

Who We Are #21 — Vikings and Northmen



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Mighty Saga of the Northmen

Ninth and 10th Centuries Were Era of Viking Triumphs in Western Europe

Purest White Heritage Survives in North Atlantic

Land Scarcity, Spirit of Heroism Impelled Vikings

*Militant Christianity, Lack of Northern Solidarity Bring End to Viking Age of
Freedom, Challenge, and Glory Ends*

JUST AS IT WAS the Northmen who, by imposing order on Europe's eastern frontier in the second half of the first millennium, stiffened that frontier and made Russia a White racial bulwark against the non-White hordes of Asia, it was also the

Northmen who, in the same era, pushed Europe's western frontier westward across the great, unknown Ocean Sea, opening up new lands for settlement by succeeding generations of our race.

Called many names — Danes, Geats, Norsemen, Rus, Swedes, Varangers — they are best known to us by the name which is also used to characterize both the age in which they flourished and the way of life of many of them: Vikings. Like two great waves of raiders, conquerors, and colonizers before them, the Goths and the Anglo-Saxons, they came from the Nordic heartland: southern Sweden and Norway, the Danish peninsula, the adjoining portion of northern Germany, and the nearby North Sea and Baltic islands.

Essence of Whiteness

They are of special interest to us in our endeavor to understand who we are, not so much because most of us have Viking forebears (although a great many people with immediate roots in Ireland, Scotland, England, and northwestern France, as well as in Scandinavia, do), but because they give us a clearer, more detailed picture of that pure essence of Indo-European Whiteness — which is the common heritage of us all, whether our recent ancestors were Germans, Celts, Balts, or Slavs — than we can obtain from a study of any other European people.

German in language like the Goths and the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings retained other aspects of Germanic culture which those earlier emigrants from the Nordic heartland had already lost by the dawn of the Viking Age. In particular, the Vikings held to their Indo-European religion and worldview longer than any of the other Germanic peoples. They also remained harder, fiercer in battle, and more venturesome than those who had been softened by the more civilized living to the south.

Enthusiastic Piracy

The Vikings lived by farming, stockbreeding, craftsmanship, and trade like the others, but they ventured farther afield in their trading enterprise, and they customarily and enthusiastically combined it with piracy, whence came their name. (The Old Norse noun *viking* meant piracy or a pirate raid, and a *vikingr* was a person who engaged in viking.)

Because they had extensive dealings with their literate cousins elsewhere in Europe and influenced the lives of the latter very strongly over a period of more than 300 years, we have a great deal of firsthand information about the Vikings. Whereas our knowledge of the lifestyles and mores of most of the other pre-Christian peoples of Europe comes primarily from the archaeologists — and, in some cases, from a handful of surviving Classical writings — we have hundreds of extant firsthand accounts of the Vikings, dating from as late as the 11th century.

Furthermore, we have the Vikings' own words. Their sagas, an enormously rich treasury of history and legend, law and religion, custom and technique, passed from the oral to the written stage relatively quickly — in the case of some of the historical sagas, within a few years — and therefore provide a generally more reliable source of information than the early histories of many other preliterate peoples.

Best and Worst in Our Race

The Vikings not only serve as an especially useful epitome of Whiteness at a time when our survival demands a renewal of the best of our old values and strengths, but they also provide a clear reminder of the danger inherent in one of our most lethal weaknesses: excessive individualism and lack of racial solidarity. A study of the Vikings acquaints us with both the best and the worst (or, in this age, the least affordable) of the characteristics of our race.

We have already examined, in the 15th installment of this series, the origins and the basic racial components of the proto-Germans, from whom the Vikings descended. The Vikings themselves recognized at least two of these racial components: one a tall, fair, light-eyed, long-headed race (Nordic); and the other a shorter, darker, round-headed race, perhaps with a Mongoloid admixture.

