



Northmen: The Viking Saga, 793-1241 AD

John Haywood

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An authoritative volume that places the Vikings in their wider geographical and historical context.

Follow the Vikings from their prehistoric pagan origins to their transformation into Christian Europeans.

In 800, the Scandinavians were barbarians in longships bent only on plunder and rapine. But as these Norse warriors left their northern strongholds to trade, raid, and settle across wide areas of Europe, Asia and the North Atlantic, their violent and predatory culture left a unique imprint on medieval history. So much so that, by 1200, the Viking homelands had become an integral part of Latin Christendom. Northmen tells this story.

Focusing on key events, such as the sack of Lindisfarne in 793 and the murder of the saga-writer Snorri Sturluson in 1241, in authoritative and compelling prose, medieval history expert Dr. John Haywood tells the extraordinary story of the Viking Age shedding light on the causes, impact, and eventual decline of Viking seafaring.

Northmen: The Viking Saga, 793-1241 AD Details

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Author : John Haywood

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From Reader Review Northmen: The Viking Saga, 793-1241 AD for online ebook

Marc says

Quite dry and factual enumeration of the Viking raids and expansion in various parts of Europe, from the end of the 8th century until (mostly) the middle of the 11th century . The perspective is mainly that of the areas that suffered from the raids and what they did or did not do about it. So the biggest shortcoming of this book is that we do not gain any insight into the causes of the Viking expansion, unless that it was all about "honor and booty". Of course it was, but as a historical explanation that seems hardly sufficient, especially since we are talking about a period of more than 2 centuries of almost unending 'terror'.

An interesting aspect though is the focus is on the ambiguous attitude of Western kings with regard to the Vikings: they often used them to get their own feudal lords into trouble, so that they would not affect their (royal) authority; in the end they only enforced the power of these local lords. The sketch of the gradual 'assimilation' of the Vikings, both in the areas they occupied, and in their home countries, is also quite remarkable. In short: a book that gives a limited number of answers about a very turbulent period in history.

Lauren Albert says

There were times when Haywood loses the Vikings in his discussions of the peoples they invaded. And there were times when I lost them in the repetitive names common at times (like in European monarchies!). He chooses to discuss them in separate sections depending on what group/nation they were interacting with. He never discusses them overall though he makes it clear that there wasn't really an "overall"--there were Norwegians, and Danes, and Swedes.

Sotiris Karaiskos says

A brief but comprehensive narrative history of the Vikings, very interesting.

Speesh says

Why read just one Viking book, when you can read half a dozen? Don't they all say pretty much the same thing? Given that the Vikings existed *a very long time ago* surely all that can be said about them, has been said? Well, yes. And no. Obviously - you don't need me to tell you - there are good books about the Vikings and there are bad books about the Vikings. Some are more readable - for the average Joe like me - and some are deadly dull, but still very worthy. These days, books about The Vikings can't be filled with just the latest finds - which will only ever nowadays alter our understanding of them in a minor way (unless they find a new site in the Americas I guess). So, from our point of view, the reader, and from the Publisher's point of view, because they want us to go out and buy them - there has to be an angle.

"Tell me exactly why do we need another book about the Vikings, young man?"

"Well, I'm gonna do it differently..."

What this one does differently is...well, difficult to put a finger on. It's well written, points made, points argued, points proved. It's written pretty much chronologically, starting with the earliest known raids, to the final integrations into the different nation states - and other nation states. Along the way, there some new (to me) ways of looking at what we already knew. Maybe it's that that sets it apart. And concise, not much time/space wasted. As regards the left a unique impact bit, I felt he was rather more negative regarding their impact, than that would suggest and what is clearly provable. I used to live near Wetherby, called a small stream a beck, and liked going to the Yorkshire Dales, to name just three linguistic examples (you can go find out the what and the why of those).

But shouldn't there be a *North Women* as well? Without North Women, there wouldn't have been any North Men, I'm thinking.

Otherwise, a very fine addition to my Viking library and one that could well fit in yours as well.

