

Part I, Paper 2

Scandinavian history in the Viking Age

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This course is devoted to the history of the Norse-speaking peoples of Scandinavia during the Viking age (from the eighth to the eleventh centuries). It concentrates not on the notorious Viking raids which terrorised western and eastern Europe at this time, but rather on political, social, religious, and economic developments in the Scandinavian homelands. Weekly lectures are given over a two-year cycle, and so any student intending to take this paper at Tripos is strongly urged to attend during both years. The lecture course should be complemented by both supervisions, of which a full course of eight sessions is normally provided during either the first or second year, and private study, of which around four to five hours a week is recommended.

While Viking armies ravaged abroad, in their Scandinavian homelands thriving commercial emporia witnessed active trading in rich natural resources, luxury goods, slaves, and other commodities from near and far; kings struggled to build kingdoms and break the power of local chieftains; and Christianity made itself felt, first simply as one cultural influence among many, then as a political tool, and finally as a fundamental part of the structure of society. Viking raiding and trading is an integral aspect of the course, which explores the significance of such activity for social and political developments within Scandinavia itself, from the Germanic Iron age through to the early mediaeval period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The history of Viking-age Scandinavia is also characterised by ideological clashes, between paganism and Christianity, between conservative and innovative social ideals. Against this background the course charts the origins and development of the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and also follows the Vikings abroad into new colonial settlements on the Atlantic islands and in eastern Europe.