Jarls, Karls, and Thralls

A tenth-century Viking narrative poem, *Rigsthula* (*Song of Rig*), provides a fanciful account of the origins of the Scandinavian population. In it a traveler named *Rig* (i.e., “king”) is given lodging at three dwellings. At each he manages to impregnate the woman of the house before he leaves, thereby fathering three sons.

The first woman is old and wrinkled, and she dwells in a hovel. The son she bears for Rig is dark, stooped, and ugly. He is named *Thrall*, and from him is descended the race of serfs and slaves, the hewers of wood and the carriers of water.

The second woman is younger, better looking, better housed, and more industrious. Her son by Rig is a sturdy, light-eyed boy, and is given the name *Karl*. From Karl is descended the race of free peasants and craftsmen.

The third woman is young, tall, blond, and lovely, and the house in which she lives is large and magnificent. She bears Rig a son who is strong and straight of limb, white of skin, fair of hair, light of eyes, and quick of mind. He is named *Jarl* (*Earl*), and he quickly learns the magic of the runes and the mastery of weapons. He hunts, rides, fights, and fears no man. From him is descended the race of kings and lords of the earth.

Racial Memory

Rig himself is identified with the Norse god *Heimdall*, the whitest of all the gods and the father of all mankind. *Rigsthula* reminds us of the ancient Aryan religious

work, the *Rigveda*, which, more than 20 centuries earlier, also gave a fanciful account of the origins of the races. It is clear that Rig's descendants via Thrall represent the dark, round-headed element in the Scandinavian population, and that this element was at some time in the past held in a servile status by a largely Nordic ruling class.

Scandinavian mythology may also reflect racial memories of early contacts between Nordic invaders and Cro-Magnon natives, in the numerous references to "frost giants."

In any event, by the dawn of the Viking Age a general mixing had taken place. Thralls may still have been darker, on the average, than the free farmers or the nobility, but one could find Nordic slaves, largely the consequence of the Viking policy of enslaving prisoners of war, and one could also find darker elements among the wealthy and powerful, as evidenced by the names of such leaders as *Halfdan the Black* (ninth-century king of a Viking realm in southern Norway). By far the dominant racial element among the Vikings, however, was Nordic.

Lapps and Finns

To the north of the Northmen, in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, were the Lapps, a very primitive race which lived a nomadic life and gained its sustenance primarily from the reindeer of the forest and tundra. The sixth-century historians Jordanes and Procopius describe the Lapps as being culturally little above the beasts on which they preyed.

Both racially and linguistically the Lapps were closely related to the Finno-Ugric tribes to the east. They were short, predominantly dark (although today some Lapps are blond, apparently having absorbed Nordic genes), broad-nosed, and extremely round-headed. They were at least partly, and perhaps wholly, responsible for the dark element among the Vikings, although there was little mixing between Vikings and Lapps during the Viking Age because of their entirely different lifestyles. The mixing must have taken place during the prehistoric period, perhaps shortly after the proto-Germans arrived in Scandinavia and before they had driven the ancestors of the Lapps further north.

Contrasting Spirits

As is often the case in racial crossings, however, instead of producing a stable hybrid race the mixing of the two types resulted in the repeated and unpredictable re-emergence of the darker, minority strain among the Nordic majority. Nor were complexion, stature, and head shape the only persistent differences between the two types: the sagas tell us over and over of the temperamental and spiritual differences, with the Nordic being open-minded, level-headed, imaginative, objective, and, above all, venturesome; and the other being conservative, subjective, suspicious, and prone to emotional excesses.

The Viking spirit was a Nordic spirit, but it was a Nordic spirit tempered and honed by the very special environment in which the Northmen lived. The coastal region of southwestern Norway, containing the Rogaland, Hordaland, and Sogn districts, provides an example which is perhaps extreme, but nevertheless useful in understanding the influence of this environment. A rocky, inhospitable coast is broken up by numerous, often precipitous fjords. Patches of land suitable for farming and grazing tend to be rather small, and they are separated by mountainous terrain which becomes impassable during large portions of the year. There is relatively little room for inland expansion beyond the heads of the fjords.