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Carlos says

Be warned this book will be useful to you if you are truly and deeply interested in Viking history, as that is what this book focuses on entirely. From the Vikings' beginnings on Scandinavia, its emergence from then on to raids on the English coast, raids in the Scottish, Irish, Spanish, Muslim Spain, Russia, Sweden, France and even the Byzantine empire occupy most of the book. The author goes to explain what effects the Viking presence had in each of these places, how they took power in England, how they influenced civil war in the Frankish kingdom, how they helped unify Scotland and Ireland, how they colonized Iceland and Greenland, and how they even reached America. The Christianization of the Vikings was a defining moment that would forever change the Vikings, because instead of being happy with just raids they now wanted to settle and centralize power in each land they settled. A lot of information densely packed.... if you truly are interested in the Viking age, this book is for you.

Gumble's Yard says

Book that covers Dark Age (around late 700s to the early twelfth century) Scandinavia. The book opens with a well-written introduction on the Vikings' world view followed by an opening chapter setting out the origins of the Viking Societies. Most of the rest of the book then follows a geographical theme – looking at the interaction of the Vikings with various areas (for example England, the France, Scotland, Ireland, Spain, Eastern Europe) and particularly considering what part the Vikings played in the development of that area (typically their armed raids in some way perturbed the balance of power) and what evidence of their involvement still remains (typically the more successful Scandinavians settled down and were integrated into the local population). A chapter then follows on the Norse adventures in the North Atlantic (the founding of Iceland and Greenland) and the expeditions to America, before returning to England and the interventions of the Scandinavians in the defining events of the 100-year period from late 900s which culminated in the Norwegian defeat at Stamford Bridge. A detailed chapter then looks at the establishment of kingdoms in each of Denmark, Norway and (more gradually) Sweden and argues that ultimately Scandinavia was assimilated into the cultural mainstream of the Roman Catholic world and that the parallel peace with

Christian nations and the establishment of stable government meant that advancement and riches through Viking raids was replaced by more conventional social and political advancement. A final melancholic chapter looks at the gradual decline of the hold-out Viking colonies in places such as the Orkneys, Isle of Man, Hebrides and most poignantly Greenland (effectively cut off by the Little Ice Age). Overall an interesting book. The author has an interesting mix of styles: periods when he suddenly veers off into too much detail on a minor area - particularly when examining archaeological evidence of Scandinavian sites; capable of writing long passages which rattle through lists of dynastic successions and battles which are very hard for the non-expert reader to engage with; but who is also capable of standing back and summarising whole periods into their key outcomes as well as identifying mega-themes across the book.

Anton says

This book is simply excellent. Haywood takes the reader on a deep dive into the origin of the men from the North and the formation of the Scandinavian nations from the late-onset iron age through the Viking era and into their 13th-century assimilation into the rest of Europe. We are shown the vikings as ravagers, conquerors, merchants, explorers, colonizers, and nation-builders - a nuanced depiction that nevertheless never shies away from how these violent men for the most part weren't very pleasant people. The part which elevates *North Men* to the top shelf however is how Haywood starts it off with an effective exploration of the viking mindset and psychology. Rather than just tell you about the vikings this helps you understand the vikings, which is what every history book ought to aim for. Proper job.

Dave says

For nearly 500 years, the Vikings were the scourge of much of Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and beyond. These fearsome warriors invaded and conquered vast swaths of lands from Great Britain and France to Islamic Spain and Italy. Along the way, it colonized Iceland, Greenland and even Russia, and managed to set up outposts in what is now North America.

In "Northmen: The Viking Saga, AD 793-1241," historian John Haywood recounts with compelling detail this expansive and violent journey by Scandinavian hordes across five centuries. Published by Thomas Dunne Books, this authoritative work provides historic background for the legendary Ragnar Lodbrok (literally "hairy breeches"), made even more famous by The History Channel's wildly popular show "Vikings," and the countless Norse leaders who followed in his path with their own longboats.

Haywood is an expert on Dark Age Europe and he carefully recounts the waves of raiding parties and invading armies that swept across the continent and beyond in their thirstless quest for treasure, glory and fame. A chilling aura and impressive warrior culture drove this reign of terror that saw the Vikings conquer and rule much of Great Britain and establish Normandy (translated as "men of the North") as a protectorate for Francia.

