

Chapter 12
The Vikings



Actor Kirk Douglas in the 1958 film *The Vikings*. Portrayals of Vikings are often based on stereotypes. Do you think this image is an accurate representation of a Viking?

Links with our times

In modern times, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark are ranked among the world's most progressive, prosperous and peaceful nations. They have a reputation for being tolerant and for respecting human rights. But in the Early Middle Ages the people of these lands were known as Vikings and they were among the most feared warriors of their times.

The image at left shows a stereotype often associated with the Vikings. They are commonly thought to have been crazed killers wielding battleaxes and swords, raping and looting their way from one country to another.

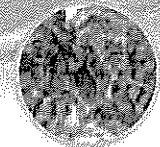
In this chapter we will examine the extent to which these impressions of the Vikings are accurate. No culture has ever survived on plunder alone, so we will explore the Vikings in their homelands and find out how they lived. Were they just marauding bands of pirates or did they have a distinctive culture and religion? We will analyse various sources to discover what these people from the deep northern parts of Europe were like.

The image at the top of the next page reveals the first of many misconceptions (wrong ideas) you will explore in this chapter. The image shows a stereotyped image of a horned Viking helmet. This is a representation of Vikings you are likely to be familiar with. The image below that is an authentic Viking helmet found in Norway. This source, as well as the one at left, show what Viking helmets really looked like. The horned helmet is a misconception, but no-one is sure how it came about. Besides, horned helmets would have been impractical in battle, and the real helmet looks far more terrifying anyway!

A timeline of the Viking Age

CE

700



787
First recorded Viking raid in Wessex, England.

800

793
Vikings loot monastery in Lindisfarne, England.

Eighth century
Advancements in shipbuilding allow Vikings to raid distant lands.



900

c. 850
Vikings begin to build permanent settlements in raided lands.



985
Harald Bluetooth dies.

930
Althing is established in Iceland.

1000

1000
Christianity is adopted in Iceland.

995
King Olaf Trygvason imposes Christianity on Norway.

1100

1066
Battle of Hastings and the last true Viking attack on England.

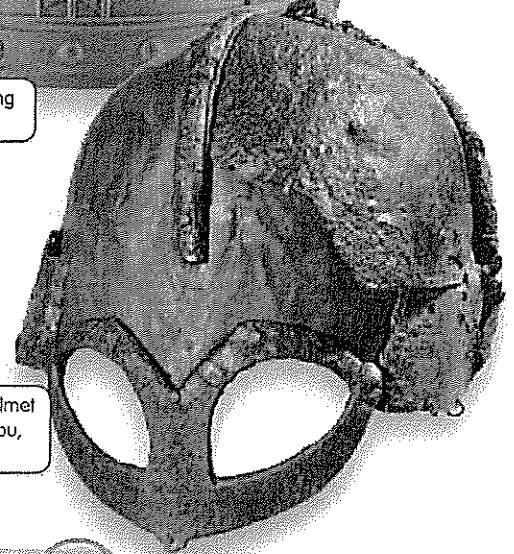
eBookPLUS

Create a visual timeline of the Viking Age with the interactive timeline application in your eBookPLUS.

SEARCHLIGHT ID: INT-2944



A stereotyped Viking horned helmet



An actual Viking helmet found in Gjermundbu, Norway

Big questions



As you work through this chapter, look for information that will help you to answer these questions:

- 1 What do we know of the Vikings from the artefacts that archaeologists have found?
- 2 What do we know of the Vikings from written sources, such as myths, stories, annals and chronicles?
- 3 What sort of religion did the Vikings practise?
- 4 How did the age of the Vikings come to an end?
- 5 What misconceptions exist about the Vikings?

Starter questions



- 1 Have you seen any movies about Vikings? If you have, describe how they were portrayed in those movies.
- 2 What kinds of stereotypes do you think most people associate with Vikings?
- 3 Can you think of another group of people in society about whom there have been stereotypes? Give an example.
- 4 List all the facts that you know about the modern Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT ...?

3.1 The Vikings

The Vikings were seafarers who came from Scandinavia. This is the region encompassing the modern nations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Vikings are also known as Northmen or Norse. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, their ferocious attacks struck fear into the hearts of people throughout many parts of Europe.

Early records of Viking raids

In 787 CE, about 400 years after the Romans left Britain, the country's first recorded Viking raid took place (see **Source 1**).

Source 1 An excerpt from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, written in Old English in the eighth century. The passage reads, 'And during his reign [King Beorhtric of Wessex] there first came three ships. . . Those were the first ships of the men of Denmark that attacked the people of England.'

And on his dagum cuomon ærest þreo scipu . . . þæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Deniscra manna þe Angelcynnes land gesohton.

Only six years later, the Vikings wreaked havoc in a second raid, this time on the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne, a small island off England's north-east coast.

Source 2 From *The Annals of Ulster*, an Irish manuscript from c. 820 CE

The sea spewed forth floods of foreigners over Erin [Ireland], so that no haven, no landing-place, no fort, no castle might be found, but it was submerged by waves of Vikings and pirates.

Viking raids soon became much more frequent and by around 850 CE the Vikings were using bigger raiding fleets and beginning to occupy permanent settlements. These settlements served as trading posts and as bases from which further raids could be launched against monasteries and villages that were far from the coasts. Dublin in Ireland, for example, began as a Viking settlement.

Kiev and Novgorod, which today are major cities in modern-day Ukraine and Russia, began as trading posts for Swedish Vikings. Called the Varangians, these Vikings had much to do with establishing the first nation in that region, called Kiev Rus. In western

Europe, Danish Vikings succeeded in taking Normandy as a **duchy** from the French king. They became the Normans and went on to conquer England and parts of southern Italy.

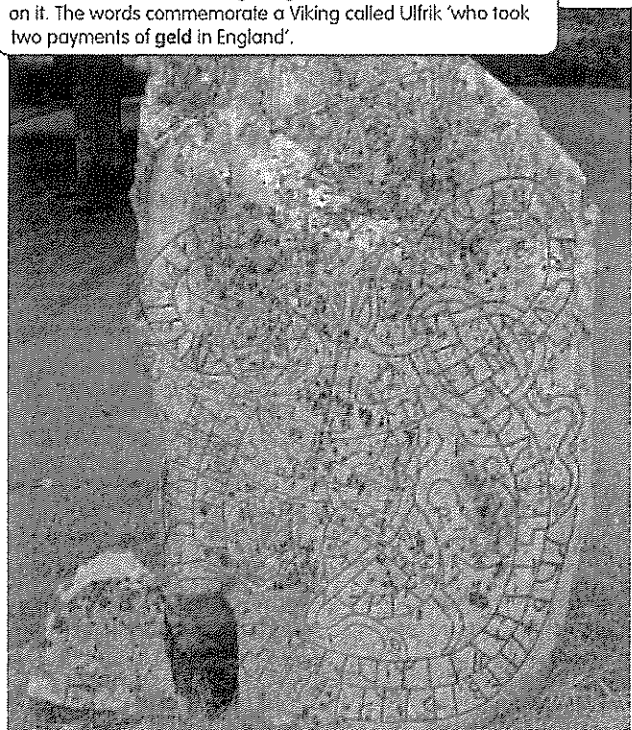
Source 3 Ermentarius, a Frankish writer, commenting on Viking raids in France c. 860 CE

The number of ships increases, the endless flood of Vikings never ceases to grow bigger. Everywhere [Christians] are the victims of massacre, burning and plunder. The Vikings overrun all that lies before them . . .

Runes and sagas

The Vikings did not commit anything to extensive writing until Christianity arrived in the eleventh century. During the Early Middle Ages, it was usually only members of the Church who had the skills to write. The Vikings were **pagans** and so they did not have groups of Christians among them to record events in writing. Rather, their story-telling was an oral tradition. However, Viking writing, called **runes**, did exist; runes were inscribed on bone or carved on rock.

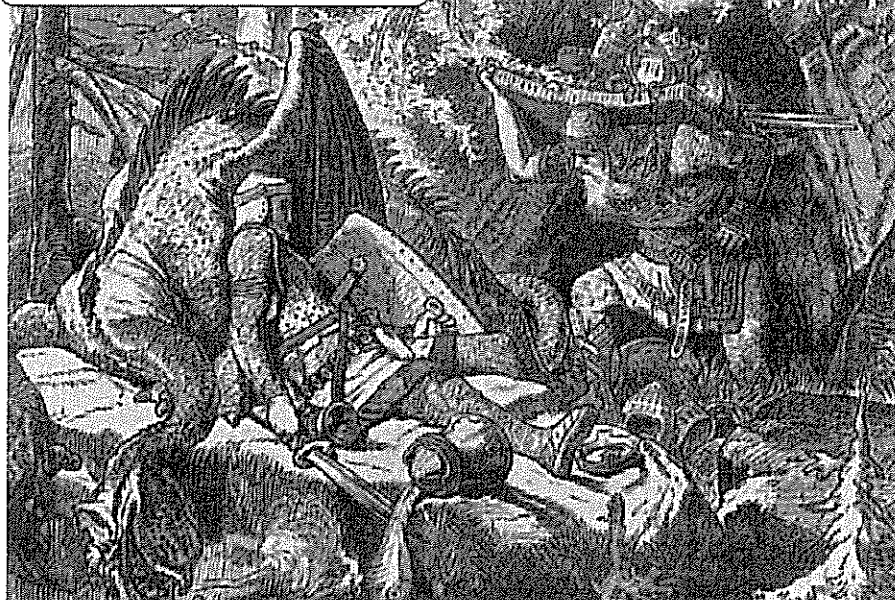
Source 4 A stone from Lingsberg, Sweden, with runes carved on it. The words commemorate a Viking called Ulfrik 'who took two payments of **geld** in England'.



By the time the Viking Age had ended, stories began to appear in writing. These stories are known as the **sagas**. The sagas were tales and legends about Viking heroes. Although the heroes of the sagas were sometimes based on real people, the sagas themselves were largely fictional tales. They encouraged a romantic and heroic image of the Vikings.

The only written saga dating back to the Viking Age is not of Scandinavian origin but written by an English poet. This is the oldest known story written in Old English (see **Source 1**). This saga is called *Beowulf* and is set in Sweden and Denmark. It tells of the Viking hero Beowulf who sets out to kill a monster ravaging the kingdom of Denmark. Beowulf also kills the monster's mother and a dragon. The fact that this tale is written in English demonstrates the significant presence Viking culture had in Britain. Despite being largely fictional, such sagas give historians some insights into Viking culture.

Source 5 An illustration showing a scene from the saga *Beowulf*. It shows the hero Beowulf dying from his wounds after slaying a dragon.



Archaeological discoveries

The Viking Age is shrouded in legend and coloured by the gruesome accounts of victims of Viking raids. This is because, unlike the Greeks and Romans, the Vikings left few visible monuments. These were mostly mysterious standing stones. Some were carved with runes, signs and images; others were arranged to outline the shape of boats.

In the nineteenth century, archaeologists began digging at sites believed to harbour relics of the Viking Age. These included mounds and the sites of settlements. Some of the mounds had folk tales associated with them. One such mound, in the middle of a farm field in Gokstad, Norway, was called the King's Mound. It was believed a king was buried there with his hoard of treasure. When archaeologists dug into the mound in 1880, it turned out to be just what the folk tale had said: the remains of a Viking king with his hoard of treasure, although some of it had been stolen by grave robbers centuries before. More spectacularly still, the king and his hoard lay in a huge Viking ship, made mostly of oak. Until then, there had been only pictures of such dragon ships on rocks and in tapestries. In the last 150 years, other such archaeological digs have given us a greater insight into how the Vikings lived.

Activities

Student workbook
3.1

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- Read **Sources 1, 2 and 3** closely. For each of these sources:
 - describe its origins (where and when it was written)
 - explain whether it should be considered to be a primary source or a secondary source and why
 - describe its perspective (point of view) on Vikings
 - outline the conclusions you could draw about one aspect of the Viking Age from this source.
- Compare the three sources and explain how they support each other.
- Do you think you would get a different perspective if you read an account of these same events written by Vikings?
- Study **Sources 4 and 5** closely and write your own historical questions to analyse each of these two sources.
- Answer the questions you have asked as far as it is possible using just the information in the sources and their captions.

duchy dukedom; a small state ruled by a duke, a nobleman whose rank is just below that of a prince
geld money or other valuables taken under threat of violence
pagan one who worships many gods
runes letters of the Scandinavian alphabet based on Roman or Greek letters but modified to be easily carved on wood or stone
saga a medieval Scandinavian tale about exploits and adventures in the life of a hero or his family

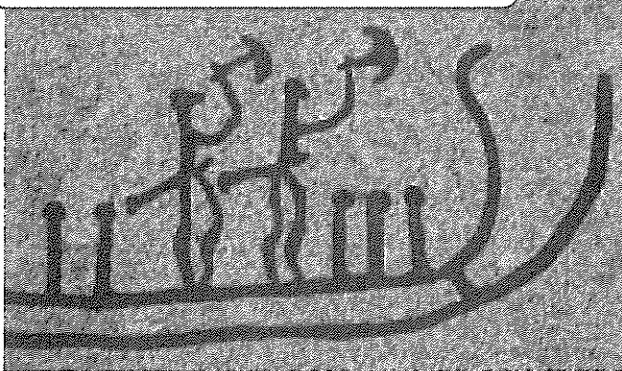
3.2 Scandinavia before the Viking Age

The period called the Viking Age was fairly short, spanning from about 790 to 1066 CE. During this period, many Viking raids were recorded. However, the Vikings did not spend most of their time going on raids. They had families, and these families needed food and shelter. The Vikings were primarily farmers, tilling what little soil was available in their heavily forested and rocky homelands. Above all things, their ancestors were farmers.

The Bronze Age in Scandinavia

By 1500 BCE, the pre-Viking culture in Scandinavia began to use **bronze** for making tools and weapons. Like their Viking descendants, these people used boats as a means of transportation. We know this because Scandinavians from the Bronze Age left thousands of rock carvings, many of which show boats. One such vessel was excavated in Hjortspring, Denmark, in 1972. Like the carvings in [Source 1](#), it had curious double-pronged **prows** and was propelled by paddles.

Source 1 Bronze Age rock carvings from Tanum, Sweden, dated 1500–500 BCE



The Iron Age and the Migration period

By the time the Romans made contact with the Scandinavians on the Jutland Peninsula in the fifth year CE, the Scandinavians were using oars in huge boats designed for military transport. However, they had yet to develop the **keel** and the mast. It was these additions to boatcraft which would give their Viking descendants a greater range across the seas. About 500 BCE, the Scandinavians had begun to make weapons and tools

from iron, a harder metal than bronze, which made them more effective in battle.

The Roman historian Tacitus observed the customs of these early Iron Age ancestors of the Vikings. He recounts their bloody, religious customs, whereby criminals and innocent victims of sacrifice were killed as an offering to an earth goddess. In recent centuries, such victims' remains, preserved by the acids of **peat** bogs, have been unearthed, as shown in [Source 2](#).

Source 2 'Tollund Man', a body found in a peat bog in Bjældskovdal in Denmark. He was strangled and thrown in the bog where he lay for the next 2000 years.



Source 3 The Roman historian Tacitus, from *Germania*, written about 98 CE

[The] communities of the Suiones [Swedes], seated in the very Ocean . . . besides their strength in men and arms, also possess a naval force. The form of their vessels differs from ours in having a prow at each end, so that they are always ready to advance. They make no use of sails, nor have regular benches of oars at the sides: they row, as is practiced in some rivers, without order, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, as occasion requires.

It is around this time that Scandinavians began venturing further afield in their boats, trading such goods as walrus tooth ivory, **amber** and furs for luxury items such as glassware and silk from places as far away as Rome. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the various tribes of northern and central Europe began fighting each other. This time (300–700 CE) is called the Migration period because many of these tribes moved around the continent. However, the Scandinavians did not seem very affected by this, and continued profiting through trade.