No Viking Democrats

The men who inhabited this region were necessarily self-reliant, tenacious, energetic, and resourceful. No anemic democrats these: the terrain was not suited to the placid, ant-heap mentality of lesser races to the south; it bred men with strong wills and stronger egos, a natural warrior aristocracy. Furthermore, the terrain naturally directed their attention and their energy outward, toward the lands which could be reached by the sea which played such an important role in the lives of these fjord-dwellers. Whether their need was for more land to accommodate an expanding population, for gold or women to be plundered from less war-like peoples, or simply for an outlet for their restless, questing natures, the fjords and the sea, together with their superb, almost instinctive seamanship, provided the means.

It should not be surprising, then, that the first Vikings of the Viking Age came from southwestern Norway, and that this region continued to send forth Vikings as late as the latter half of the 11th century, when the other Viking lands had largely put their predatory ways behind them.

Cultural Unity

The isolation by terrain and climate of many Viking communities did not prevent the Vikings from having a remarkable unity of culture, language, and spirit but it certainly did not encourage political unity. Viking individualism seemed to be inimical to a sense of racial solidarity. While more subjective races to the south were often drawn together by the perceived need for mutual support in the face of a hostile world, Vikings were much more inclined to face the world as individuals. Their loyalty and sense of community seldom extended beyond the fighting band to which they belonged — or, at most, to that limited region of Norway or Denmark or whatever which they considered “home” — and they would as gladly — or almost as gladly — hew down the Vikings of a rival band as a monastery full of trembling priests in some southern land. Within the band, however, the Viking ethos demanded a solidarity as uncompromising as that of the other Germanic peoples of their time.

Advent of the Dragon Ship

Warriors from Scandinavia and northwestern Germany had been raiding Britain and the coasts of Gaul and Spain since Roman times, but historians generally date the beginning of the Viking Age at the middle of the eighth century, with the development of the Viking longship or dragon ship: the long, strong, flexible, shallow-draft vessel, propelled by both sail and oars, with high prow fore and aft, which was ideally suited to its task of carrying anywhere from 20 to 100 armed men (and often their horses as well) swiftly across the North Sea, up rivers and inlets to unsuspecting communities which were often far inland, and then making a fast getaway with booty and captives, leaving slower pursuing craft in its wake.

The dragon ships made their first appearance in the historical record in 787, with a raid on England's south coast. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports:

In this year (King) Beorhtric took to wife Eadburh, daughter of King Offa. And in his days came for the first time three ships of Norwegians from Hordaland, and then the king's reeve rode thither and tried to make them go to the royal manor, for he did not know who or what they were, and with that they killed him. These were the first ships of the Danes to come to England.

Conquest of the Danelaw

Through the 790's and the first years of the ninth century, Vikings struck the English coast more and more often. And, like the Angles and Saxons before them, many of them came not just to raid but to seize land and stay. By 870 Vikings had conquered most of England north of Wessex and had established a number of settlements in Ireland as well, where they founded Dublin, Limerick, Wexford, and many other communities.

The Saxon king, Alfred of Wessex (Alfred the Great), who ruled from 871-899, halted the further Viking conquest of England and even pushed the invaders back in a few places, but by then the Viking presence in England was permanent and irreversible. East-central and most of northern England became known as "the Danelaw," where Viking customs prevailed over those of the Saxons. (The Vikings of the Danelaw were by no means all Danes; to the settled and civilized English, however, all Vikings, regardless of their country of origin, looked alike, and the names of the various Scandinavian countries were often applied to them indiscriminately.)

An Endless Flood

On the Continent too the ninth century was a period of growing pressure from the north. A Frankish chronicler writes:

The number of ships increases; the endless flood of Vikings never ceases to grow bigger, everywhere Christ's people are the victims of massacre, burning, and plunder. The Vikings

overrun all that lies before them, and none can withstand them. They seize Bordeaux, Perigueux, Limoges, Angouleme, Toulouse; Angers, Tours, and Orleans are made deserts. Ships past counting voyage up the Seine.... Rouen is laid waste, looted, and burned. Paris, Beauvais, Meaux are taken; Melun's stronghold is razed to the ground; Chartres occupied; Evreux and Bayeux looted; and every town invested.