Rollo, the great Viking chieftain, and his followers signed a peace treaty and settled the coastal area of northern France. Their job was to defend Paris from other invading Viking tribes. More than a century later, Rollo's great-great-grandson William the Conqueror would lead the Norman invasion of England and become its king.

Haywood describes the Viking saga with meticulous detail. His book is well written and thoroughly researched with interesting facts about the Scandinavian rampage. At times, it can come across like Genesis

from the Bible with so much who-begat-who. But, in the end, it is a rich tapestry of amazing stories about one of history's most enigmatic warrior cultures and its successes and failures.

What drove the Vikings to raid and pillage is an interesting story in itself. Haywood carefully documents how the lack of centralized and comprehensive governments across Scandinavia during the Dark Ages enabled the development of warlords and warrior clans that, at first, battled each other for control. Soon, though, they realized there were fortunes to be made elsewhere instead of bloodying each other. Without a king or established government to reign in this lust for plunder, the Viking tribes were free to roam as far as their longboats would take them.

That reach proved to be significant. When not attacking, Vikings also took on the roles of explorers and merchants. All three career paths would lead them thousands of miles from Scandinavia and leave a significant cultural and linguistic impact on many lands. Many parts of England, Scotland and Ireland still have local names that trace back to the Viking invasions while Russia owes its establishment to the Rus, Norse fur traders who plied their trade along the Volga and other rivers.

If nothing else, the Vikings were very adaptive. In addition to lending its own twist to local vocabulary, it easily adopted other customs and beliefs into its own culture. The vast hordes of Northmen would eventually surrender allegiance to Oden and Thor and accept Christ as their religious center. In Normandy, by the time William the Conquerer sailed across the English Channel, the fierce warriors transformed from Vikings to Frenchmen in just five generations.

This adaptability would lead to the end of the Vikings. By the 13th century, the warrior culture had passed and the Northmen began to settle down. Most of Scandinavia became Christian and began pursuing less violent career paths. Stronger national governments also began clamping down on warrior chieftains in an effort to develop less belicose relationships with neighbors.

The Viking saga would become the stuff of legends. Oral tradition was strong in this culture and writing about history did not really catch on until the 12th century, so much of what we know today can be speculative. That's why this work by John Haywood is so important. His research takes us beyond the myth and fable into the hearts and minds of the real Vikings so we can understand their impact through history. And it was quite an impact!

Mark Mortensen says

I believe this may be the best account of the golden years of the "Viking Age" from 793-1241. It's interesting to note that this highlight period of the Northmen coincides with the Dark Ages, a time when little history was recorded. With this in mind I must warn readers that it is in textbook form and the documentation, although very thorough, seems repetitive as Scandinavians, predominately Danish Kings, set forth with warriors on war ships to prey on weaker civilizations looting, plundering and demanding ransoms.

The Lost Dreamer says

For a purely historical enumeration of events, this book has been pretty thrilling to me. Maybe because I had been wanting to get some serious insight on the Viking Age for some time, which is exactly what this book provided. Even for someone who isn't used to read this kind of historical telling, this can be appealing.

Haywood presents a lot of information in a fairly organized format, including some extra materials, such as a cronology, quite useful for the reader to make better sense of all the names, places and dates provided. Surprisingly, North Men has also given me some indirect insight about modern Scandinavian nations, which I didn't expect and I wasn't looking for. Not only that, but the book provides an useful and detailed explanation of the Vikings' influence in several parts of Europe. Despite the long telling of raids, petty kings and battles, I found that reading this was a enjoyable experience. At some points I was deeply caught by it, despite not having a "plot".

I've only missed some more attention on Viking culture and art. Maybe that's the only thing that I really felt was lacking: some pages about how these kingdoms' culture and way of life evolved along the centuries and all the interchanges that they had with several other nations. Also it feels like more could be said about he role of women in Viking societies.