The Vendel era, 400–800 CE

The Vendel era, whereby the Scandinavians became more identifiable as the culture we call Viking, is named after an archaeological site in Sweden. In Vendel, and in the nearby site of Valsgarde, archaeologists have excavated a series of graves. Warriors were buried in boats with splendid arrays of weapons and armour. The boats are identifiably Viking in style. The armour is, too, although Viking Age armour tended to be less ornate or decorative and probably more practical in battle.

It is probable that the Scandinavians from the Vendel era went on raids like their Viking descendants. However, there is no record of such raids before 787 CE, which is when the Vendel era evolved into the Viking Age.

Source 4 A helmet from a grave in Valsgarde, Sweden from the seventh century CE



Activities



Student workbook
3.1

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 1 Draw up a timeline for the following periods of Scandinavian history: the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Migration period, the Vendel era and the Viking Age. Note that some of these periods may overlap with each other.
- 2 Why do historians call certain periods of history the Bronze Age and the Iron Age?

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 3 What evidence is there that shows Bronze Age Scandinavians used boats?
- 4 According to the Roman historian Tacitus, to who did the Danes of the Iron Age offer human sacrifice?
- 5 Why do historians give the Migration period its name?
- 6 List three items Scandinavian traders exported.
- 7 What did archaeologists find at Vendel and Valsgarde in Sweden?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 8 Refer back to the timeline created in activity 1. Which of the periods on your timeline overlap? Why would they overlap? (*Hint: Think about the activities by which each period is defined.*)
- 9 Use the internet or your library to find pictures of the Bronze Age vessel called the Hjortspring boat, and its replicas, which have been tested on the water. Compare the Hjortspring boat to the rock carvings in **Source 1**. Explain how these carvings, abstract as they are, show similar boats to the Hjortspring boat. Do you think replicas of such boats would have been possible to construct before the finding of the Hjortspring boat? Explain your answer.
- 10 What evidence is there in **Source 3** that the Swedes were already good sailors in the first century CE, hundreds of years before the Viking Age?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 11 Using the internet or your library, research 'Tollund Man', shown in **Source 2**. Imagine he is a modern-day victim of crime and you need to write a police report about the incident. Use headings such as 'Cause of death', 'Age of victim at death', 'Location where body was found' and 'Possible motives for crime'.
- 12 Using the internet or your library, research the archaeological finds in Vendel and Valsgarde. Present a PowerPoint presentation of these archaeological sites to the class, including an itemised list of artefacts found there, such as the helmet shown in **Source 4**.

amber yellow fossil resin found in countries around the Baltic Sea and valued as precious stones in the manufacture of jewellery

bronze metal alloy mainly of copper and tin

keel lowest timber running along the length of a vessel, and upon which the framework of the whole boat is built

peat vegetable matter, decomposed by water and partially turned to carbon, frequently forming a bog

proW front part of a boat or ship

3.3 The Viking homelands

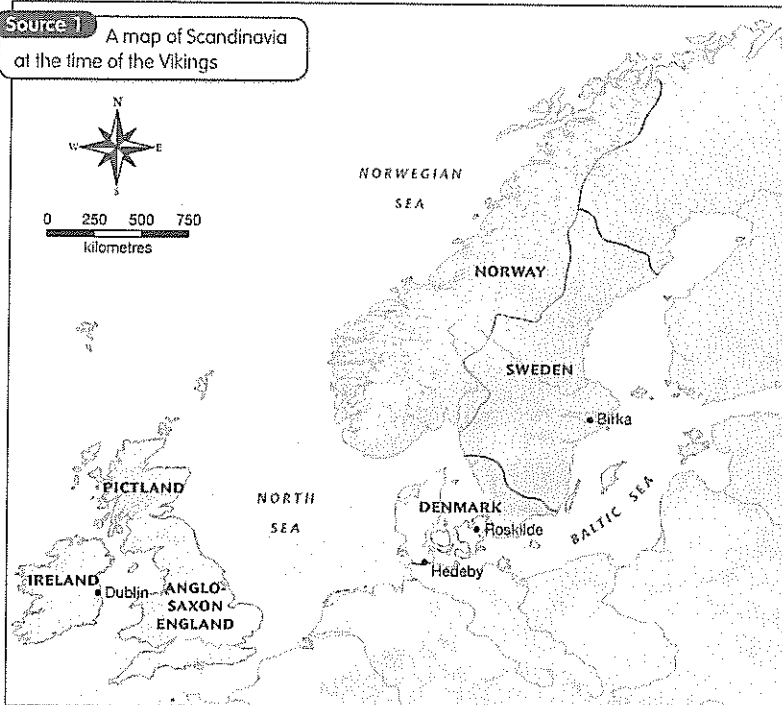
In Scandinavia, Viking communities existed in those areas that enjoyed a mild climate and **arable** land. Coastal areas were favoured because of the high, craggy mountains running down the peninsula of what is now Sweden and Norway. But even here, arable land was hard to come by because much of the ground was rocky. This is likely one of the reasons why the Vikings were forced to become raiders.

Geography

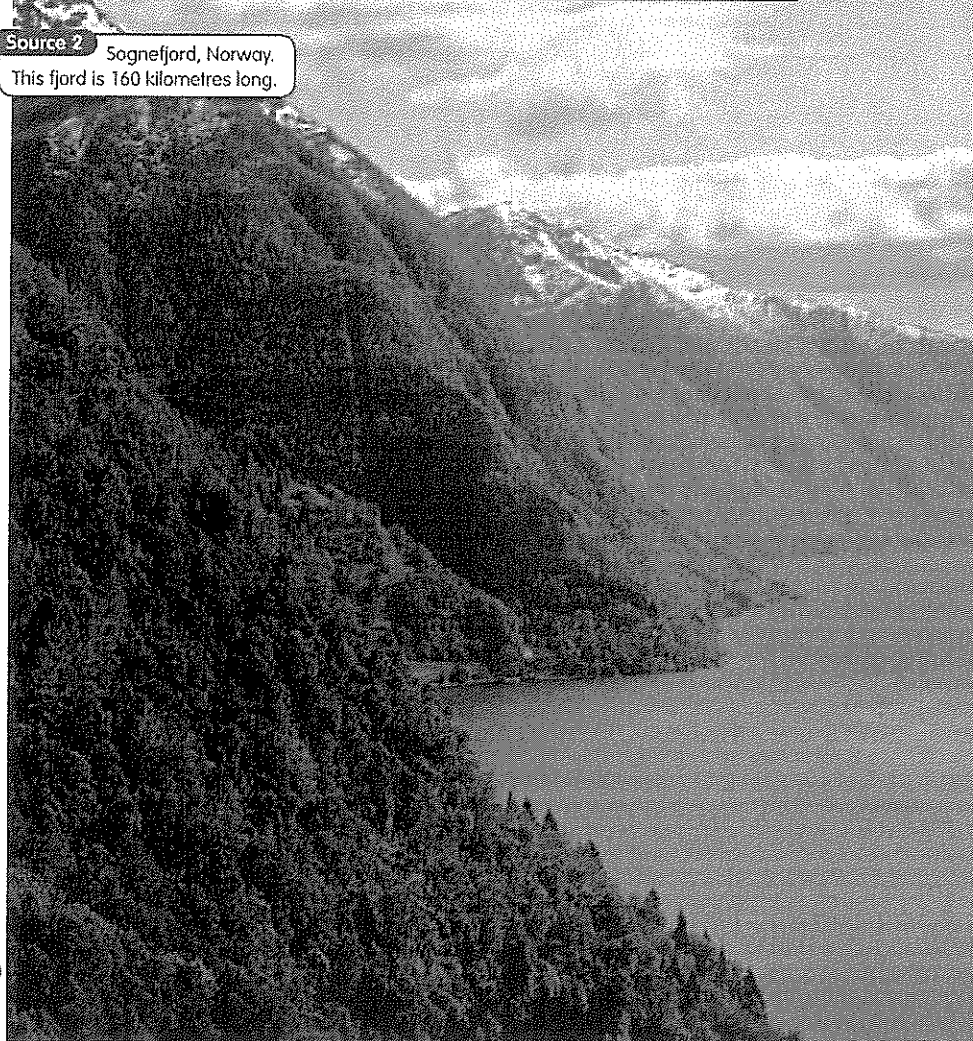
Much of Scandinavia cannot be used to grow crops. For example, only about three per cent of Norway's land is suitable for farming. For centuries, people wondered why the Vikings and their Bronze Age ancestors left **cairns** of stones around their farms. Some were clearly graves, and others were markers to help give directions to overland travellers in lands where roads were few and far between. But other cairns were more puzzling. Most historians now believe that these piles were left by farmers who were simply clearing their land of rocks.

As well as rocky ground, Sweden has many lakes and forests. The Swedish Vikings tended to live in the southern and central parts of the region where the best farmland was to be found. The Danes also had problems with arable land, but for different reasons to their northern neighbours. Occupying the Jutland Peninsula, they lived on low-lying land. They tended to use the eastern part of the peninsula for farming because the western side was too sandy.

Source 1 A map of Scandinavia at the time of the Vikings



Source 2 Sognefjord, Norway. This fjord is 160 kilometres long.



However, the geography also provided some benefits. Norse Vikings occupied the shores of deep-sea canyons called **fjords**, which are protected from Atlantic storms by an extensive buffer of as many as 50 000 tiny islands. Islands surrounding Denmark have a similar effect.

Climate

The Scandinavian climate was a little kinder than the geography. Although days are short during winter, there may be as many as twenty hours of sunlight a day in summer. The **Gulf Stream**, a warm ocean current, helps keep temperatures mild and, more importantly, prevents harbours from freezing in winter. This was vital for seafaring people like the Vikings, because the inland regions were far too mountainous for travel.

The Viking urge to voyage

There are a number of theories as to why the Vikings went on raids and later established colonies in other regions. One is that with a growing population and not enough

farmland, they were forced to raid, trade and explore just to survive. The search for arable land led them to migrate to places like Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland, and conquer places like Normandy and Russia.

Another theory suggests that some Vikings had fought against their own kings and chieftains and fled overseas as a result. With their kings owning most of what little land was available, some Viking people may have desired to search for their own land. This theory may explain why some Norse left Norway to settle Iceland. Another hypothesis is that the Vikings noticed and took advantage of the bickering among the states of Europe, raiding them and eventually seizing land these states could not defend.

With few written records from the Vikings' perspective, it is difficult to say which of the many theories is the most accurate. It could even be a combination of many of the reasons discussed in this spread.

Activities



Student workbook
3.2

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 What was the Vikings' main means of travel? Why?
- 2 What is the name of the peninsula which forms the main part of Denmark?
- 3 What benefits did the Scandinavians gain from the Gulf Stream?
- 4 Which Scandinavian country is known for its fjords?
- 5 Give one theory as to why Vikings went on voyages to raid and conquer other lands.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 6 Look at the map in **Source 1**. Using the information in this spread, explain why the middle of the peninsula was not inhabited by people of either Norway or Sweden.
- 7 Using the internet or your library, research how fjords like the one shown in **Source 2** were formed.

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 8 Imagine you are a Viking from the ninth century CE. Write a statement explaining why you wish to embark on a raid on a nearby country.

arable land that can be ploughed for crops

cairn carefully arranged pile of stones, usually intended as a landmark

fjord long, narrow inlet flanked by high cliffs and slopes

Gulf Stream great warm current of water flowing from the Caribbean Sea all the way to northern Europe



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Viking homelands and
settlements pp. 94–5

3.4 Viking war gear

The Vikings have often been considered **barbarians**, particularly by historical European sources. Some Viking raiders took their reputation to extremes. The most barbaric and ferocious of all Vikings were the **berserkers**. These crazed warriors dressed only in animal skins and charged screaming into battle while biting the rims of their shields. However, the term 'barbarian' is misleading. When considering their weapons, armour and ships, the Vikings can be said to have been at the cutting edge of technology.

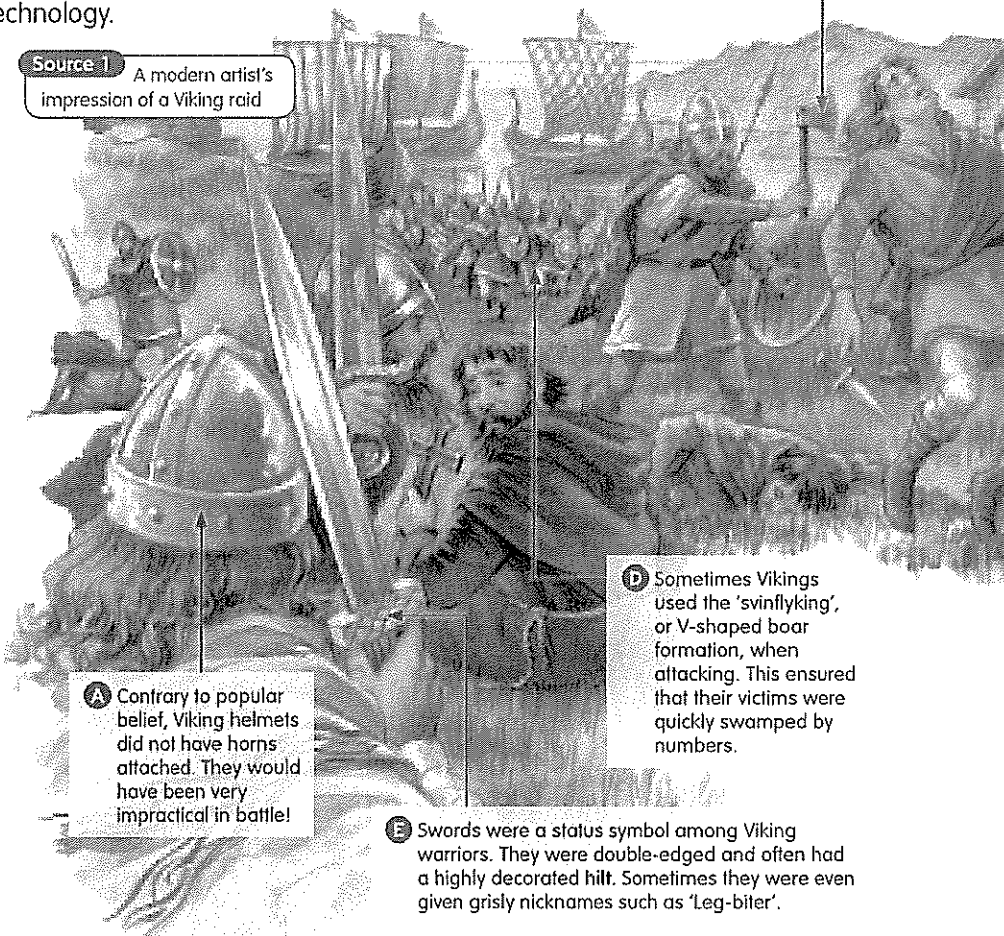
Viking armour

The Viking helmet began as an ornate mask constructed of bronze and iron, at least among those who could afford it. By the Viking Age, the helmet had become more simplified. The only authentic helmet from the Viking Age so far discovered by archaeologists is shown in the chapter opener. However, pictorial evidence from the Viking Age suggests that the iron, conical helmet with a bar extended over the nose to protect the face was common. Its shape helped deflect the blows of weapons and remained popular among knights well into the Middle Ages.

The shield was held close to the body to protect the warrior from arrows, spears and swords. About a metre wide, it was round and constructed from timber planks. An iron **boss** reinforced the centre. By the end of the Viking Age, kite-shaped shields became more common. These protected the thighs, especially when the warrior mounted a horse.

Body armour could be a shirt of stiffened leather, overlapping metal scales known as **lamellar** or **mail**. Mail was made up of links of chain and was very expensive because it was woven by hand using a pair of pliers and a pile of chain links. Longer mail coats are called **hauberks** and became more popular towards the end of the Viking Age.