Ralph the Walker

Just as in England and Ireland, however, Vikings who at first came only to seize women and gold later came to seize land as well. This process reached its climax early in the 10th century when a Viking band wrested away from the West Franks a substantial piece of territory in northwestern France, south of the lower Seine. In 911 the Frankish king Charles the Simple, the great-great-grandson of Charlemagne, gave legal sanction to this conquest by recognizing the Viking leader Ganga-Hrolf as his vassal and confirming the latter in the ownership of the land which his band had already seized.

Ganga-Hrolf (i.e., Hrolf the Ganger or Ralph the Walker, so named because he was too large to be carried by any horse), called Rollo by the French, in turn submitted to baptism and settled down to the task of enlarging and consolidating his domain. He was the first Duke of Normandy, as his land came to be known, after its Nor(se)man conquerors.

Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky

Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries the Vikings also conquered and settled other lands. In the last installment we looked at their exploits in the east, among the Slavs. To the west they colonized the Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, and Faroe Islands.

In 861 a Swedish Viking made the first circumnavigation of Iceland, and other Vikings immediately followed to establish settlements on the island. A century later an Icelandic Viking, Eric the Red, led the first band of settlers to the uninhabited island of Greenland, which had been sighted a few years earlier by another Viking seaman.

In the year 986 the Viking Bjarni Herjulfsson, sailing from Norway to Greenland, missed his intended destination and instead found himself off the coast of a previously unknown land: North America. Bjarni did not land, but he carried the news of his sighting back to Greenland.

Leif, the son of Eric the Red, bought Bjarni's ship from him and set out to see the new land for himself. He established a small settlement at a place he called Vinland, on the island of Newfoundland, but he only spent one winter there.

First White American

A few years later another Greenland Viking, Thorfinn Karlsefni, made a determined effort to establish a permanent Viking presence in America. He fitted out three longships and recruited 160 men and women to accompany him on the westward voyage. They built a community in North America which they called Straumfjord, and in 1004 Thorfinn's wife Gudrid bore him a son, Snorri, there: the first native White American.

Unrelenting attacks by Indians — Skraelings to the Vikings — made life very difficult for Thorfinn's American colonists, however, and after three years they abandoned their settlement and returned to Greenland.

Had the Vikings' weapons been technologically superior to the bows and arrows of the Skraelings — as Columbus' firearms were — then White history in America would have begun 500 years sooner than it did. As it was, the individual superiority of the Viking warriors in battle could not make up for the enormous numerical advantage enjoyed by the hordes of Red men who opposed them.

In 1962 archaeologists excavated the ruins of what is believed to have been Straumfjord, near the present Newfoundland village of L'Anse aux Meadows.

Victims of White Slavers

In Greenland too, with its utterly inhospitable environment, the Viking presence did not last. Initially there were no hostile Skraelings in Greenland — in fact, the first Eskimos did not arrive on the island until nearly 400 years after the Vikings — but the total lack of trees, metal ores, and other natural resources, together with the scarcity of farmland, kept the White population down to a maximum of 3,000 persons, scattered among some 300 farms.

Ironically, it seems to have been piracy which was the undoing of the Greenland Vikings. Although they were Christianized shortly after the year 1,000 and gave up their warlike ways and the raiding of other lands for gold and women, there was still a strong demand for blond slave girls in Moorish Spain and North Africa and in the Turkish lands to the southeast. The demand was met by pirates recruited in England and Germany by Jewish middlemen, who began raiding the island settlements of the North Atlantic in the 14th century.

Iceland — which suffered its last attack by White-slaving pirates as late as the 19th century — and the other Viking islands survived the raids, but Greenland did not.

