Manslaughter must have run in the family; because around 981, a judge banished Thorvald’s son Eric from Iceland for the very same crimes that his father had committed. Eric Thorvaldsson’s sentence of exile was to last for three years.

As a talented seaman and explorer, Eric had the skills to put his three years in exile to good use. Sailing west from Iceland, Eric soon made landfall on the huge island that he would later name Greenland. Eric was probably not the first Viking to discover Greenland, but he was certainly the first to explore the island so thoroughly. Eric spent the three years from about 982 - 985 sailing up and down Greenland’s coastline, searching out the best places to establish permanent colonies.

As soon as his term of exile expired, Eric returned to Iceland and began recruiting settlers to build colonies on his new island. To make his venture more attractive to settlers, Eric chose to name his island “Greenland”— despite the fact that Greenland was far less green, and far more ice-covered, than Iceland was. By 985, however, all of Iceland’s best land was taken, and Eric found plenty of Viking settlers who were eager to try their luck in his new, supposedly green paradise.

Around 986, Eric the Red led about 20 ships loaded with people and supplies on a colonizing expedition from Iceland to Greenland. The expedition had trouble from the beginning: Only 14 of the 20 ships survived the journey, and those that survived found the island to be far less welcoming than Eric had promised. Greenland’s forbidding climate meant that the Viking colonies on Greenland would never thrive the way the ones on Iceland thrived. Nevertheless, Viking settlers continued to flow into Greenland, building colony after colony there.

Some of these new settlers brought disease with them. Around 1003, Eric the Red and many other Greenland Vikings died of an epidemic disease carried in by settlers from the east.

Other interesting facts about Eric the Red:

- Eric's nickname, "the Red," probably meant that he had red hair.

Leif Ericsson ("Leif the Lucky," 970? - 1020?)

Like his father Eric the Red, Leif Ericsson was a skilled Viking seaman and explorer. Leif's first long journey took him, not west, but east: Around 999, Leif sailed from Greenland to his family's homeland in Norway, possibly on a mission to win more support for his father's colonies on Greenland.

By this time, Christian missionaries had begun converting the Vikings to Christianity. When Leif arrived in Norway, Norway was a Christian nation with a Christian king named Olaf I. For one of two reasons— either because he believed the Gospel, or because he wanted help from the Christian King Olaf— Leif decided to become a Christian as well.



Christian Krohg, "Leif-Ericsson"

On Leif's return journey to Greenland, Olaf sent along a Christian priest to carry the Gospel to the Greenlanders. Eric's mother received the Gospel gladly, but his pagan father Eric never did. Eric the Red never accepted Christianity, and never set foot inside the new Christian church that Olaf's priest built in Greenland.

North America

Sometime around the turn of the millennium in 1000 AD, Leif led his most famous voyage— the one on which he discovered North America. There are two different tales about Leif's voyage of discovery:

1. One tale says that while Leif was on his way back home from Norway, a major storm blew him off course. After the storm blew over, Leif found himself sailing along the coast of the never-before-seen continent of North America.
2. Another tale says that Leif learned about North America from another Viking named Bjarni Herjólfsson, who had seen the continent years before when he himself was blown off course. By purchasing Bjarni's boat and following the route that Bjarni laid out for him, Leif Ericsson became the first European ever to land on North America.

Vinland

After exploring the coast of North America for a time, Leif decided to build a small colony where he could spend the winter. He named his colony *Vinland*, or "Wineland," in honor of the abundant wild grapes he found there. After collecting great quantities of grapes and logs, both of which were scarce in Greenland, Leif headed home the following spring.

Somewhere along the way home from Vinland to Greenland, Leif found and rescued a shipwrecked, castaway Viking explorer. It was this fortunate deed that earned Leif his nickname, "Leif the Lucky."

Thorvald Ericsson

The Vikings' next expedition to Vinland, led by Leif's brother Thorvald Ericsson, was not as successful as

the first. After spending one winter in Vinland, Thorvald and his men found themselves in a fight with nine natives whom the Vikings called *Skraelings*.

INTERESTING INQUIRIES: Who Were the *Skraelings*?

Vinland's natives, whom the Vikings called *Skraelings*, probably belonged to one of the three hunter-gatherer cultures who lived in northeast North America during the Viking Age: the Thule, Dorset and Point Revenge cultures. All three cultures were ancestors of the Inuit, a Native American race that still lives in that part of North America.

Thorvald Ericsson's skirmishes with the Inuit's ancestors were the first of many clashes between Native Americans and European colonists.

The Vikings managed to kill eight *Skraelings*, but the ninth escaped to summon reinforcements. When the second band of *Skraelings* attacked, they killed Thorvald with an arrow.

FASCINATING FAILURES: Why the Viking Colonies in Vinland and Greenland Failed

Photo courtesy of Uwe Kils: Viking Ship

After the *Skraelings* killed Thorvald Ericsson, the Vikings abandoned their colony at Vinland. Although other Vikings would return to gather grapes and logs, no Viking would ever establish a successful colony in North America.