Source 1 A modern artist's impression of a Viking raid



A Contrary to popular belief, Viking helmets did not have horns attached. They would have been very impractical in battle!

B Viking raiding parties struck quickly and unexpectedly, often at dawn, when it was hard for victims to escape or defend themselves.

C The iron-headed battleaxe was so sharp and heavy it could cut through armour.

D Sometimes Vikings used the 'svinflyking', or V-shaped boar formation, when attacking. This ensured that their victims were quickly swamped by numbers.

E Swords were a status symbol among Viking warriors. They were double-edged and often had a highly decorated hilt. Sometimes they were even given grisly nicknames such as 'Leg-biter'.

Viking weapons

The Vikings used a full array of weaponry: bow and arrow, spear, axe and sword. The battleaxe shown in **Source 1** is called the bearded axe, and was used almost exclusively by the Vikings. However, the sword was the most popular weapon among the Vikings. It typically had a broad, double-edged blade, a cross-guard to protect the hand and a **pommel** on the end, which could be used for punching at close quarters.

Viking swords were very ornate, sometimes gilded with precious metals. Vikings even gave names to their swords. For example, the fictional Beowulf's sword was called Hrunting. Another saga tells of King Magnus of Norway having a sword gilded with gold and with a grip made from walrus ivory, which he called Leg-biter. The Vikings certainly placed great importance on their swords and the rest of their war gear.

F As a refuge, some monks built tall, round towers of stone. Rope ladders hung down from openings at the top. After climbing into the tower, monks pulled the ladders up. They stayed there until a Viking attack was over.

H The circular wooden shields were about one metre in diameter. They featured brightly painted designs. A metal boss covered the hole in the centre to which was attached an iron hand grip.

Source 3 A memorial stone from Lindisfarne showing what appear to be Vikings

Activities

Student workbook
3.3

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Why have the Vikings been regarded as barbarians?
- 2 How might berserkers have added to the Vikings' barbarous image?
- 3 Explain how the conical helmet, as depicted in **Source 1**, was useful to its wearer in battle.
- 4 What was the Viking shield made of?
- 5 What was the name of Beowulf's sword?
- 6 What did King Magnus of Norway name his sword?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 7 What sort of evidence would the artist who created **Source 1** have needed to accurately draw Viking warriors? Find examples from other sources in this chapter that would help to create a picture of what the Viking warriors might have looked like.
- 8 Which weapons and armour are visible in **Source 3**? What do the figures appear to be doing? How does a source like this help us understand what Vikings looked like when going into battle?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 9 Imagine you are King Magnus of Norway. Explain why you have given your favourite sword a name.

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 10 Use the internet and your library to research what Viking weapons and armour were like. Present your findings to class, using evidence such as the swords shown in **Source 2**.

Source 2 Viking weapons from the tenth century CE

barbarian uncultured and uncivilised; not Christian
berserker Viking warrior who fought naked or near-naked and rushed wildly into battle. The word 'berserk' is derived from this.
boss metal bulge used as reinforcement in the centre of a shield
hilt the handle of a sword or dagger
lamellar made up of overlapping metal plates or scales
mail armour comprising chain links
pommel rounded knob at the end of a sword hilt

3.5 Viking longships

Whatever the reasons for Viking raids, developments in shipbuilding gave the Vikings an effective means by which to attack distant lands.

Technological developments

For centuries, Scandinavians sailed in craft that were essentially giant rowboats. Then, in the eighth century CE, they devised several innovations: a keel, a great woollen or linen sail and an oar used as a **rudder** for steering. With this new technology, they could make longer ocean voyages. It also gave them the means by which to attack lands a long way away.

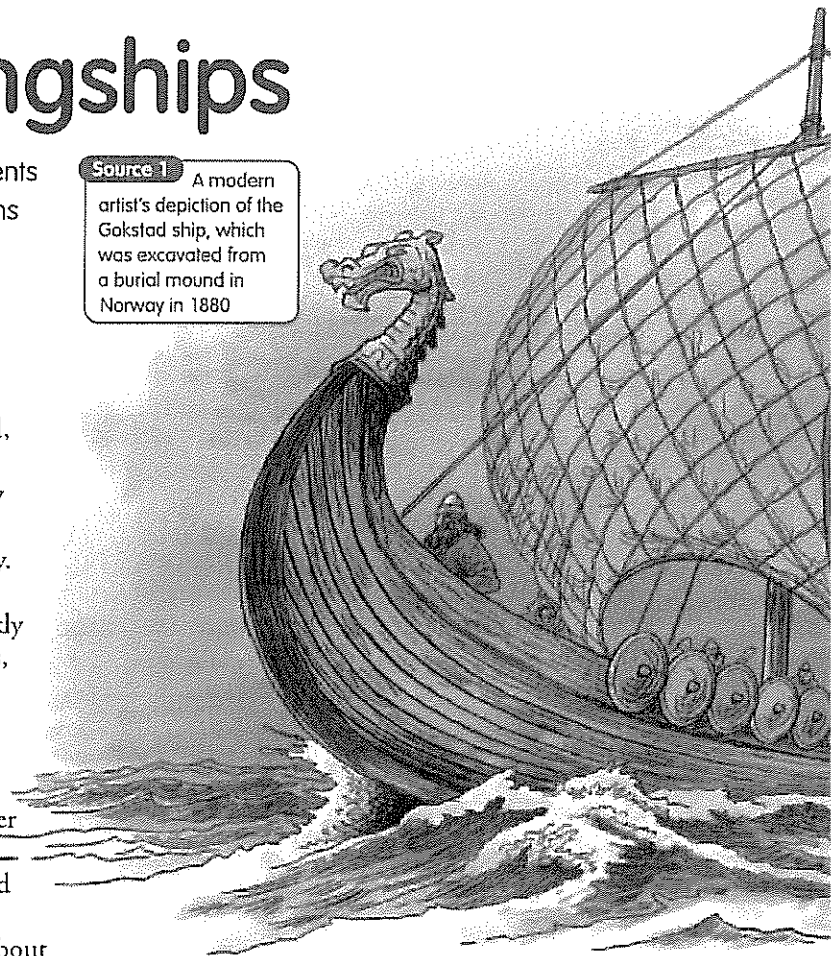
In 1893, and again in 1998, a replica of the Gokstad ship (see **Source 1**) demonstrated how quickly such longships could sail across the sea. In both cases, it sailed from Norway to Canada in under a month.

At 23 metres long and 5 metres wide, manned by 32 rowers, its size was impressive. It demonstrated that tales about Viking dragon ships were not exaggerated. Since then, the remains of an even longer dragon ship have been found in Roskilde fjorde, Denmark. This ship was over 30 metres in length and would have had sixty men manning its oars.

As big as these ships were, their hulls were only about two metres deep. This meant they could be rowed not only at sea but in lakes, fjords, rivers and even shallow creeks. They could be easily dragged up onto a beach like rowboats. There is even evidence that smaller ships were carried overland. This was how Swedish Vikings travelled from one waterway to another in Russia.

Such Viking vessels were built for raids and warfare. They are called longships because of their slender shape. Sometimes they are called dragon ships because the carved head of a mythical monster was occasionally mounted on the prow of the boat. It is remarkable that the timber for these ships was cut with only an axe. Unlike modern shipbuilding, the Vikings constructed the hull first and then cut and inserted the frame.

Source 1 A modern artist's depiction of the Gokstad ship, which was excavated from a burial mound in Norway in 1880



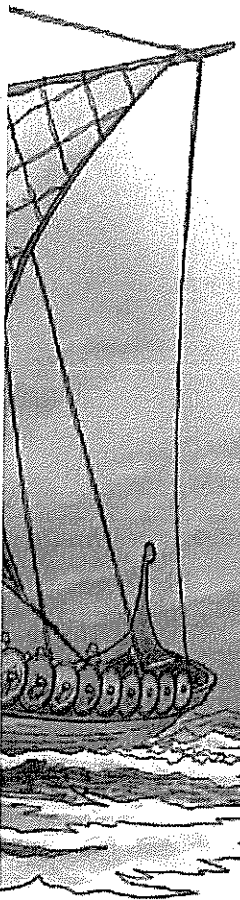
Source 2 A reproduction of a dragon ship carved on stone from Gotland, Sweden, in the eighth century CE



Did you know?



The longest Viking ship ever found, described in this spread, was sunk deliberately in Roskilde fjorde along with other ships. It is believed this was an attempt to create a barrier against enemy ships trying to attack the harbour. Although it was sunk in Denmark, evidence suggests the boat was built in Dublin, Ireland.

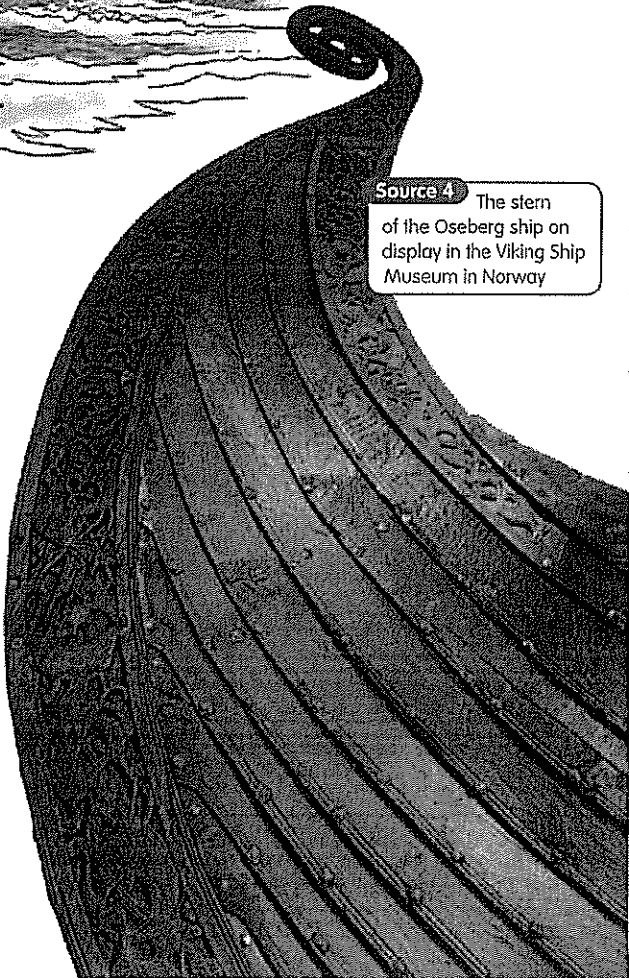


Source 3 From the saga *Beowulf*, translated into modern English

Under the sea-girt cliffs the shining ship was readied, laded with coats of mail, swords and gleaming war harness. Bidding farewell to their king, the sturdy warriors embarked... [leaning] to the oars.

Like a bird, like a swallow, the glistening ship sped forward. She cut a path through the clear, green sea, her prow wreathed in bubbles and foam. Across unknown waters the light floater lunged and ploughed into the swells. The salt spray blew strong on the warriors' foreheads.

rudder broad wooden or metal piece at the end of a boat used for steering; on a longship, it was a broad oar attached to the tiller
tiller steering lever at the back of a boat



Source 4 The stern of the Oseberg ship on display in the Viking Ship Museum in Norway

Design and navigation

The prows of Viking ships were often elaborately decorated with figureheads representing dragons (see **Source 1**) or serpents (see **Sources 2 and 4**). However, the Oseberg ship, shown in **Source 4**, may not be a typical longship because it was found in the excavated burial site of a Norwegian Viking queen. If you look closely, you will see that its stern also features a finely carved pattern of smaller dragons and vines. Another important feature of the longship is that the woollen sails had patterns, as can be seen in **Source 2**. It is likely this criss-cross stitching had a practical purpose — it gave the sails the strength to withstand strong winds.

What is even more amazing is that Viking ships could cross vast seas without any of the navigation instruments used today. Vikings knew enough about the weather patterns to know when to put to sea, and they navigated by the positions of the stars and by the height of the sun above the horizon.

Activities



Student workbook
3.4

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 List the three most important developments in Viking shipbuilding in the eighth century.
- 2 What is the length of the longest Viking longship found so far? How many men manned its oars?
- 3 How did Swedish Vikings move their longships from one river to the next in Russia?
- 4 What does the stern of the Oseberg ship resemble?
- 5 Why did the Vikings cross-stitch their sails?
- 6 What was unusual about the way Viking ships were built?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 7 Using **Source 3** as reference, describe your impression of the beginning of a voyage in a Viking longship. Be sure to mention what the Vikings brought on their journey, how the ship was powered and how it performed in the water.
- 8 Examine **Source 4**. Why do you think this ship was buried with a Viking queen, or noble woman, and her belongings?
- 9 Compare **Sources 2 and 4**. How did the discovery of the Oseberg ship demonstrate that the carving in **Source 2** is a fairly accurate representation of at least one type of Viking ship?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 10 As a class, create the shape of the largest Viking ship found so far. It is 30 metres long and 3.2 metres wide. Do this outside using schoolbags. Students should sit in places where the rowers would have sat. One bag in the middle of the ship will represent the position of the mast. Don't forget to have someone controlling the **tiller**. Vikings and their ancestors used rocks in an exercise similar to this to begin creating their ships.

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 11 What would it have been like to sail in a longship?

3.6 Viking explorers, settlers and traders

Vikings were ferocious warriors and raiders but they were also successful explorers whose seamanship enabled them to reach places unknown to other Europeans. They colonised new lands and became traders in commodities such as fur, timber, metal goods and slaves — the people who were captured during their raids.

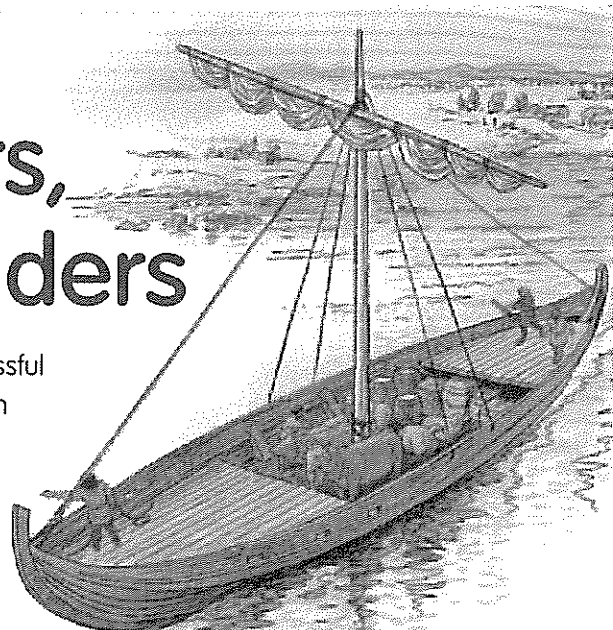
Exploring and colonising

As their population grew, the Vikings colonised the lands they had raided and looted, and they looked for new lands in which to settle. Norwegian Vikings colonised the North Sea island of Iceland. This settlement later became the base from which Vikings colonised the coast of Greenland. One of the most famous of all Viking explorers was Leif Eriksson. According to Viking sagas, Eriksson sailed from Iceland to North America in about 1000 CE, five centuries before any other European. He briefly established a settlement at a place he called Vinland because wild grapes grew there. It was probably strong resistance from indigenous North Americans that caused the Vikings to soon abandon Vinland.

Trading settlements

Viking trading towns were built along the coasts of their Scandinavian homelands. At least one of these trading posts, Hedeby, in Denmark, was at the crossroads for trade between the East and the West. It was visited by traders from as far away as Baghdad, in Iraq. Goods exchanged included wine, bronze, iron and glassware. Viking traders also sold slaves. They were mostly Slavic peoples from Eastern Europe who were captured in Viking raids. They were traded for Arabic silver and gold. This trade was so extensive that in many European languages the modern word for 'slave' has stemmed from the word 'Slavs'.