Purest Cultural Heritage

Today these North Atlantic islands, of which Iceland with its quarter-million inhabitants is the most significant, preserve the Viking cultural heritage in its purest form. The modern Icelandic and Faroese languages are nearly identical to the Old Norse spoken by the Vikings, while English and the other Germanic languages have

undergone great changes during the last 1,000 years. In folkways as well, many Viking traits have been preserved in the islands, especially in Iceland and the Faroes. There has even been a return to the Viking religion by some Icelanders in recent years.

Racially, Iceland does not present quite as pure a picture as one might wish, for the ninth-century Viking settlers were not all jarls and karls; they brought their thralls along with them as well. Despite this lapse, their descendants today are biologically closer to the original Viking stock than the population of any other country. This racial quality is reflected not only in the tallest average stature in the White world, but in the highest literacy rate (100 per cent) as well.

Not only do all Icelanders read and write, but a far higher proportion of them are authors than is true for any other country. And, despite her tiny population, which is able to support only a single university, Iceland is able to boast a larger per capita Nobel Laureate quota than any other nation on earth.

No Minorities

Iceland is outstanding in another respect as well: alone among the White nations of the world it does not bear the curse of non-White minorities; it has no Blacks, no Jews, no Vietnamese, no Mexicans. Iceland has not been invaded for the last 1,000 years, except during the Second World War, when the country was occupied by American troops. The bulk of the foreigners withdrew after the war, and Icelanders insisted that future U.S. troops sent to man the air base which the United States was allowed to maintain on the island include no non-Whites.

The greatest debt that the White race owes to Icelanders is for their preservation of the Norse literary heritage: the Viking sagas. While church officials in other European countries were rounding up and burning all the pre-Christian books they could lay their hands on during the Middle Ages, Icelandic scholars were busy writing down the sagas which still existed only in oral form and transcribing, annotating, and expanding those which had been put into writing earlier.

Even where we must use extreme caution in drawing historical data from the sagas, they give us a clear and unambiguous picture of the Viking ethos and the Viking world-view, of Viking attitudes, beliefs, feelings and temperament.

Shaping of the Viking Age

Fortunately, when it is Norse history we want we have the records of the Vikings' literate Frankish and English cousins to supplement and clarify the semi-legendary material of the sagas. From these records we can also gain a good deal of insight into some of the external forces and circumstances which raised the curtain on the Viking Age in the eighth century and then lowered it in the 11th.

One of the forces was certainly the tide of Christendom which was rising over Europe from the south during the eighth century. The Franks had become Christianized during the sixth century, after their king, Chlodwig (Clovis), accepted baptism, but the Saxons, the immediate neighbors of the Northmen, rejected the alien religion from the Levant and held to their ancestral ways, as did the Northmen themselves, of course.

Genocidal Evangelism

Beginning in 772, a year after he became sole king of the Franks upon the death of his brother Carloman, Karl, later known to the French as Charlemagne, son of Pepin the Short and grandson of Karl the Hammer, waged a 32-year campaign of genocidal evangelism against the Saxons. The campaign began with Karl's destruction of the *Irmingsul*, or World Pillar, the Saxon equivalent of the Norse World Ash, *Yggdrasil*, located in the Saxons' most sacred grove, at Eresburg (on the site of the present Marburg), and it became bloodier, crueller, and more intolerant as it wore on.

In 774, at Quierzy, Karl issued a proclamation that he would kill every Saxon who refused to accept the sweet yoke of Jesus. Henceforth a contingent of Christian priests accompanied the Frankish army on its expeditions against the Saxons, and in every Saxon village those who refused to be baptized by the priests were slaughtered on the spot.

Butchery at Verden

Karl's savagery reached a peak in the tenth year of the evangelism: in 782, at Verden on the Aller, with the blessing of the Church, he had 4,500 Saxon nobles beheaded. Twelve years later, in 794, he introduced a policy under which every third Saxon was uprooted from his land and forced to resettle among Franks or other Christianized tribes.