But, in any case, I've enjoyed reading this. I've learnt a lot and it never felt too long, dense or beyond my reach. I think it a really good text for those who, like me, lack a background in History, and are looking for an accesible approach to Vikingb influence in Europe. I cannot say anything about the quallity of the author's historical research, as I don't have the knowledge to judge that. But, as an outsider, it has been really enlightening.

Brie says

I knew very little about Viking history and I found this book at a time when I was eager to read about it. Haywood's book is informative and comprehensive. Using primary sources and denoting when certain sources may be unreliable, it tells the histories of Viking activity in every location they travelled. But it doesn't just tell about what the Vikings were up to, it examines the existing cultures and peoples the Vikings raided and/or explored. It's goal is to tell about the Vikings' impact on these peoples, how the Vikings themselves shaped European development through unprecedented warfare and Paganism vs Christian narratives.

Besides this, Haywood then also tells about Europe's impact on Scandinavia and the eventual fall of Viking activity in favor of centralized European MOs. My favorite chapter had to be about the Vikings in the North Atlantic (Iceland, Greenland, North America).

Though informative, I often found the chapters to be dense to the point of distraction, only because of the volume of foreign language names and placenames and the hectic tales of so many people/kings. The book is equipped with maps of the various regions and lists of all the kings of each region, as well as an overall timeline.

Francisco says

Entretenida obra divulgativa sobre los pueblos escandinavos, su historia y su influencia en Europa. Tal vez, la organización por ámbitos geográficos complica el poder establecer un hilo conductor, ya que muchos de los protagonistas actuaron en diferentes ubicaciones a lo largo del tiempo. Pero como conclusión obtenemos una imagen clara del impacto de los vikingos en la evolución de los estados europeos.

Judy says

I confess I did not read every word. A comprehensive history, battle by battle, king by king, boat by boat. Interesting for those who want to understand the cultural history of the Scandanavian people, especially the Danes, after the Iron Age began.

Steve Donoghue says

An engagingly-written and wide-ranging overview of the Viking era! Here's my longer review:

<http://www.openlettersmonthly.com/boo...>

Omar Ali says

A good and wide-ranging account of the Vikings, from their early beginnings to their invasions, slave taking and expansion to the North Atlantic, the British Isles, Normandy, Sicily, the Slavic lands and beyond (new to me: an account of two vicious plundering raids all the way to the Caspian coast of Iran and Azerbaijan!). The detailed descriptions of who succeeded whom and how can become confusing, but it is either that or skipping a lot of detail and the author opted to include the details.

I do wish he had included diagrams of the boats and structures he describes, and maps of the lands he is talking about; it is tiresome to have to open Wikipedia alongside the book (this is not a problem specific to this book).

The ancient Indo-European religion/culture of the Vikings, with its harsh but courageous and highly honor-obsessed warrior ethos is well described, along with some of the usual speculations about how their beliefs made them more or less fatalistic and/or brave, which the author clearly regards as self-evident but which may not may not be the whole story (again, this is not a quibble about this book in particular; I am just increasingly skeptical of speculations in this category in general).

The author has made good use of a wide variety of European and Muslim sources. There is a description of a Viking-Rus chief's funeral rites and the ritualized rape that was indulged in by all his subordinates to honor him (this from Ibn Fadlan's account) that gives a good indication of the distance from that world to ours. Incidentally, I read Michael Crichton's "Eaters of the dead" back in 1980 or so, based partly on Ibn Fadlan's account of his journeys among the Rus. I remember it as being a very fun read. It would be a nice quick snack alongside this book.

Overall, well worth a read.

Tangential thought: It seems the conversion of X to Roman Catholicism versus Y to Orthodox Christianity and Z to Islam (sometimes for very random contingent reasons) led to borders that are more culturally and historically significant to this day than almost any other factor. In the hierarchy of identities, the demotion of religion is a recent and very limited and incomplete phenomenon. We don't have to go back to that world, but it would be foolish to act as if it did not exist until recently and still does in too many ways... Even if and when it is transcended, the chances of doing so AND replacing its power with new ones is better if that power is more clearly understood and acknowledged.