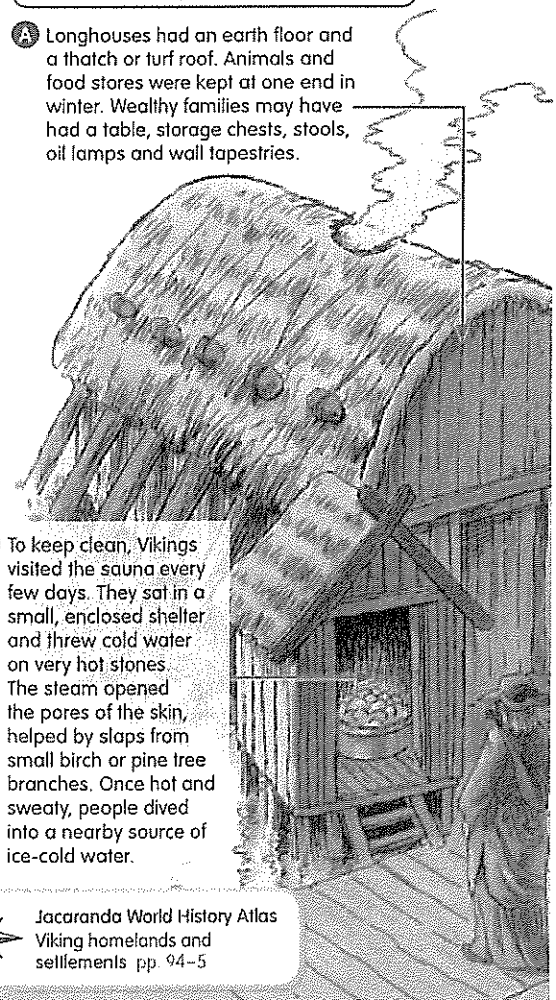
Viking trading settlements were founded as far west as Ireland and as far east as Russia. Trading posts



Source 2 A modern artist's reconstruction of a knarr, based on a wreck found in Roskilde fjorde, Denmark

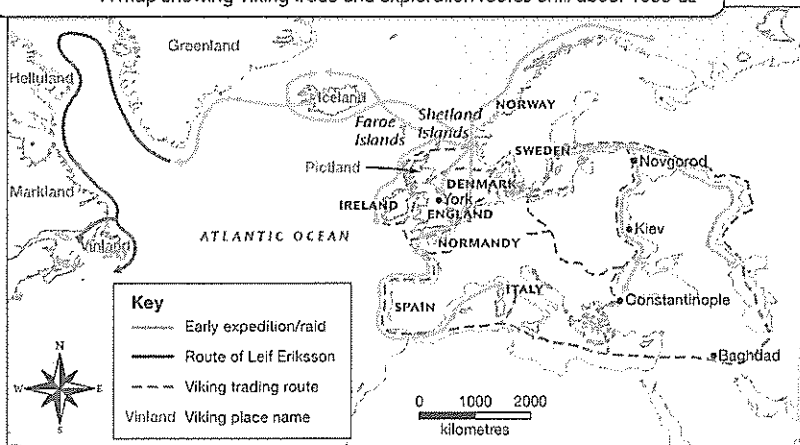
Source 3 A modern artist's reconstruction of a Danish trading centre

A Longhouses had an earth floor and a thatch or turf roof. Animals and food stores were kept at one end in winter. Wealthy families may have had a table, storage chests, stools, oil lamps and wall tapestries.

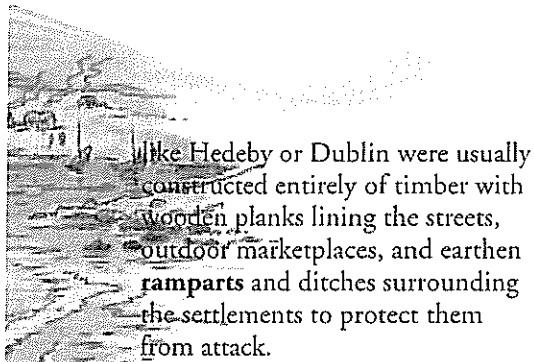


E To keep clean, Vikings visited the sauna every few days. They sat in a small, enclosed shelter and threw cold water on very hot stones. The steam opened the pores of the skin, helped by slaps from small birch or pine tree branches. Once hot and sweaty, people dived into a nearby source of ice-cold water.

Source 1 A map showing Viking trade and exploration routes until about 1000 CE



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Viking homelands and settlements pp. 94–5



Like Hedeby or Dublin were usually constructed entirely of timber with wooden planks lining the streets, outdoor marketplaces, and earthen ramparts and ditches surrounding the settlements to protect them from attack.

Trading boats

Viking longships were designed for war and long travel, but the Vikings also built another type of ship called a **knarr**. These ships were designed for trade and each could hold around thirty cubic metres of goods. Historians know what they looked like because two knarrs have been found at the bottom of the sea. They were filled with rocks and sunk along with some longboats to block Roskildefjorde in Denmark. This was done to create an underwater barrier against enemy attacks.

The Danes in England

From the mid-ninth century, Danish Vikings overran much of England. But in 878 CE, after several battles, Alfred, the Saxon king of Wessex, forced the Danes to accept a treaty under which the Danish leader, Guthrum, agreed to withdraw to the eastern part of the country. This part of the land was known as the Danelaw. Alfred's son later conquered the Danelaw. However, in 1016, Danish forces conquered England. Under the Danish king Canute, England formed part of a Scandinavian empire until 1042.

knarr a Viking trading ship
rampart defensive mound of earth, usually surrounding a fortress or military camp

C Men wore a woollen undershirt and leggings under a belted tunic or coat. Like women, they wore woollen or fur hats, woollen socks and soft leather shoes or boots. Women wore a long linen shift under a woollen tunic, clipped at the shoulders by two brooches.

E Meat and fish were preserved by being smoked, or pickled in salt. Bread, made from ground grain, was baked in clay ovens.

D Women spun wool from sheep and goats into cloth on wooden looms. Vegetable juices and minerals were used to dye the cloth.

F Iron weapons and tools were made and repaired in the blacksmith's barn. Sometimes steel (made by adding carbon to molten iron) was welded onto weapons such as axes to make them stronger.

G When not working, many Vikings passed the time wrestling, swimming, skiing, playing a board game called hnefnatafl (a bit like chess), and listening to the sagas told by storytellers.

H The Vikings were experts at building both warships and trading vessels.

I At the markets, merchants might trade silks from China and glassware from Italy for farm produce or artefacts. Artefacts might include combs (made from deer antlers), skates and musical instruments (made from animal bones), cups (made from cow horns), silver jewellery and tapestries.

Activities

Student workbook
3.5

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Why did the Danes sink ships in Roskildefjorde?
- 2 Why would a knarr have been stouter than a longship?
- 3 Why was Hedeby's geographical position good for trade?
- 4 How was Hedeby defended?
- 5 Who led the first expedition to the Americas?
- 6 What was Vinland?
- 7 What was the Danelaw?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 8 Archaeologists have found only the foundation timbers of towns like the one shown in **Source 3**. How might they have decided how the rest of the town might have looked, as shown in the illustration?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 9 Using an atlas, find as many modern-day nations as possible through which Viking trade — and raiding — routes passed.
- 10 Using the internet and your library, research the Viking shipwreck site at Roskildefjorde in Denmark. Explain how the ships were recovered, what their relative sizes and functions were, how many have been recovered, and when, why and how they were sunk.

3.7 Viking religion

The Europeans who suffered raids and conquests at the hands of the Vikings saw them as **heathens** — people who did not believe in God. Viking brutality was seen as a mark of paganism. The Vikings certainly followed a pagan religion in the earlier phases of their history, but they were gradually influenced by Christianity. Whether this lessened their perceived 'brutality' is a matter of debate. Therefore, there are two parts to Viking religion: paganism and Christianity.

Pagan Viking religion

Not much is known about pagan Viking religion because evidence is scarce. The sagas appear to give us some details. However, the sagas were written two hundred years after the Viking Age and so likely contain exaggeration and misinformation. We know for certain that pagan Viking religion was **polytheistic**; that is, the Vikings worshipped numerous gods. It is also known that two of their major gods were Odin and Thor. Odin figures prominently in the sagas as a deity who rules from Valhöll, the Hall of the Slain, where those who died in battle are welcomed by his war-maidens known as the valkyries. Thor was the god of thunder, war and farming and was represented by the hammer he wielded. However, beyond this, the sagas contradict each other. Some accounts place Odin as the ruling god while others put Thor as the ruling god.

Scenes from Viking myths and legends, some of them later retold in the sagas, appear as stone carvings. However, many of these were in temples that have long since disappeared. Travellers from other lands sometimes made passing reference to Viking worship but gave few details.

Burial customs help to shed a little more light on pagan Viking religion. Evidence such as the Oseberg ship shows that burying the dead with their most prized possessions was customary. It was believed one's

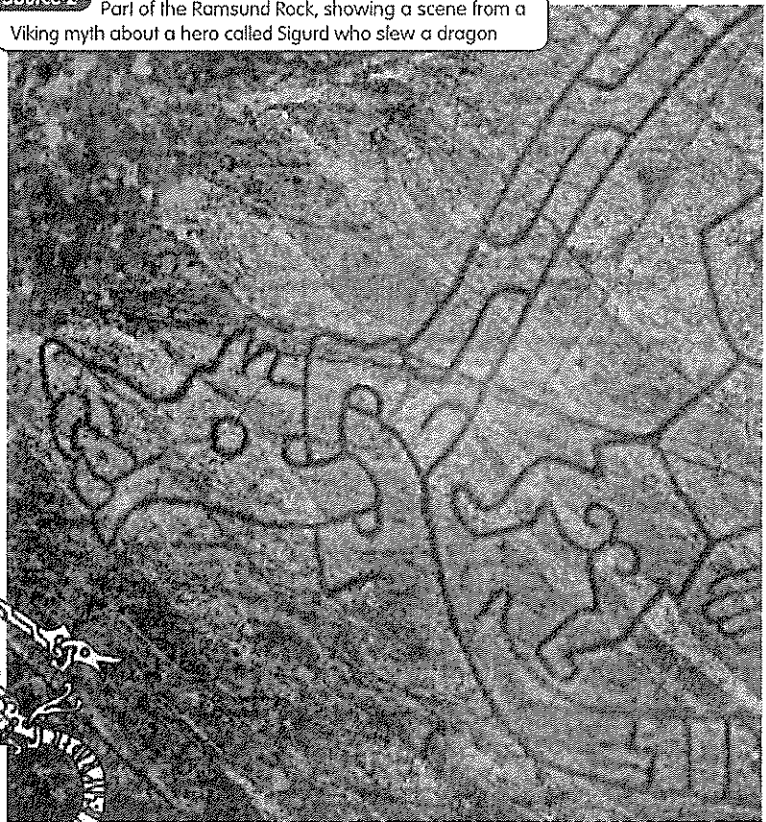
soul would use these in the next world. The ship was a popular grave item and came in many forms and sizes; when boats were not available, stones were arranged in the shape of a boat. The boat possibly symbolised the means by which the dead would reach the afterlife.

The coming of Christianity

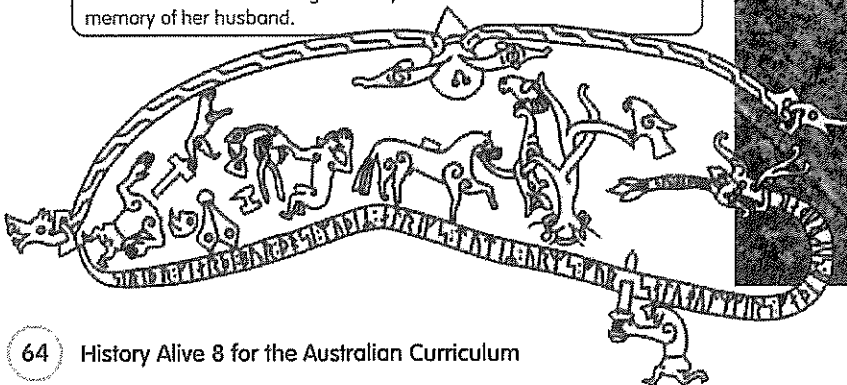
By the end of the Viking Age most of the Scandinavian countries had adopted Christianity as their main religion. Those in the west were influenced by Rome. Further east, where the descendants of Swedish Vikings had mixed with the Slav tribes on the rivers of Russia, the chief influence was Constantinople, which followed Eastern Orthodoxy. This was a result of Vikings serving as guards for the emperor of Constantinople.

Evidence suggests the conversion to Christianity was a gradual process. There was a long period of overlap where Christian and old pagan practices mingled. For the Christian missionaries who spread the faith throughout Scandinavia, this may have been seen as a practical tactic. By not completely overthrowing the old gods and the old pagan rituals, Christianity was able to get a foothold in Viking lands. There may also have been some

Source 2 Part of the Ramsund Rock, showing a scene from a Viking myth about a hero called Sigurd who slew a dragon

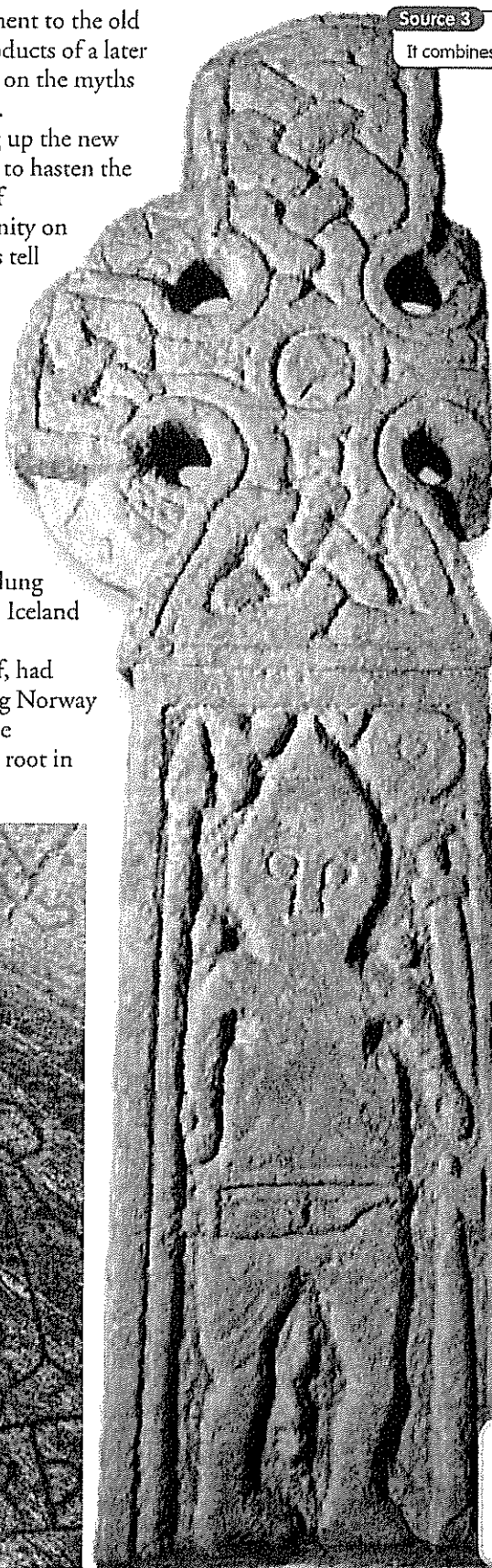


Source 1 Line drawing detail of all of the images on the Ramsund Rock. The runes on the dragon's body are a woman's dedication to the memory of her husband.



degree of sentimental attachment to the old pagan religion. The sagas, products of a later Christian age, dwell at length on the myths and legends of the pagan past.