Fairly early in this campaign, in 777, one of the most prominent of the Saxon chieftains, Widukind, took shelter among the Danes and appealed to their king, Sigfred, for assistance against the Franks. Although the Danes were wary of becoming involved in a full-scale war against the formidable Karl, they and the other Northern peoples were put on their guard, and they became increasingly indignant over the Frankish suppression of the Saxons' religion.

Karl's brutal campaign against the Saxons undoubtedly helped raise a certain consciousness in the North of the spiritual and cultural differences which separated Scandinavia from those lands which had fallen under the yoke of the Christian Church.

Special Treatment

One manifestation of this consciousness was the erection of the Danevirke, an extensive system of defensive earthworks across the neck of the Danish peninsula, begun in 808.

Another was the special treatment which the Vikings customarily meted out to the Christian monks and priests who fell into their hands. The monasteries and churches, with their troves of treasure mulcted from superstitious citizens seeking to buy their way into heaven, were tempting targets to the raiders from the North anyway, but the element of revenge must have made them even more tempting, and it was for good reason that throughout the ninth century the daily prayer of every pious cleric was: “*A furore Normannorum libera nos, Domine!*” (“From the fury of the Northmen deliver us, Lord!”)

The internal forces leading to the eruption of the Vikings from their Northern fjords were even stronger than the external ones. Among the former was a very high birthrate specifically among the most active and aggressive of the Northmen, the result of their customary practice of polygyny.

The Most for the Best

According to the 11th-century German ecclesiastical historian, Adam of Bremen, every Swede of more than average substance kept two or three wives, while the nobility had no limit to the number of women they allowed themselves. For example, Harald Fairhair, the Norwegian warrior who unified Norway in the ninth century and became its first king, had as many as 40 sons by some accounts, at least nine of whom are known to history; and Harald’s son Erik Bloodaxe had at least eight sons who grew to manhood.

In the capitalistic South such a practice may have meant only that the cleverest and crookedest paper-shufflers — i.e., the richest men — would have more progeny, on the average, than honest workingmen, but in the hard living North, where every man’s mettle was tested almost daily by his environment and by his fellows, it was marvelously eugenic: the strong, the able, and the aggressive had proportionately more children than they would have had in a monogamous society.

Genetic Effects of Monks

Another interesting eugenic contrast between North and South is provided by the Christian practice of clerical celibacy. Although there were many periods during the Middle Ages in which violations were commonplace, as early as the fourth century the Church began insisting on total celibacy for the higher clergy. With the growing incidence of monasticism after the sixth century, a greatly increased portion of the population of Christian Europe was subjected to the rule of celibacy.

In the Middle Ages the clerical life was not, as is often the case today, simply a refuge for those who could succeed at nothing else; it was usually the only route to scholarship — and often the only route to literacy as well — and it attracted many

able and intelligent men, whose genes were then lost to their race. For a thousand years, until the Reformation, there was a selective draining away of Christian Europe's intellectual vitality.

A Mighty Hive

The high birthrate among the most active and energetic elements of the population in the Northern countries led to land-hunger and the drive for external conquests. In the words of 17th-century English statesman and writer Sir William Temple:

Each of these countries was like a mighty hive, which, by the vigor of propagation and health of climate, growing too full of people, threw out some new swarm at certain periods of time that took wing and sought out some new abode, expelling or subduing the old inhabitants and seating themselves in their rooms.

This state of affairs also held long before the Viking Age, of course.

In addition to the generalized effects of a high birthrate, two other consequences of polygyny which bore on the rise of viking as a way of life were the large numbers of second, third, fourth, and later sons in the families of Norse landholders — sons left without inheritance and without land, unless they could wrest it away from someone else — and a shortage of women.

The most popular way to solve the latter problem was to go on a raid and carry off women from Ireland, England, or France, although there was also a heavy traffic in Slav slave girls from the Rus realms. The *Hrafnsmal* tells of life in Harald Fairhair's court:

Glorious is their way of life, those warriors who play chess in Harald's court. They are made rich with money and fine swords, with metal of Hunaland and girls from the east.

