

THE VIKINGS

TRADERS AND RAIDERS

The Vikings were people who lived in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages. They originally settled the Scandinavian lands but the countries of Scandinavia as we know them today did not exist until the end of the Viking age. Today these countries are known as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The Vikings played a major role in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages, especially during the Viking Age which was from 800 CE to 1066 CE.

The name Scandinavia comes from a region in southern Sweden called Skåne or Scania. The terms Norden and Nordic, both meaning "North," have also been used to refer collectively to the five Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands). In general, Scandinavia denotes Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The term Norden refers to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. These form a group of countries having affinities with each other and are distinct from the rest of continental Europe.

Scandinavian may also refer to a language group, Continental Scandinavian, that is descended from Old Norse and includes Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish. The Vikings didn't call themselves Vikings. This name came later down the line. The Vikings called themselves 'Ostmen' and were also known as Norsemen, Norse and Danes

Viking Raids

The word Viking actually means "to raid" in Old Norse and from around the year 793 to 1066, Norsemen used rivers and oceans to explore Europe for trading, raiding and conquest. The Vikings usually carried out their raids during the summer months when it was safer and easier to cross the sea from their home in Norway. The rest of the year they would have farmed the land and raised animals for food.

The Vikings were skilled at building ships, sailing them and using their knowledge of the sun and the stars to navigate the sea. They would go on to raid and pillage a number of coastal communities in north-Western Europe during the next two centuries. The Vikings would board their long ships and head across the waters to raid villages on the northern coast of Europe, including islands such as Great Britain. They first showed up in England to raid villages in 787 CE. The Vikings were known to attack defenceless monasteries when they raided. This got them a bad reputation as barbarians, but to the Vikings, monasteries were wealthy and undefended easy targets.

The siege of Paris of 845 was the culmination of a nearly year- long Viking invasion of West Francia. The Viking forces were led by a Norse chieftain named "Reginherus", or Ragnar, who tentatively has been identified with the legendary saga character Ragnar

Lodbrok. This siege was notable as it was the first occasion on which the Vikings dug themselves in for a long siege rather than conduct a hit-and-run raid.

Eventually the Vikings began to settle in lands outside of Scandinavia. In the 9th century they settled portions of Great Britain, Germany, and Iceland. In the 10th century they moved into north eastern Europe including Russia. They also settled along the coast of northern France, where they established Normandy, which means "northmen". By the start of the 11th century the Vikings were at the peak of their expansion. One Viking, Leif Eriksson, son of Erik the Red, actually made it to North America. He started a brief settlement in present day Canada. This was many hundreds of years before Columbus.



The Vikings from Norway and Denmark often travelled West to England, Scotland and France to trade. Here they would trade amber from the Baltic area, arctic furs, animal skins and walrus tusks. The Vikings from Sweden often went East along rivers to Russia and as far South as Constantinople.

Vikings traded many things which included cereals, vegetables and domestic animals. They were brought into the towns by farmers and exchanged for necessities, such as clothes or tools, and luxury items, like jewellery and glass. During the course of the Viking period, silver became a more and more important component of trading.

Coins were used throughout Viking times in the Nordic Countries but their significance and use changed with time. Much of the trade was based on barter. People would meet at market places and barter the surplus from their own farm for the items they needed.