Kings and chieftains taking up the new Christian faith also did much to hasten the path to conversion. King Olaf Tryggvason imposed Christianity on Norway in 995 CE. The sagas tell of him destroying pagan temples. Such aggression suggests there was resistance to the spread of Christianity. With some parts of the Scandinavian world remote from the rest of Europe, and therefore having little, if any, contact with the Christian faith, this seems a reasonable assumption, especially in far-flung regions like northern Norway, Iceland and Greenland. By the time Tryggvason's successor, St Olaf, had finished his work of converting Norway and Iceland to Christianity, the Christian faith had taken firm root in the Viking world.



Source 3

A Viking gravestone from Yorkshire in England. It combines both Christian and pagan symbols.

Activities



Student workbook
3.6

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 1 Explain the meaning of the following concepts and terms:
 - a heathen
 - b pagan
 - c Valhöll
 - d valkyries.
- 2 Who were Odin and Thor?

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 3 What type of Christianity was followed by the descendants of Swedish Vikings who had settled in Russia?
- 4 Which kings imposed Christianity on Norway and Iceland?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 5 Research the Sigurd legend. Examine **Source 1** and label those parts of the picture that illustrate incidents from the Sigurd myth. Treat the source as if it contained many frames (like a comic book) rather than a single picture.
- 6 What evidence is there in **Source 3** suggesting that the Vikings mixed Christian and pagan beliefs as they moved towards Christianity?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 7 Use the internet and your library to research a Viking myth. Present it to the class in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. On each slide, summarise an incident in the story. Include suitable images for each slide.
- 8 Why do you think the Vikings converted from paganism to Christianity?

heathen one who is neither Christian, nor Jewish nor Muslim, and is often seen as therefore being uncivilised
polytheism the worship of numerous gods

3.8 Gods, giants and burial customs

Viking myths are full of tales of giants and of gods who lived in a place called Asgard. They also abound with stories of birds and animals with human qualities, and of dwarves and trolls. Belief in such tales of fantasy helped to inspire warriors and to comfort those hoping for love, prosperity, safety and life after death.

Gods

Before they largely became Christians (by the twelfth century), the Vikings believed their good fortune in life depended on their pagan gods. Animals and people — even chieftains — were sacrificed to keep the gods happy. Even after they had adopted Christianity, some pagan beliefs and habits remained.

Death

As pagans, the Vikings believed that death marked the start of a journey to another world. A warrior slain in battle with a sword in his hand travelled to Valhøll — the great hall of the supreme god Odin. There, he would fight by day and feast by night until Ragnarok. On the day of Ragnarok, there would be a terrible war, followed by the death of the gods and a new order of peace.

Vikings who died a less noble death than warriors went to a place called Hel. For most, this was a bit like life on Earth. For the wicked, however, it was a place of punishment. The Viking saga *The Seeress's Prophecy* describes how people such as **oath breakers** were made weak and sick with poison in Hel, and had to trudge through rivers filled with sharpened swords and knives.

Wherever they went after their life on Earth, the pagan Vikings believed the dead would need things they used or enjoyed in life. Hence, the dead were buried (or burnt) with items such as food and drink, eating utensils, weapons, tools, combs, jewellery, horses, dogs, wagons or boats — even their slaves. Funeral rituals were often very elaborate.

When they became Christians, Vikings generally buried their dead, without possessions, after holding a simple service.

Source 1 Some of the more significant pagan deities were Odin, Thor and Freya.

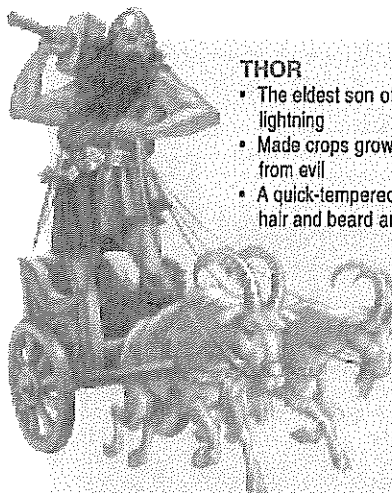
ODIN

- Chief god; and god of wisdom, war, death and poetry
- Married to Frigg. Sons included Thor (god of thunder and lightning) and Balder (god of light).
- Long grey beard and one eye. He traded one eye to drink at the well of wisdom.
- Invented the runes, using them to communicate and to do magic tricks
- Rode an eight-legged horse called Sleipnir
- Had a spear that always hit its target, and a bow that fired ten arrows at once
- Had two ravens which flew into the world every day to collect information
- Thought to have inspired the name 'Wednesday' (Woden's Day)



THOR

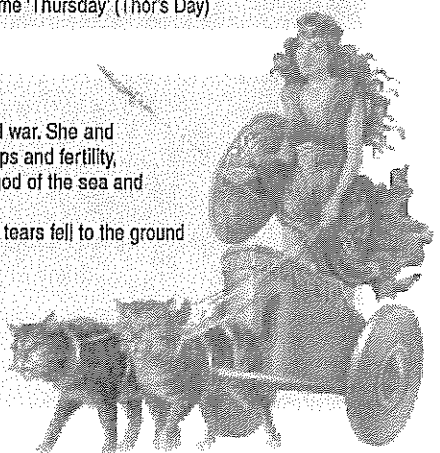
- The eldest son of Odin, and god of thunder and lightning
- Made crops grow and fought giants to protect people from evil
- A quick-tempered, very strong and tall man, with red hair and beard and wild eyes
- Drove a cart pulled by two giant goats. Vikings believed that thunder was the sound of its turning wheels.
- Threw a hammer called Mjollnir (caused lightning) which always hit its target and returned to his hand
- Wore iron gloves so he could throw and catch his mighty hammer



- Wore a belt called Megingjard, which made him ten times as strong
- Married to Siv, the goddess of the cornfields
- Thought to have inspired the name 'Thursday' (Thor's Day)

FREYA

- The goddess of love, fertility and war. She and her brother Freyr, the god of crops and fertility, were the children of Njord, the god of the sea and ships.
- When she lost her husband, her tears fell to the ground as amber.
- Rode in a chariot pulled by cats
- Wore a feather coat when she wanted to fly
- Thought to have inspired the name 'Friday' (Freya's Day)



Burial

Evidence indicates that, at different times in history, Vikings buried their dead in mass graves, in deep pits, in wagons — even in boats. Given the importance of the sea to the Vikings, it is not surprising that ships played an important part in some of their funeral practices. They also provided a symbolic means for a person's journey in the afterlife.

It was important to Vikings that their name be remembered after death, as this provided a way in which they could live forever. Hence, burial sites were often marked with a runestone, a cairn (pile of rocks) or, more commonly, a large earth mound called a howe.

Cremation

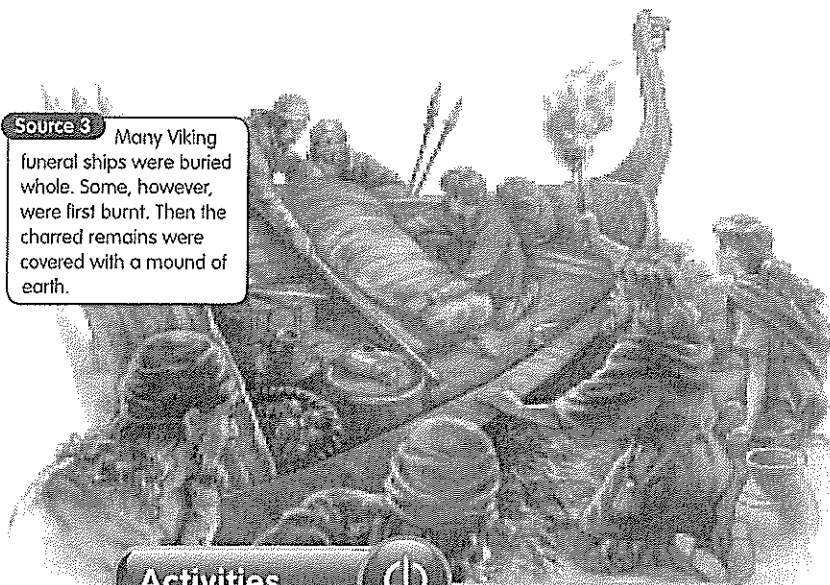
Cremation was another common burial practice for pagan Vikings. The Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan, who attended a ship-burning funeral on the Volga in 922, wrote that Vikings believed that burning a body released the dead person's spirit faster than burying it could do. Hence it was a kind act. The sagas describe tales in which the dead were cremated in treasure-filled ships pushed out to sea. There is as yet no archaeological evidence to confirm this practice.

Source 2 Some grave sites are marked by runestones arranged in the outline of a ship's hull. These were probably the graves of those who could not afford a boat.



oath breaker someone who goes back on their word

Source 3 Many Viking funeral ships were buried whole. Some, however, were first burnt. Then the charred remains were covered with a mound of earth.



Activities

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Where did the Viking gods live?
- 2 What is the relationship between our weekdays and Viking mythology?
- 3 Draw lines to correctly connect the entries in the following table:

Viking god	Responsibility
Odin	Goddess of cornfields
Thor	God of light
Freya	God of thunder and lightning
Balder	God of wisdom
Siv	Goddess of love and fertility

- 4 How did burial practices change once the Vikings became Christian?
- 5 Why are Viking burial sites often marked with runestones, cairns or mounds?
- 6 Why did Vikings sometimes choose cremation?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 7 Look at **Sources 2 and 3**. How can we tell that the person buried in the boat in **Source 3** is most likely wealthier than the person buried in the runestone 'boat' in **Source 2**?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 8 Use information in this chapter to write a eulogy (a short speech honouring a dead person) for a Viking warrior. Your eulogy should refer to the person's funeral and their journey to Valhöll. You will need to create them — their name, personality and achievements. You may like to use software to create a digital eulogy, including appropriate pictures and music.
- 9 Imagine you are one of the gods featured in this spread. Write a short tale that describes one day in your life. Your tale should be consistent with the description given here for your character. Don't mention your name in the story. Put completed stories in a box. Select one that is not your own and see how long it takes you to recognise the Viking god.

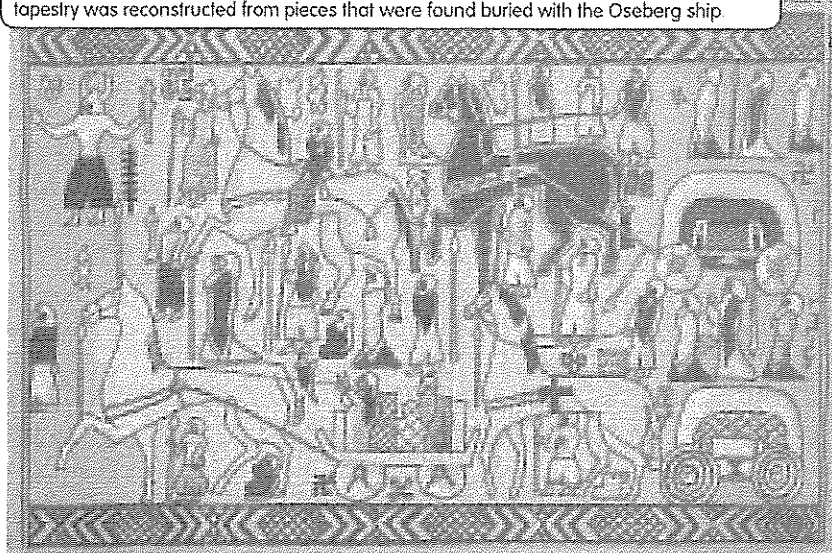
3.9 The Vikings as farmers

Although Vikings may be best known as pirates and raiders, they were, above all, farmers. The minority that went off on raids had to make sure there was someone at home looking after the farm. Their families' survival depended on stocking up on enough food for themselves and their animals to get through the long winter.

What were Viking farms like?

Generally, Viking farms tended to be a huddle of buildings around the **longhouse** where the family lived. Archaeologists have found that longhouses in the early part of the Viking Age included not only the living quarters for the family, but also stalls for animals, a workshop, and stores for food and tools. Later, the longhouse was used only as living quarters for the family; everything else was moved to other buildings. Hired hands were often employed to help run the farm. Slaves were also used, probably

Source 1 A reconstruction of a Viking **tapestry** showing various everyday activities. The tapestry was reconstructed from pieces that were found buried with the Oseberg ship.



in the least desirable jobs, such as looking after sheep.

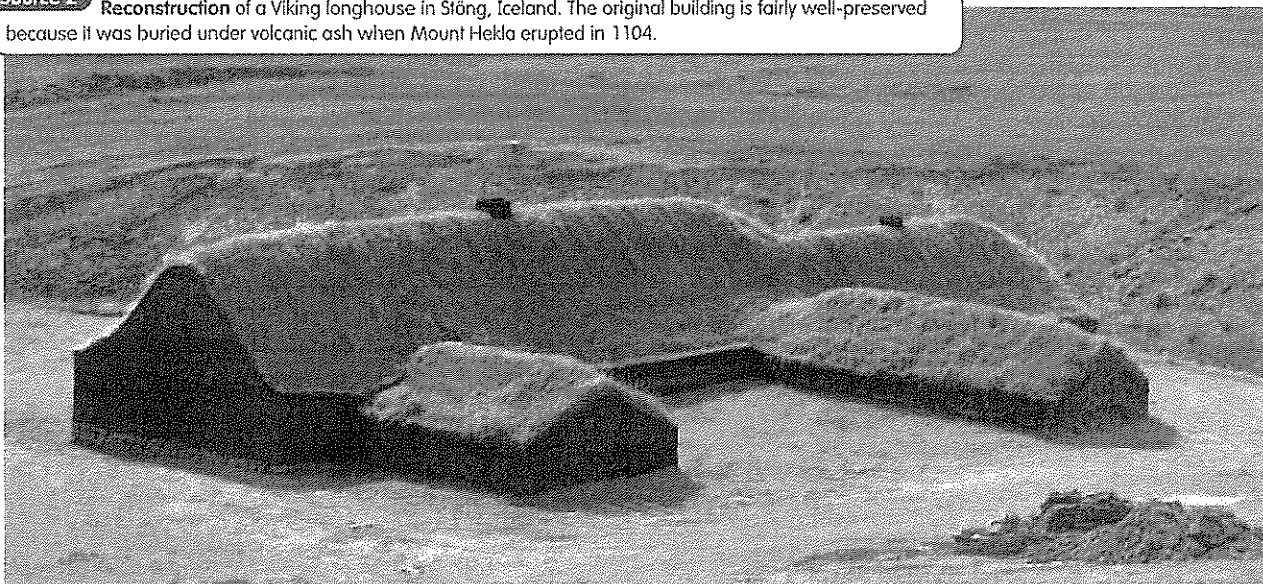
Villages were rare. Where there was a prosperous trade route, farms may have grouped together as a village. Generally, however, Viking farms were isolated. For this reason, they had to be **self-sufficient**, producing all their own food and tools. The Viking farmer had to be a good carpenter, blacksmith,

cultivator of crops and breeder of animals. This is because he had to build his own longhouse and any boats or carts he may have needed. He also had to make his own tools.