Victory at Hafrsfjord

The political consolidation which began taking place in Scandinavia in the ninth century served as an especially strong impetus to Viking colonizers. As mentioned earlier, the Vikings were extremely individualistic, extremely resentful of any encroachments on their freedom of action. After Harald Fairhair won a great sea victory at Hafrsfjord over the Viking chieftains of western Norway in 872, many of them left Norway with their households and their followers and settled in Iceland and the smaller islands of the North Atlantic rather than submit to Harald's rule.

A century later, political consolidation having been achieved, Scandinavian monarchs began to realize the policy advantages in bringing their people into the same religious camp as their neighbors to the south. The first to take the step was

Denmark's Harald Bluetooth, son of King Gorm the Old. In 965, 15 years after Gorm's death, Harald allowed himself to be baptized, and then he undertook the forcible conversion of the rest of the Danes: a move which did not sit well with many and led to further emigration and turmoil in the North. It also led eventually to Harald's deposition and banishment.

Jomsvikings

It is from this period that the legend of the Jomsvikings arose. The legend tells of dispossessed Viking émigrés establishing a fortress in Slavic Wendland (Pomerania), at the mouth of the Oder. Called Jomsborg, this fortress in time became the home of an ideal military brotherhood.

Ruled on Spartan principles, an all-male community of warriors between the ages of 18 and 50 contracted their services to the highest bidder. Many are the Viking heroes who gained glory fighting in the company of the Jomsvikings, but no trace of their mighty fortress remains today.

Three decades after Harald Bluetooth's attempt to Christianize the Danes, a similar effort was made in Norway. Olaf Tryggvason, great-grandson of Harald Fairhair, accepted baptism in 994, as part of a settlement worked out with the English whom Olaf's Vikings had been raiding unmercifully. (Another part of the deal was the payment by the English of 16,000 pounds of silver to the Vikings.)

Prior to 994 Olaf was one of the most active and colorful Vikings of the 10th century. His career foreshadowed in several respects that of his most illustrious successor, the 11th-century Norwegian king Harald Sigurdsson. Among the many adventures attributed to Olaf is a raiding expedition on the English east coast in 991, culminating in a victorious battle against the Anglo-Saxons at Maldon (about 30 miles northeast of London).

Battle of Maldon

The entry for 991 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records:

In this year Olaf came with 93 ships to Folkestone and ravaged the neighborhood, went on to Sandwich and thence to Ipswich, and overran the whole area, and so to Maldon. And there Alderman Brythnoth and his fyrd came to meet him, and fought with him. And they killed the alderman and the battlefield was theirs....

One of the Anglo-Saxon survivors of the battle against Olaf versified his recollections soon afterward. The portion of his narrative, *The Battle of Maldon*, which has survived provides us with one of the clearest contemporary expressions of the medieval Germanic warrior's ethos, shared by Viking and Anglo-Saxon alike,

in which the highest manly virtue is fidelity unto death. From the last stanzas of the poem, after Brythnoth has fallen and his men see the coming defeat, we read:

Then Bryhtwold spoke, shook ash appear, raised shield-board. In the bravest words this hoar companion handed on the charge:

“Courage shall grow keener, clearer the will, the heart fiercer, as our force faileth. Here our lord lies leveled in the dust, the man all marred. He shall mourn to the end who thinks to wend off from this war-play now. Though I am white with winters I will not away, for I think to lodge me alongside my dear one, lay me down by my lord’s right hand....”

The Viking Way to Immortality

The heroic ethos, the core of the Viking attitude toward life, of which the high value placed on fidelity is but one aspect, is probably stated best in the oft-repeated lines from *Grettirssaga*:

*Cattle die, and kinsmen die,
And so one dies oneself.
One thing I know that never dies:
The fame of a dead man’s deeds.*

To the Viking immortality was not gained by being baptized, going to Mass every Sunday, and being openhanded when the collection plate came around; the only way he knew to overcome the annihilation which awaits every man in the grave was to live his life in such a way that other men would remember him and esteem his memory. The individual consciousness must die, but the consciousness of the community, the tribe, and the race lives on; and, to the extent that the individual has entered that collective consciousness, he becomes immortal.

