



The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings (Oxford Illustrated Histories)

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With settlements stretching across a vast expanse--from Newfoundland in North America to Kiev in the heart of the Ukraine--and with legends of their exploits extending even farther, the Vikings were the most far-flung and feared people of their time. Yet the archaeological and historical records are so scant that the true nature of Viking civilization remains shrouded in mystery. Who were these seafaring warriors from the North? Were they, as their southern enemies claimed, "a wrathful, foreign, purely pagan people" who swept in from the sea to plunder and slaughter? Or were they remarkably successful merchants and explorers forced into war out of geographic necessity?

In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*, twelve leading scholars draw on the latest research and archaeological evidence to provide the clearest picture yet of this fabled people. Painting a fascinating portrait of the influences that the "Northmen" had on foreign lands, the contributors trace Viking excursions to the British Islands, Russia, Iceland, Greenland, and the northern tip of Newfoundland, which the Vikings called "Vinland." We also meet the great Viking kings: from King Godfred, King of the Danes, who led campaigns against Charlemagne in Saxony; to King Harald Bluetooth, the first of the Christian rulers, who helped unify Scandinavia and introduced a modern infrastructure of bridges and roads; to King Knut, who invaded England and proved a dangerous adversary to William the Conqueror. The volume also looks at the day-to-day social life of the Vikings, describing for instance their almost religious reverence for boats and boat-building, a deep bond with the sea that is still visible in the etymology to English words for "anchor," "boat," "rudder," "ship," and "fishing," all of which can be traced back to Old Norse roots. But perhaps most important, the book goes a long way towards answering the age-old question of who these people were. Were they, as their contemporaries asserted, just a motley assortment of savage pagans, to be reviled by the Church and society? The contributors show that the Vikings did indeed control the Northern Seas with the viciousness of pirates and that they pillaged Christian towns with relentless ferocity. And yet we also discover that they were shrewd traders whose dealings in fur in Russia and walrus tusks in Iceland were the envy of Europe.

Attractively illustrated with 24 color plates, 16 maps, and over a hundred black-and-white pictures, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* is a superb account of this rugged maritime culture. From sagas to shipbuilding, from funeral rites to the fur trade, this superb volume is an indispensable guide to the Viking world.

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