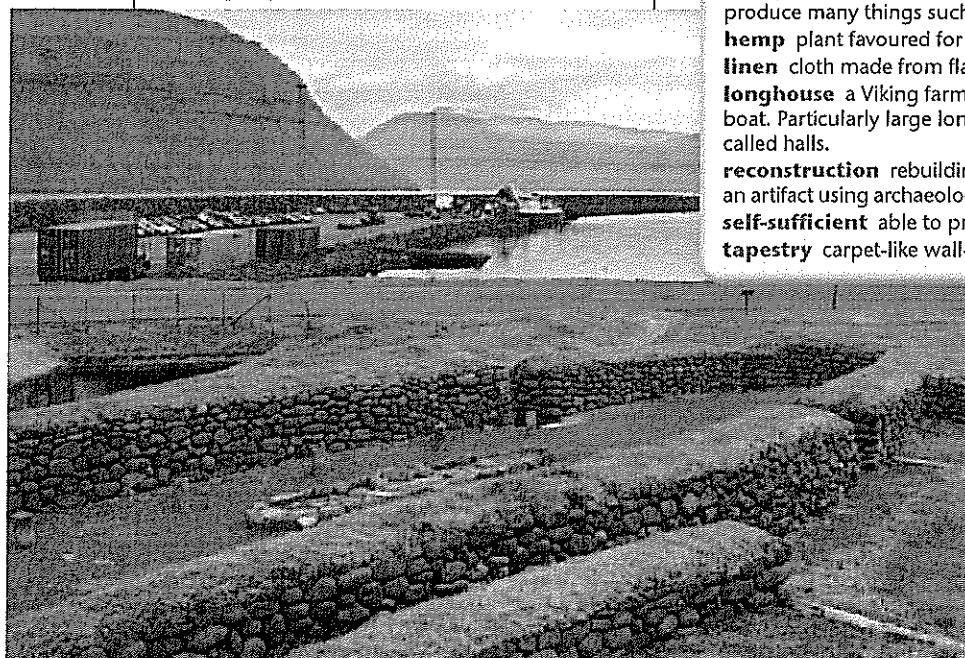
Livestock and crops

Viking farmers kept cattle, horses, sheep, goats and pigs for meat, dairy products, wool and skins. Horses and oxen were also used

Source 2 Reconstruction of a Viking longhouse in Stöng, Iceland. The original building is fairly well-preserved because it was buried under volcanic ash when Mount Hekla erupted in 1104.



Source 3 An archaeological site showing the foundations of a Viking longhouse in Denmark



flax plant cultivated for its seeds and fibres, which can be used to produce many things such as textiles

hemp plant favoured for its tough fibre, useful in the making of rope

linen cloth made from flax

longhouse a Viking farmhouse with a curved shape like an upturned boat. Particularly large longhouses meant for 30–50 people are often called halls.

reconstruction rebuilding or re-making: in archaeology, rebuilding an artifact using archaeological remains as a guide

self-sufficient able to provide for its own needs

tapestry carpet-like wall-hanging

for transport. In summer sheep and cattle were taken to higher pastures. But winter was severely cold, so livestock tended to be kept indoors and fed with hay. A poor harvest could mean starvation for both the animals and the Vikings. Besides hay, archaeologists have also found evidence of grain crops like barley, rye and oats, as well as such vegetables as onions, peas and cabbages. **Flax** and **hemp** were grown to make **linen** and rope for the rigging of boats.

Women and children

The wife of a Viking farmer was a figure who had much authority in her community. She commanded the work on the farm when her husband was away. She wore a belt with a set of keys to the farm's food stores. In the harsh climate, food was the most precious commodity. There is evidence that women accompanied men on rough sea voyages, even to uninhabited places like Iceland and Greenland. Without women, colonies could never have been established there.

Some women enjoyed a degree of power in their communities. As with Viking chiefs and kings, there is evidence of important women being buried with their belongings in longboats. The most spectacular example is the Oseberg ship burial (see spread 3.5). The body buried in that magnificent longship was a woman's: she is sometimes called 'the Oseberg queen'. She may or may not have been a queen, but she was certainly a respected and important figure.

Of Viking children, there is barely any evidence. It can be hypothesised that girls and boys would have helped with chores around the farm, such as making linen garments (probably a girl's task), milking cows, preparing food and hunting. In a society which Scandinavians themselves regard as prehistoric, school did not exist. It is likely that in such a warrior society, a young boy's practical education came in the form of learning the skills of warfare: handling a bow or a sword. Probably he was also trained in the construction and sailing of boats.

Activities



EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 What was the main purpose of the farm longhouse?
- 2 Who was often used to do the least desirable jobs on the farm?
- 3 List two skills the Viking farmer needed besides farming.
- 4 List three types of animals kept on Viking farms.
- 5 Why did the farmer keep his livestock indoors during the winter?
- 6 What was used to feed animals in the winter?
- 7 List three crops cultivated on Viking farms.
- 8 Why were flax and hemp useful?
- 9 Describe how men, women and children lived and worked in Viking society.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 10 Look at **Source 1**. List four things we are able to find out from this source about how the Vikings lived.
- 11 How does an archaeological find such as **Source 3** help to create reconstructions such as the house in **Source 2**?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 12 Use the internet and your library to research remains of longhouses in the Viking world, particularly in Iceland. Find a ground plan of a longhouse showing the various features and rooms. Draw the plan and label the features and rooms.

3.10 SkillBuilder

Interpreting sources on the Vikings

What are our main sources for the Vikings?

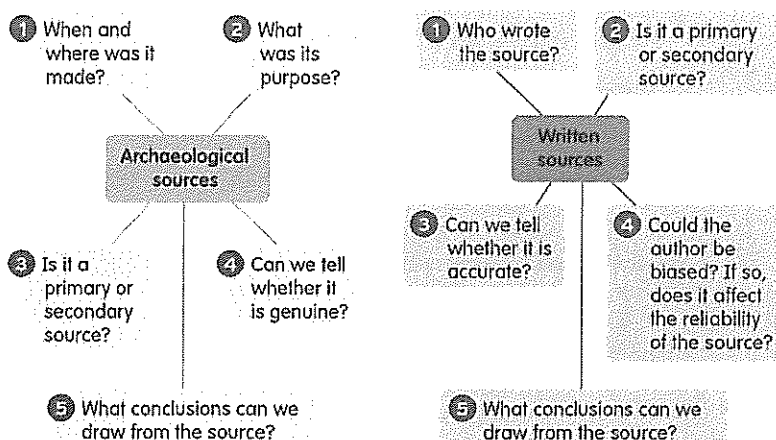
We have many sources that tell us about the Vikings. Most sources from the Viking Age are archaeological. This means that much of what is written about the Vikings is based on guesswork. Written documents from the Viking Age itself are, for the most part, very brief. Secondary sources, including film or attempts to recreate Viking life through replicas like armour or ships or buildings, are often based on guesswork.

Why do we need to interpret sources for the Vikings?

Sources can reveal a lot about the Vikings. Historians need to ask questions about both primary and secondary sources to identify their origin (where they came from), their purpose (why they were created) and whether or not they are reliable and therefore useful.

How to interpret sources for the Vikings

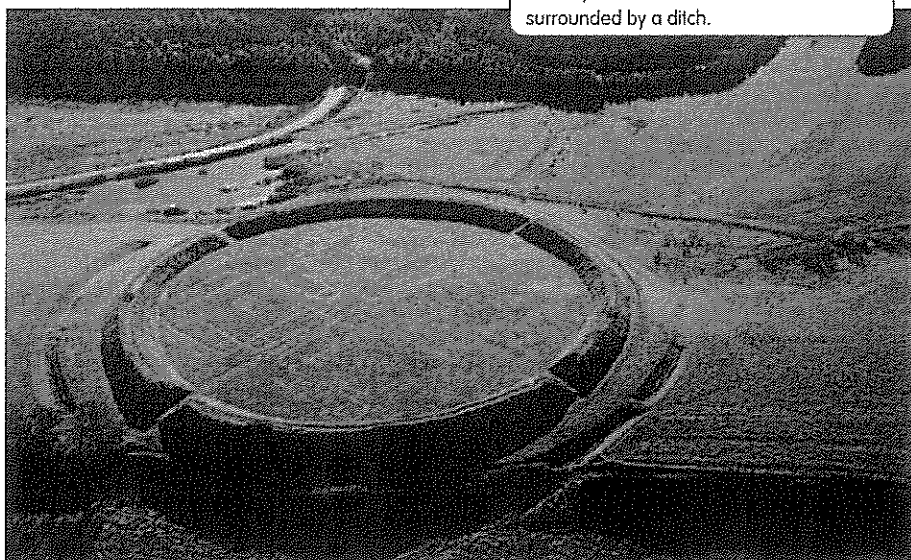
We need to think carefully about the clues each source provides. We need to ask questions such as:



STEP 1

The questions for archaeological sources have been applied to **Source 1**.

Source 1 The Trelleborg Ring, a Viking fortress in Denmark, was built about 980 CE. Ring fortresses were surrounded by circular earthen mounds. Visible in this aerial view is the circular ridged earthen mound, which was the defensive wall. It is surrounded by a ditch.



- 1 *When and where was it made?* Scientific tests show it was built between 980 and 981 CE.
- 2 *What was its purpose?* It was a fortress, meant to shelter armed men and to control the surrounding country.
- 3 *Is it a primary or secondary source?* Having been built during the Viking Age, it is a primary source. Almost certainly it was built by Danish Vikings.
- 4 *Can we tell whether it is genuine?* It is a genuine Viking building complex. It was built during the Viking Age and is now mostly in ruins, with most of the timber structures having disappeared over time.
- 5 *What conclusions can we draw from the source?* The Vikings built ring fortresses that were surrounded by mounds and ditches.

STEP 2

The questions for written sources have been applied to

Source 2

Source 2 An extract from an Icelandic saga called *Eyrbyggja*, written originally in Old Norse, or Icelandic, in the mid-thirteenth century

[The] onset [of the battle] was of the fiercest, and many were wounded on either side, but none slain. Snorri and his folk shot so thick and fast, that Raven with his men gave back from the wall [of the defensive work]. Then Thrand the Strider made a run at the wall, and leaped up so high that he got his axe hooked over the same, and therewith he drew himself up by the axe-shaft till he came up on to the work ... [When] Raven saw that a man had got on to the work, he ran at Thrand, and thrust at him with a spear, but Thrand put the thrust from him, and smote Raven on the arm close by the shoulder, and struck off the arm. After that many men came on him, and he let himself fall down outside the wall ...

- 1 *Who wrote the source?* The author is unknown. We know only that, like the Viking saga he has written, he has an Icelandic heritage.
- 2 *Is it a primary or secondary source?* The event is a Viking battle. As this source was written in the mid-thirteenth century and the author could not have witnessed the events he describes, it is a secondary source. However, if we were studying this source in the context of thirteenth-century medieval literature, it would be a primary source.
- 3 *Can we tell whether it is accurate?* It is not an eyewitness account. Even as a fictional account, the style of warfare may have changed after 200 years. At best, it is an imaginative account of a battle on a Viking fortress. We cannot be certain that it is an accurate description of an event from the Viking Age.
- 4 *Could the author be biased? If so, does it reflect the reliability of the source?* There does not appear to be any motive for bias. It is a straightforward account of a battle in the Viking Age.
- 5 *What conclusions can we draw from the source?* We cannot conclude anything about actual Viking battles, but we can conclude that the Vikings told stories about their battles.

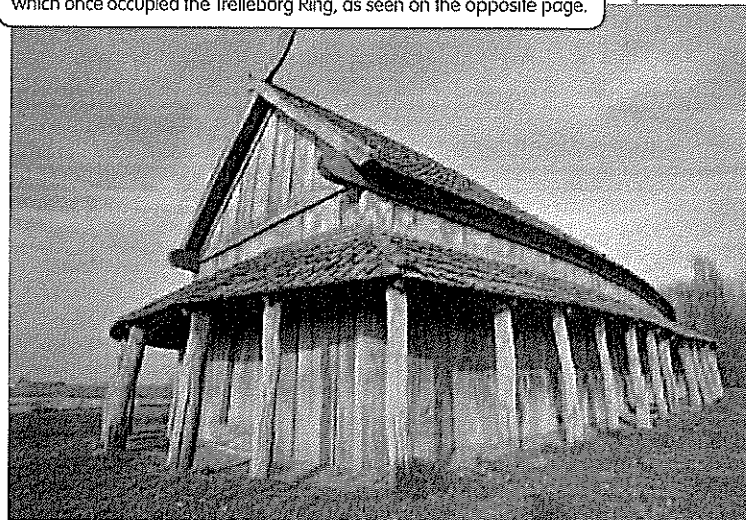
Developing my skills

Use the questions above to interpret the following sources. The information given in **Source 3** will help you judge which is more reliable out of **Sources 4 and 5**.

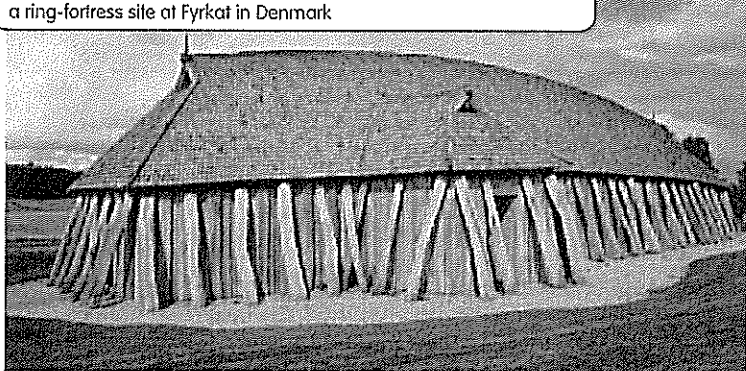
Source 3 From an article by Holger Schmidt entitled 'The Trelleborg House Reconsidered'

The reconstructed Viking-age house erected at Trelleborg in 1942 has, as a result of recent archaeological investigation, proved to be wrongly designed. The theory that it had an outside gallery [the verandah] is impossible to sustain, since on further examination the posts proved to be inclined towards the house and they must, therefore, be explained as buttresses ... [The] whole structure of the house must be reconsidered ... [The] Trelleborg house-type is that of the NW European medieval hall. It was built entirely of wood, the walls were of a stave-plank construction and it had a trussed-rafter roof. The convex shape of the structure was in accordance with contemporary taste or style ... The walls ... were perpendicular, but the roof and buttresses would have been the overriding feature of the exterior, giving it the curved outline of ... hog-back grave-covers.

Source 4 Reconstruction of a Viking longhouse from Trelleborg. It was built in 1942 and is supposed to be modelled on the longhouses which once occupied the Trelleborg Ring, as seen on the opposite page.



Source 5 A more recent reconstruction of a Viking longhouse from a ring-fortress site at Fyrkat in Denmark



3.11 Harald Bluetooth, Viking king of Denmark

In 2010, archaeologists announced they had unearthed a Viking 'palace' in Jelling, a village in Denmark on the Jutland Peninsula. The foundations of five longhouses, standing stones in the shape of a longship and some runestones have so far been uncovered. Whose palace complex has been discovered?

Viking royal palace

The palace is the ruins of a particularly large longhouse beneath the present-day church. The complex has been dated to the late tenth century, the same period as ring-fortresses such as Trelleborg (see spread 3.10). Therefore, it is likely this complex was built by the same people.

'The birth certificate of Denmark'

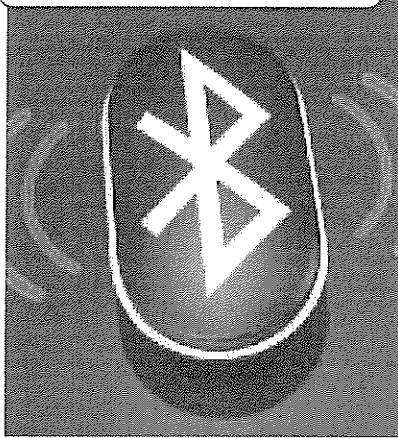
Close to the palace complex are two runestones called the Jelling stones. One is shown in **Source 2**. This stone was erected by Harald Bluetooth, the king of Denmark. This stone has both pictures and runes carved into it. The stone:

- honours Harald Bluetooth's parents
- proclaims Harald united Norway and Denmark into a single Viking empire
- declares Harald brought Christianity to Denmark and Norway.

For these reasons, the Jelling stones have become known as 'the birth certificate of Denmark'. In other words, they record the beginning of Denmark as a nation.

Source 1

The Ericsson company's Bluetooth symbol. It is made up of two runic letters, standing for H and B, the initials of the Danish king Harald Bluetooth.