The biggest reason behind Vinland's failure was the failure of its neighbor, Greenland. Because Greenland's climate had never been as hospitable as Iceland's, the Viking colonies at Greenland had to import much of what they needed to live. The struggling colonies at Greenland simply could not afford to send valuable supplies to Vinland, especially when they knew that they might lose those supplies to the hostile *Skraelings*. In time, the colonies at Greenland failed altogether, and the Vikings retreated to Iceland.

The failure of Vinland is the main reason why Christopher Columbus, and not Leif Ericsson, was long honored as the first European to discover America— even though Columbus' discoveries came nearly 500 years later. Because Columbus' colonies on Hispaniola survived, his deeds were remembered; but because Ericsson's colony at Vinland died, his deeds were mostly forgotten.

CHURCH HISTORY FOCUS

CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSIES: The East-West Schism (1054)

Church History in Brief Rublev icon, "Angels at Mamre"

The Eastern Church and the Western church argued over more than just icons. They also argued over what kind of bread they should use in the Lord's Supper, whether or not priests should marry and how they should word the Nicene Creed. Their biggest argument of all was over the pope's authority: The Western church felt that the pope should have authority over all Christians, wherever they lived; but the Eastern church saw no reason why the pope should be more powerful



that the patriarch of Constantinople.

Eventually, these arguments split the church. The Western church became the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eastern Church became the Eastern Orthodox Church. These divided churches have never come back together.

When the Roman Empire divided into East and West, the churches of the West (centered around Rome) and the churches of the East (centered around Constantinople) also began to divide. The longer the separation between East and West continued, the greater the differences between East and West became. After the Fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD, Christians began to have more and more trouble overlooking those differences:

Language: When the Western Roman Empire fell, the people of the East began to fall back upon their native Greek. Under Emperor Heraclius (reigned 610 - 641), Greek became the Byzantine Empire's official language. Meanwhile, Latin remained the language of the West, especially in the Western church.

Politics: Long after the Fall of Rome in the West, the Byzantine Empire remained strong in the east. In the West, strong popes like Leo and Gregory took charge of weak governments in Italy and beyond. After the popes took charge of the Papal States, some of them began to act more like earthly kings than spiritual leaders (see Chapter 7). Things were different in the East, where the still-strong Byzantine emperors had no need of popes to run their empire.

Beliefs and Practices: East and West also disagreed over Christian beliefs and practices:

- They disagreed over whether or not they should use leavened bread— that is, bread prepared with yeast—in the Lord's Supper.
- They disagreed over whether or not they should allow their priests to marry.
- They disagreed over icons (religious images) and relics (objects that had belonged to dead church heroes).
- They disagreed over the proper way to hold a church service— what to say, what to read and what to sing.

Another great difference of beliefs arose over a phrase that Western Christians added to the Nicene Creed— a phrase called the *filioque*.

REFRESHING REMINDER from Chapter 2: The Christian bishops who gathered for the 325 AD Council of Nicaea wrote an important statement of Christian beliefs called the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed affirmed that there is only one God, but that God makes Himself known in the three persons of the Holy Trinity— God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. 56 years later, in 381, the Council of Constantinople affirmed and expanded the Nicene Creed.

DEFINITION: *Filioque* is a Latin word that means “and from the Son.”

FASCINATING PHRASES: The *Filioque*

Photo courtesy of Toby Hudson: Stained glass at St John the Baptist's Anglican Church

Soon after the Council of Constantinople expanded the Nicene Creed, some Western Christians began adding the word *filioque* to the line of the creed that described the Holy Spirit. The addition of this single word changed what the Nicene Creed said about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in a small, but important, way.

Without the *filioque*, the Council of Constantinople's version of the Nicene Creed read:



"I believe... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and together glorified."

With the *filioque* added, the creed read:

"I believe... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and from the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and together glorified."

For centuries, the addition of the *filioque* was strictly unofficial: Some churches added it, and some didn't. No church council suggested or approved the addition; it was simply a voluntary addition to the creed that most Western Christians liked.

The Western Christians who added the *filioque* liked the phrase because it reinforced an important Christian doctrine: the divinity of Jesus Christ. According to the rest of the Nicene Creed, Christ the Son is of the same essence as God the Father, co-equal with God. Why not then say that the Holy Spirit, who is also co-equal with God, issues from both Father and Son? The *filioque* was a strong statement of faith in the idea that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three parts of the same God. Anyone who didn't like the *filioque*, Western Christians argued, was probably an Arian who didn't believe that Jesus Christ was God (see Chapter 2).

Eastern Christians disagreed. Part of their disagreement was over manners: Eastern Christians felt that it was inexcusable for the West to add a phrase to such an important creed without asking permission from a church-wide council. Furthermore, Eastern Christians disliked what the *filioque* said about the Holy Spirit: To them, the phrase demeaned the Holy Spirit by making the Spirit seem like a lesser God than the Father and the Son.

In 1014, Pope Benedict III began using the Western version of the Nicene Creed, including the *filioque*, in church services held at Rome. From that time on, the Western church began to insist that its version of the creed was the only correct one, and that anyone who refused to add the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed was dangerously close to heresy.

