

Part II, Paper 2

A subject in Scandinavian history of the Viking Age

The coming of Christianity

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This course examines the coming of Christianity to the Scandinavian peoples during the course of the Viking Age and early Middle Ages. This conversion was a very drawn-out process, lasting from the beginnings of missionary endeavour in the eighth and ninth centuries through the renewed mission-campaigns of the tenth and eleventh until the final establishment of ecclesiastical institutions in the twelfth century. The course looks at the stages of Scandinavia's transition from paganism to Christianity through a wide range of sources and across a wide range of times and places, from Iceland and the Atlantic colonies in the west across to Sweden and the Baltic settlements in the east. The course builds on the historical background acquired by students who have taken Part I, paper 2 'Scandinavian history in the Viking Age', but that paper is not necessarily a prerequisite for this course (provided that students are willing to put in a good deal of extra work).

We begin by looking at the nature of pre-Christian belief in Scandinavia, focussing on issues such as the nature, roles, and functions of pagan cults, any evidence for pre-Christian theology or eschatological beliefs, and the question of continuity of site or custom into the Christian period. The early missions led by Anskar are of great significance, as also is the role of the church at Hamburg-Bremen in sponsoring later missionary work. A wide range of primary sources is examined in detail, but emphasis is also placed on analogies from abroad to help flesh out the sketchy picture of the conversion-process in Scandinavia itself. Further attention is devoted to the mechanisms of conversion, the various motives of the individuals who supported or opposed this process, and finally the ways in which the Church was established across Scandinavia, looking at issues such as the foundation of bishoprics and parishes.