It is believed the palace complex unearthed at Jelling was most likely Harald's seat of royal power. This is because of its size and its close proximity to the Jelling stones.

The life of Harald Bluetooth

Harald may have been the first king of a united Denmark. However, he had to fight hard to keep his throne. Given there is so little written evidence from the Viking Age, not much is known for certain about Harald's life or his reign. For example, it is not certain exactly when he was born. However, it is generally thought that he was born about 911 CE and died about 987 CE. We also know that he engaged in many battles, both at home and abroad.

Harald's conversion

Although the inscriptions on the Jelling stones give the impression that Harald freely converted his people to Christianity, some

evidence suggests Harald might have been forced to do so.

Harald's ring-fortresses were part of a defensive military system called the Danevirke, which was designed to protect his kingdom from the Germans in the south. At this time, the ruler of Germany was the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I. Some historians say that Otto I defeated Harald in battle, forced him to be baptised and commanded him to protect the churches in Denmark where many, including Harald himself, continued to worship the old pagan gods.

Other accounts, however, say that Harald Bluetooth was freely converted by a Christian cleric.

Battles

Harald appears to have been successful in foreign military expeditions. The inscription on the Jelling stone says he conquered and brought Christianity to Norway. The southern part of Sweden fell under Harald's rule, and he supported Richard the Fearless of Normandy to fight against the king of France. He succeeded in capturing King Louis IV of France as prisoner and forced the French king to accept his ally Richard's rule over Normandy.

Harald finally met his end fighting a rebellion by pagan Danes in which it is thought his own son, Svend, was involved. Harald was given a Christian burial. The Christian faith he had helped to spread throughout the Viking world would prevail. So would Denmark, which under his grandson Canute the Great would become a vast empire, encompassing Norway, Scotland and England.

Source 2 One of the Jelling stones in Jutland, Denmark. This side of the rune depicts the crucifixion. The runes on the other side of the stone read: 'Harald king had these stones made after Gorm his father and after Thyra his mother — that Harald who won all Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian'.

Did you know?



The software called Bluetooth is named after the Viking king of Denmark. Just as Harald Bluetooth united Denmark and Norway, so does the software named after him unite communication technology.

Activities



EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 When was the Viking palace complex at Jelling built?
- 2 Why are the Jelling stones called 'the birth certificate of Denmark'?
- 3 Against which enemy was the Danevirke meant to defend Denmark?
- 4 How was Harald Bluetooth able to secure the rule of Normandy for his ally Richard the Fearless?
- 5 How did Harald Bluetooth die?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 6 Examine **Source 1**. Using the internet or your library, research the runes which combine to make the Bluetooth symbol. Write these in your workbook along with their meaning.
- 7 Examine **Source 2**. Why do you think the Jelling stones have led archaeologists to hypothesise that the palace complex at Jelling was the seat of Harald Bluetooth's royal power?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 8 Use the library and the Internet to research the Danish king Canute the Great. Design a runic stone, like the Jelling stones, that describes his achievements.

3.12 The Battle of Hastings and the end of the Viking Age

In Bayeux Cathedral in France, there is an embroidered wall hanging. It shows detailed scenes from the Battle of Hastings in 1066, which led to the Norman invasion of England. It is called the Bayeux Tapestry and is one of the most famous primary sources in medieval history. Many historians believe it was created in the late eleventh century under the orders of a bishop called Odo. This man lived in Bayeux, was a leader in the Battle of Hastings and was the half-brother of William, the Norman duke who won the battle. The Bayeux Tapestry has a height of only 50 centimetres, but is 70 metres long! It outlines the events of the Battle of Hastings like a modern-day comic book.

Background to the Battle of Hastings

When England's King Edward the Confessor died in 1066, he had no direct heir to the throne. A powerful earl, Harold Godwinson, saw the opportunity to take the crown himself. But he had competition. King Harald Hardrada of Norway, as a descendant of the Danish king Canute who had once ruled England, believed he had a right to the throne. Harold Godwinson's own brother, Tostig, joined forces with Harald Hardrada. Finally, Duke William of Normandy also tried to claim the throne because he said Harold had sworn an oath promising to support him in becoming king after Edward's death.

The last Viking attack on England

Harald Hardrada and his Norwegian army landed in the north of England. They met Harold Godwinson's army on the battlefield at Stamford Bridge. They were defeated in a bloody battle and as little as 25 of their 300 longships returned to Norway. Hardrada and Tostig were both killed. Some historians consider this the last true Viking attack on England. However, William of Normandy, a descendant of Danish Vikings, was now sailing to England in a fleet of longships.

The Battle of Hastings

Harold's weary troops marched southwards 700 kilometres to meet the Norman force. They finally met near Hastings at a place now appropriately called Battle. Harold's troops formed a shield wall near the top of a hill, defending their position with battle axes. Wave after wave of Norman cavalry charged the shield wall but with little effect. Medieval battles were often decided within an hour — but not Hastings! It raged for the better part of a day. According to historians, it was a risky strategy of William's that finally won him the battle. Twice, his cavalry pretended to flee from the English. When the English troops gave chase, they broke their shield wall. William's cavalry regrouped, charged and defeated the now scattered English infantry. Harold was killed.

Source 1

Contenders for the English throne jostle for power.



A Harold Godwinson
'I should be king! Edward was my brother-in-law, and even though I rebelled against him in 1051 we've put aside our differences.'

B William, Duke of Normandy
'Edward promised me the throne because I helped him crush Harold's rebellion in 1051. Harold even swore to me that he'd let me be king!'

C Harald Hardrada
'We should not let Viking influence in England disappear. I'm a descendant of King Canute and that's why I should be king!'

D Tostig
'My brother Harold is a power hungry, ambitious swine! I want the throne for myself, and I'll use King Harald Hardrada of Norway to my advantage to get it!'

Source 2 A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry — Harold's oath

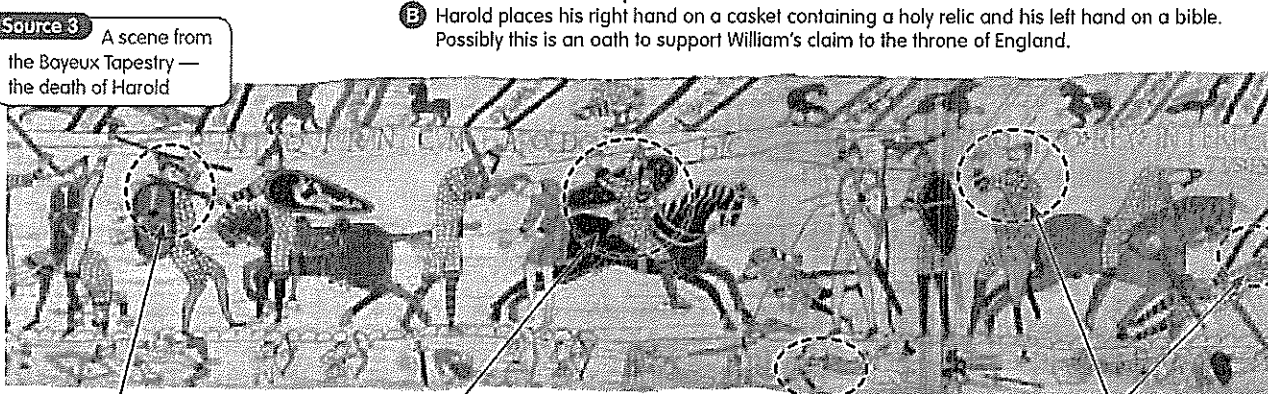


A William

C 'William' and 'Harold' in Latin. The words *dux* and *duci* mean 'leader'.

D Harold is escorted back to England in a Norman ship. Clearly it is a Viking longship in design.

Source 3 A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry — the death of Harold



A An English huscarl — the elite bodyguard of Harold's army

B A mounted Norman knight. His armour is similar to the huscarl's. His kite-shaped shield is favoured over Viking round shields.

C Stripping troops of their expensive armour

D Harold is killed. He is either shot with an arrow or cut down by a Norman sword — or perhaps both.

Aftermath

William was crowned king of England at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day, 1066. He became known as William the Conqueror. Despite his coronation, he had to continue fighting the English for the next few years before he had full authority. His knights became the new nobility of England. William followed the Frankish custom of parcelling land and peasant workers out to his supporters. This was part of a new system of running a country, called feudalism. This system, along with Christendom, would define Europe for the rest of the Middle Ages.

Did you know?

The Normans spoke French. Their conquest introduced many French and Latin words into the English language.

Activities



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Invasion of Britain pp. 82–3

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Which famous event in medieval history is shown on the Bayeux Tapestry?
- 2 Who became King of England when Edward the Confessor died?
- 3 Which Norwegian king was defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge?
- 4 Who won the Battle of Hastings?
- 5 Where and when was William the Conqueror crowned king of England?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 6 List the features of the ship shown in **Source 2** that show it is a Viking longship.
- 7 Why did the Norman knights find it so hard to break through the shield wall formed by the English huscarls?
- 8 Why do you think the Bayeux Tapestry is such a valuable source of information for historians studying the Battle of Hastings?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 9 Use the internet or your library to research the Bayeux Tapestry. Write a summary of the order of events shown in the Bayeux Tapestry.
- 10 How did events like the Norman Conquest contribute to ending the Viking Age?

3.13 Heritage of the Vikings: governing Iceland in the Viking Age

The modern parliament in Iceland is called the Althing. It has the same name as the body established in 930 CE that governed Iceland during the Viking Age. Although the Althing is regarded as the oldest national government assembly in Europe, there have been many changes over the last 1000 years. The Althing of the Viking era had some of the features of a modern parliament, but was quite different in many ways.

A Viking republic?

Iceland was originally a colony of Norwegian settlers. Most of them had settled Iceland as a result of feuding with the king of Norway. They fled to Iceland where they hoped to live free of the Norwegian king's

authority. Like Norway, Iceland was divided into a series of regional assemblies called **things**. Each thing was ruled by a local chieftain called a godar. As the population grew, these things combined to create a national governing assembly, the **Althing**. It was a unique form of government because it rejected the rule of a king. This was probably the result of the Icelandic settlers' dissatisfaction with the way they had been treated by the king of Norway.

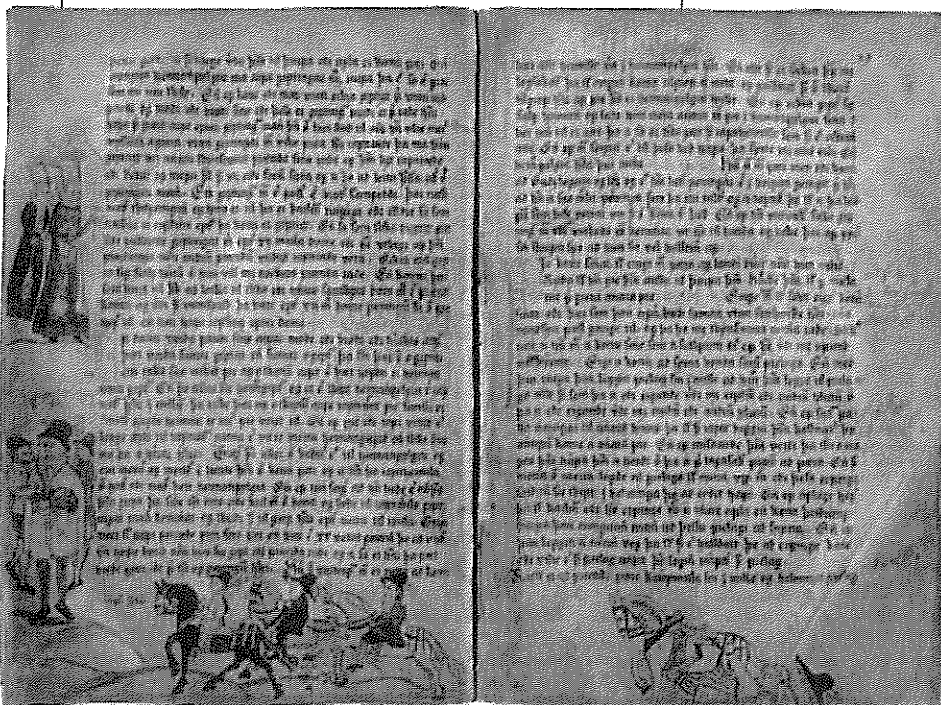
Each year in summer, the Althing met on a plain called **Thingvellir**. The godars, 48 in all, came with their supporters and were billeted in small dwellings called **booths**. The assembly met in the open at a spot called the Law Rock. They listened as the law code was recited by a representative called the Lawspeaker. Then they discussed making new laws and amending old laws. One of the more radical amendments they made to their law code was the adoption of Christianity in 1000 CE.

Feuds were frequent between the regional chieftains, and the Althing's role was to try to resolve conflict. No doubt there was an endeavour to do this peacefully, but

there is evidence that at times weapons were drawn at the Althing. One saga tells of one chieftain and his supporters using force of arms to barge through another group to get a hearing at the Althing.

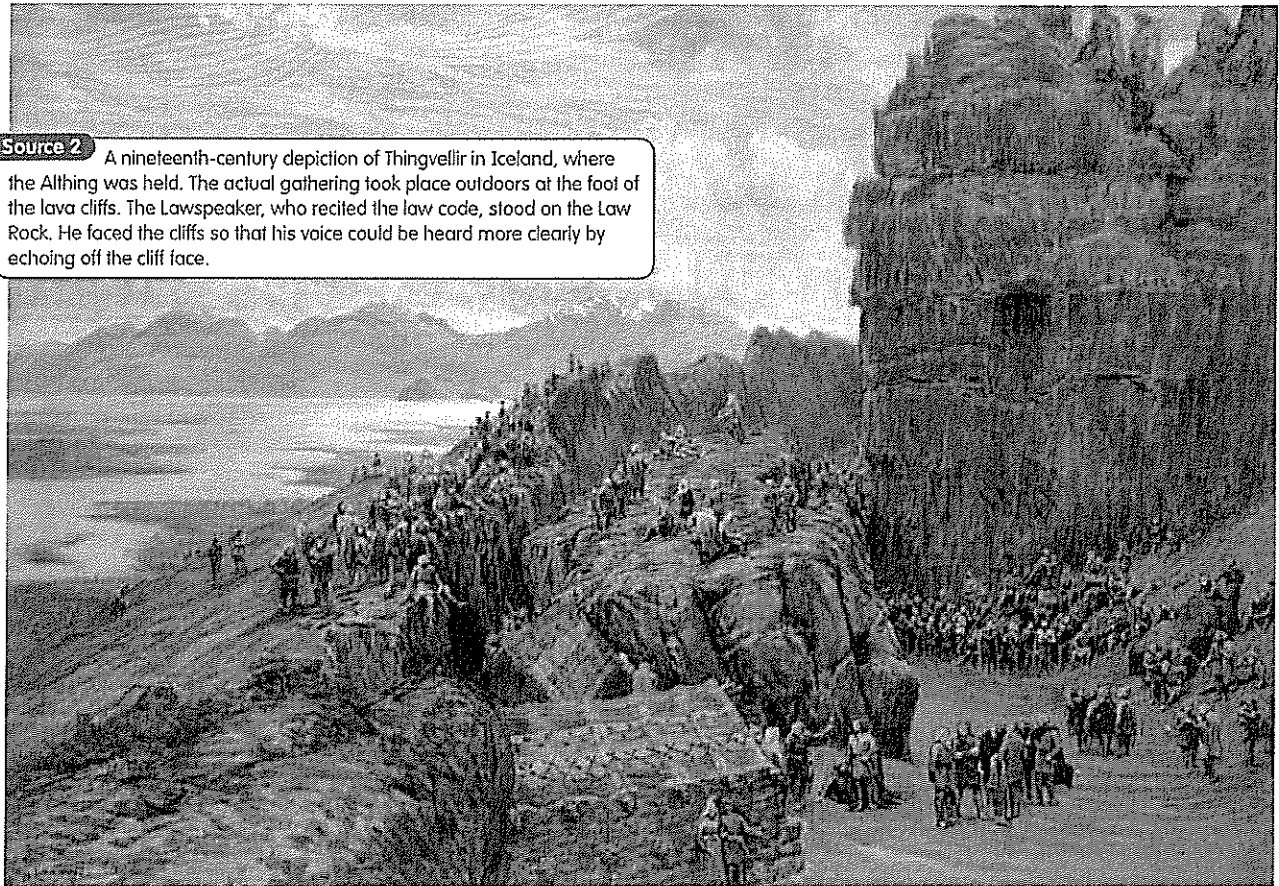
But such incidents were probably rare. The Althing was unique as an assembly of free men trying to establish rule of law without the need of a king to enforce it. They even elected a president every three years. This is why some historians describe Viking Iceland as a **republic**. However, unlike the president of a modern republic, the president of the Althing was unable to enforce laws. This was the job of those directly involved in the law-making process.