Papal Authority

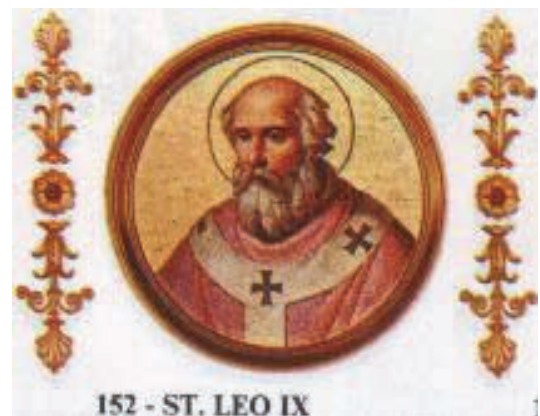
The Pope's insistence on adding the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed aggravated yet another disagreement between the churches of East and West, the most important one of all: The disagreement over the Pope's authority.

- To Western Christians, the Pope was the heir of St. Peter. As the keeper of the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19), the Pope was the final, infallible authority over the entire Christian world.
- Eastern Christians had never accepted the idea that the Bishop of Rome stood above all other bishops. They were furious that the Pope had tried to decide an important issue like the *filioque* without holding a church-wide council to discuss the issue and vote on it.

Pope, Patriarch and Cardinal

During the 1050s, the battle over the Pope's authority became a personal battle between two men: (1) Pope Leo IX, who reigned as pope from 1049 - 1054; and (2) Patriarch Michael I Cerularius, who reigned as Patriarch of Constantinople from 1043 - 1059. The Patriarch tried to claim authority over the Pope, and the Pope tried to claim authority over the Patriarch. Neither man was willing to compromise.

In 1054, Pope Leo sent his favorite secretary, Cardinal Humbert, to Constantinople as a Papal ambassador— an ambassador whose mission was not to compromise with Patriarch Michael, but to demand that the Patriarch submit to



Rome's authority. Since the Patriarch was unwilling to submit, and the Cardinal was unwilling to compromise, their negotiations did not last long. The Patriarch ignored the Cardinal, and the Cardinal stormed out of their meeting in a rage.

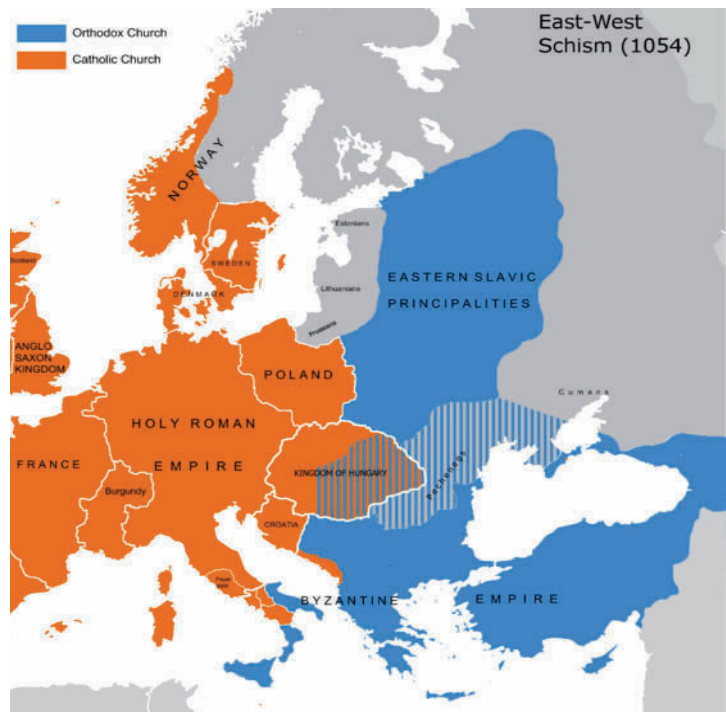
Excommunication

Finally, in July 1054, Cardinal Humbert took a fateful step: Marching into the Hagia Sophia Cathedral during prayer time, the Cardinal laid a papal bull— that is, a sealed letter from the pope— upon the altar in front of the Patriarch. The bull informed Patriarch Michael that the Pope had excommunicated him, and that he was no longer a member in good standing of the holy Catholic Church. The fact that Pope Leo had died back in April did not matter: Until and unless Michael submitted to Rome's authority, the church would not allow him to receive Holy Communion.

Naturally, the Eastern Church did not deny its patriarch Holy Communion. Instead, it wrote a bull of its own excommunicating Cardinal Humbert.

Split

After the joint excommunications of 1054, the Eastern Church and the Western church went their separate ways. A number of ambassadors tried to mend the two churches' broken relationship over the centuries, but all of their efforts failed. What had begun as a battle over Rome's authority developed into a permanent split between East and West.



The East-West split that began with the excommunication of Patriarch Michael became known as the Great Schism or the East-West Schism. Churches that followed Constantinople became known as Eastern Orthodox churches; while churches that followed Rome became known as Roman Catholic churches. In the future, all Christian churches that traced their roots back to Constantinople— including Greek Orthodox churches, Russian Orthodox churches, Syrian Orthodox churches and many others— would be called Eastern Orthodox.