Source 1 One of the earliest written versions of the Icelandic legal code. It dates from 1260, two centuries after the end of the Viking Age. Because the Vikings did not keep records in the form of a book, the code was originally recited by heart (see **Source 2**).



Source 2

A nineteenth-century depiction of Thingvellir in Iceland, where the Althing was held. The actual gathering took place outdoors at the foot of the lava cliffs. The Lawspeaker, who recited the law code, stood on the Law Rock. He faced the cliffs so that his voice could be heard more clearly by echoing off the cliff face.



Enforcing the law

There were various penalties for breaking the law. Theft was punished with beheading or hanging. A slave judged to be disobedient was punished with a whipping. Stoning and drowning were also punishments. Some offenders were sentenced to become outlaws. They were denied food and shelter and anyone had the right to kill them on sight. If you were an outlaw for life you also lost your property. Lesser offences carried a three-year sentence of outlawry. In the case of a dispute, it was the role of the injured party to enforce a punishment, not the Althing. Sometimes they accepted punishment payment from the offender or even agreed to reconciliation.

The Althing may have been very different to a modern parliament. However, in the centuries which followed its establishment, the rest of Europe would be ruled by kings and emperors. Compared to this, the Althing was more closely related to modern parliaments with representatives elected by free citizens.

Did you know?



The word *booth*, which means an enclosed structure usually of wood or canvas, such as a stall at a fair, is originally an Old Norse word, which referred to the booths described in this spread.

Activities



Student workbook
3.8

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 In what year was the Althing set up in Iceland?
- 2 From which country did Icelanders originate?
- 3 What is a godar?
- 4 Where did the Althing meet?
- 5 Under Icelandic law, what happened if you were declared an outlaw for life?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 6 Why do you think the Icelanders chose the place shown in **Source 2** for the Althing? What is appealing about the place?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 7 Using the knowledge you have acquired by reading this chapter, explain why the Icelandic law code was not written until long after the Viking Age was over.

Althing Iceland's parliament; Icelandic governing national assembly formed during the Viking Age, which met once a year

booth small, temporary shelter for participants at things and the Icelandic Althing

republic a state in which the head of the government is not a ruler who inherits his position as might a king or emperor

thing regional meeting held to decide local issues in Norway and Iceland during the Viking Age

Thingvellir meeting place of the Althing in Iceland during the Viking Age

3.14 Review and reflect

The Vikings represent a spectacular phase in history. This is largely because of their splendid weapons, armour and ships, and their sea-borne raids. In this chapter we have learnt that:

- the Vikings also engaged in peaceful trade
- the Viking Age lasted about 200 years
- the Vikings were also explorers who, among other places, visited North America
 - the Vikings settled places as far-flung as Iceland, Greenland and Russia
 - the Vikings conquered places in Ireland, England and Normandy
 - the Vikings began as pagans but eventually adopted Christianity
 - the Vikings were superb seamen.

Review



Quick quiz

- 1 Name the three Scandinavian countries which were the homelands of the Vikings.
- 2 What are runes?
- 3 What is the name of the saga, written in Old English, about a Swedish hero who slays the monster Grendel?
- 4 What is a knarr?
- 5 Which Scandinavian country has many fjords?
- 6 What is Leif Eriksson's claim to fame?
- 7 What is a berserker?
- 8 Name the Viking god of thunder.

Analysis and use of sources

- 1 How do we know that the statue in **Source 1** is that of a Viking? Does it depict any Viking stereotypes?

Historical questions and research

- 2 Use the internet or your library to find out more about the Bayeux Tapestry. How reliable is it as a primary source?
- 3 Use the internet and your library to find out how the Vikings settled Russia and Normandy.

Back to the big questions

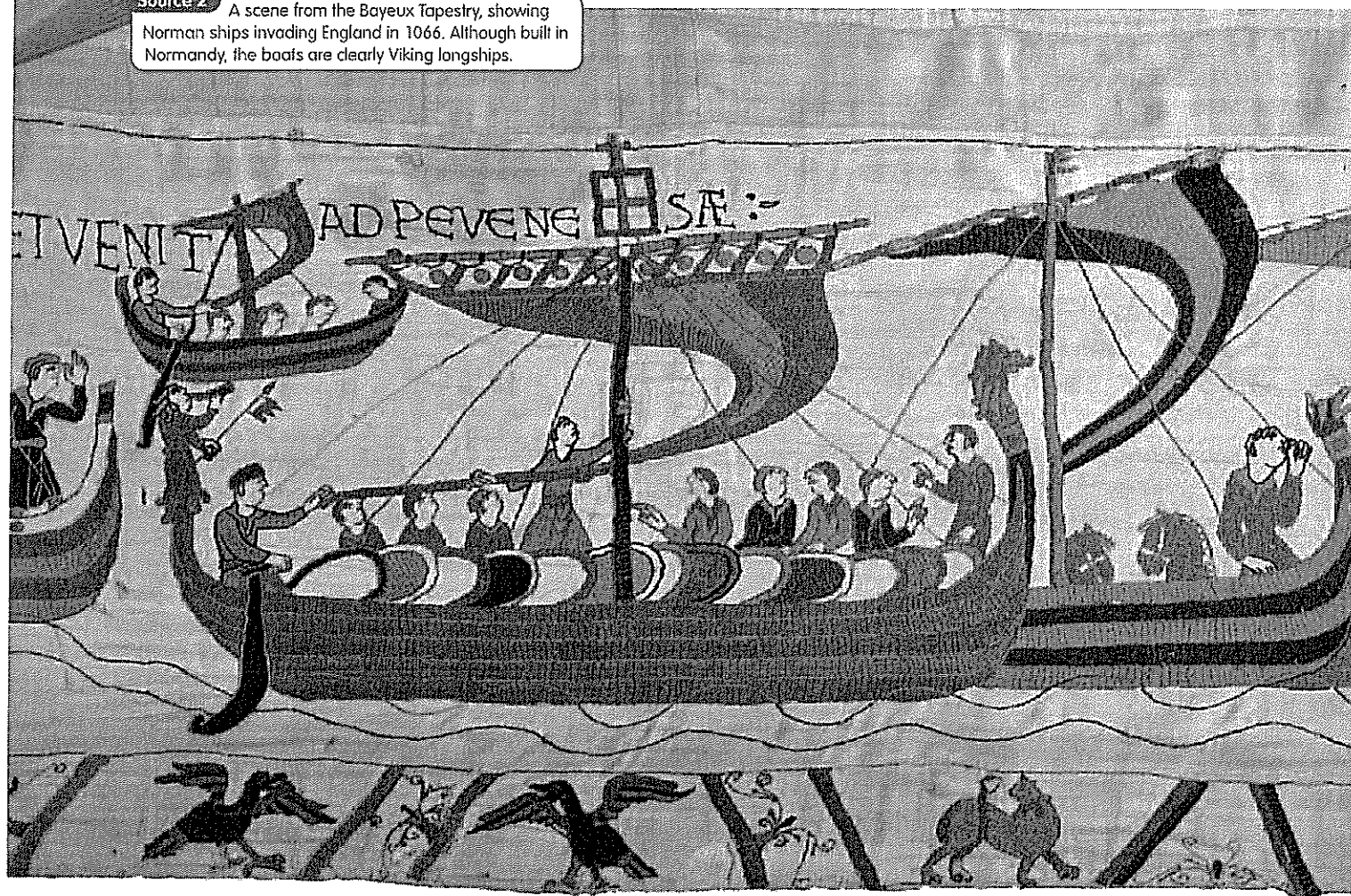
At the beginning of this chapter, several big questions were posed. Use the knowledge you have gained to answer these questions.

- 1 What do we know of the Vikings from the artefacts that archaeologists have found?
- 2 What do we know of the Vikings from written sources, such as myths, stories, annals and chronicles?
- 3 What sort of religion did the Vikings practise?
- 4 How did the age of the Vikings come to an end?
- 5 What misconceptions exist about the Vikings?

How many of these big questions were you able to answer? Can you think of any other big questions about the Vikings to add to this list? If so, explain why you would include them.

Source 1 A statue of Rurik, the first king of Kiev Rus. In this monument, he is holding a shield and dagger. It stands in the Russian city of Novgorod. Kiev Rus was established by Swedish Vikings. It eventually evolved into the modern-day nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Source 2 A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry, showing Norman ships invading England in 1066. Although built in Normandy, the boats are clearly Viking longships.



Reflect



Think about your learning during this topic. For each statement, tick the box you think applies to you.

Statements about my learning in this chapter	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I learned many things about the Vikings that surprised me.				
I enjoyed working with visual sources.				
I worked well as part of a team and cooperated in the completion of tasks.				
Discussing — talking and listening — helped me to understand the Vikings.				
Learning about the Vikings helped me to understand that stereotypes are often inaccurate.				
My work in the SkillBuilder improved my ability to interpret sources.				
Learning about the expansion of the Vikings helped me to understand that there can be many causes for an event.				


projectsplus

The Bayeux Tapestry

SEARCHLIGHT ID: PRO-0019

Your task

Your task is to 'finish' the story of the Bayeux Tapestry, showing how the events unfolded immediately after the Battle of Hastings.



The Bayeux Tapestry

1066

Your video introduction will help explain the meaning of the Bayeux Tapestry, as you visit the town of Bayeux on the north coast of France, home to the most vital and important piece of evidence to survive the Middle Ages.

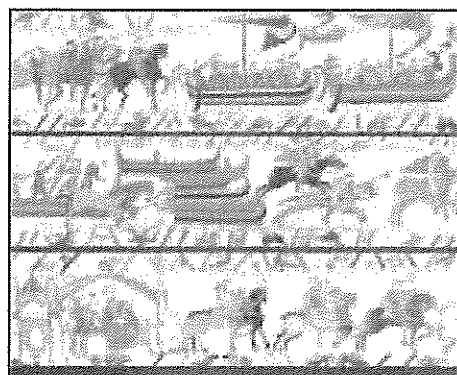
Scenario

The story of 1066 did not end with the Battle of Hastings. William the Conqueror still had much to do before he could ensure his rule was legitimised and respected. He had to establish law and order over the now vanquished Saxons. He had to ensure that the knights and barons who fought with him were rewarded, and he had to quell any remaining resistance. And, of course, he had to be crowned king.

None of these parts of the story are told in the Bayeux Tapestry, because centuries of rolling and unrolling it every time it was viewed have resulted in one end being completely frayed away. Your task is to complete the tapestry, illustrating some of the events that occurred after that fateful day near Hastings. To complete the task you will need to research different aspects of life in England after the battle, and to accompany your tapestry you will need to write a summary of the events you have depicted.

Process

- Open the ProjectsPLUS application for this chapter in your eBookPLUS. Watch the introductory video lesson and then click the 'Start Project' button and set up your project. You should complete this project in groups of no more than four. Save your settings and the project will be launched.
- Go to the Research Forum and allocate one topic to each group member (or more than one if your group has fewer than four members).
- Each group member now needs to complete research on their allocated topic. The weblinks in your Media Centre will help you get started. Make note of interesting facts and key events as you go so you can share them with the rest of the group.



Be sure to record which websites you visit so you can complete the bibliography at the end of the project. Although they have a lot of good information, you should use the sites mentioned as a starting point only. Try to use a variety of different sources to complete your research, including at least one offline source.

- Once the research has been done it's time to complete the Bayeux Tapestry. Using the research completed by the group, choose one of the research topics that you will illustrate in your completion of the tapestry. It does not need to be the topic you researched; you can choose one of the others if you like. Download the template provided in your Media Centre, and fill in the end of the story of 1066. Don't forget that the Bayeux Tapestry is like a giant comic strip, so your story should be told in a series of different panels rather than in one image. Make sure your story has an ending; for example, it could be William's coronation, the final event in the story of Hereward the Wake or the completion of the Domesday Book.
- Finally, you need to write up a summary of the research that your group completed.
 - What happened in England after the Battle of Hastings?
 - Did William manage to secure his throne or was there continued resistance to his rule?
 - Did life return to normal for the Saxons or were there long-term changes for them?

Your summary should outline the main points discovered by your group, and should be approximately 500 words in length. Don't forget to include a bibliography at the end!

projectsplus

Your ProjectsPLUS application is available in this chapter's Student Resources tab inside your eBookPLUS. Visit www.jacplus.com.au to locate your digital resources.

Suggested software

- ProjectsPLUS
- Word

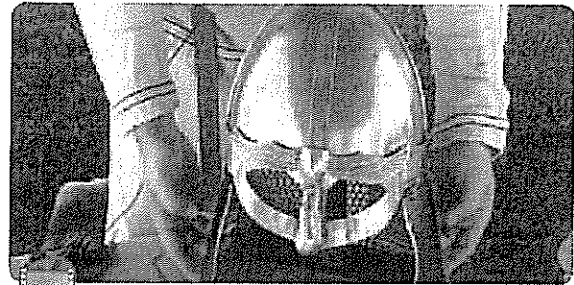
Media Centre

Your Media Centre contains:

- a template for your Bayeux Tapestry illustration
- weblinks to research sites
- an assessment rubric.

DIGITAL

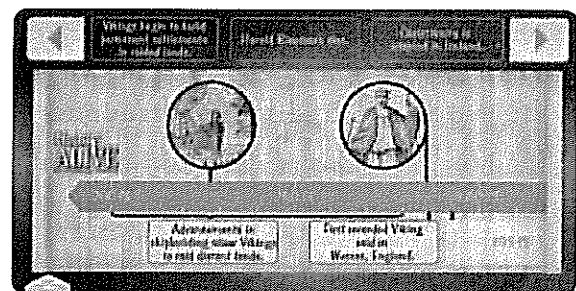
resources for this chapter



SOURCES: VIKING LIFE

See history come alive in this educational video lesson as you meet a group of passionate Viking enthusiasts who will help you understand the daily life and culture of the Viking era. See historical artefacts, including weaponry, clothing and musical instruments, and explore the food that was traditionally eaten by the Viking people.

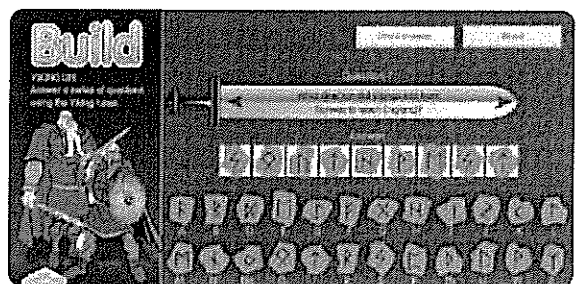
SEARCHLIGHT ID: ELE5-0214



VIKINGS TIMELINE

Use this fun interactivity to create a visual timeline of key events in the history of the Vikings from 790 to 1066 CE.

SEARCHLIGHT ID: INT-2944



BUILD: 'VIKING LIFE'

Answer a series of questions on Viking Life using runes containing the ancient Viking alphabet.

SEARCHLIGHT ID: INT-0786