The Value of Action

This attitude toward life and death necessarily makes the individual take the long view in planning his actions. Honorable behavior becomes much more than a Dale Carnegie gimmick for getting along, admiration elicited from peers much more than a boost for one’s ego.

Action and achievement become necessary, for an uneventful life which goes unremarked ends at the grave; only through fame can a man go further — and the greater the fame, the more lasting the impact a man makes on the world, the further he can go.

The Last Viking

The coming of Christianity to the Viking world eventually meant the end of that world, but it did not change the Viking ethos immediately, as is evidenced by the life of a man who was certainly one of the most remarkable of all the Vikings, and the last of the truly great ones: Harald Sigurdsson, who, after he became king of Norway, was also known as Harald Hardraada (Hard Ruler) and Harald the Ruthless.

His deeds are the subject of one of the most fascinating of the Viking sagas (*King Harald's Saga*), which we would be inclined to dismiss as an unusually imaginative work of heroic fiction, were it not solidly confirmed by the historical record. A few paragraphs on his life here will suffice to explain why Harald's contemporary, the aforementioned Adam of Bremen, called him "the Thunderbolt of the North."

Warrior-Poet

Nearly everything about Harald Sigurdsson was exceptional; for one thing, he grew to a height of seven feet, a blond giant of a man even by Viking standards. For another, he was not only the most ferocious of warriors, but he was a man of learning and culture, who composed poetry on the battlefield during lulls in the fighting.

With his strong right arm he carved a bloody path through a dozen countries, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, and won himself a Rus princess, a fortune, and a throne. And he started young: in the year 1030, at the age of 15, he was severely wounded fighting alongside his half-brother, King Olaf the Stout, against the jarls of Norway.

Christian Terror

Olaf, like Denmark's Harald Bluetooth before him, was deposed and chased out of his country after attempting to impose Christianity on his countrymen against their will. For two years Olaf had waged a campaign of Christian terror, burning the farms of all Norwegians who would not bow to the Church of Rome. Many of the stubborn traditionalists who fell into his hands he maimed or blinded.

Finally his subjects revolted, and he was forced to flee to Russia. When he returned with an army, including his half-brother Harald, in 1030 he was defeated and killed, and the wounded, 15-year-old Harald became a fugitive.

Olaf, despised by the Norwegians, was immediately made a saint by the Church, and today he is the patron saint of Norwegian Christians.

After Olaf's defeat Harald made his way to Kiev, where his kinsman, King Yaroslav the Wise, ruled. There he fell in love with one of Yaroslav's daughters, but the king would not have the penniless refugee as a son-in-law.

Varangian Guard

Harald fought for three years in the service of King Yaroslav, wreaking havoc on Yaroslav's Slav neighbors and winning great prestige for himself. Then with a following of some 500 Rus Vikings he sailed to Constantinople, where he offered his services to the Byzantine emperor. Soon he was the commander of the emperor's Varangian Guard, an elite military unit composed entirely of Vikings, the Schutzstaffel of its day.

For a decade Harald fought for the emperor throughout the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world. He also fought for himself, however, for the booty which he sent back to Kiev from his various campaigns was enormous.

Harald's adventures in the South are too numerous to recount here, but a single episode suggests a bit of the flavor: on one occasion while in Constantinople he made the mistake of seducing the wrong man's wife. As a consequence he was arrested and tossed into the arena, unarmed, with a hungry lion. He fought the lion barehanded and won.

“Hard Ruler”

Harald sailed back to Kiev in 1044 and claimed his princess. In 1047 he claimed the Norwegian throne.

During his turbulent, 19-year reign, Harald continued Olaf's campaign of forcing the Norwegians to accept Christianity, earning for himself the cognomen “Hardraada.” It was strictly policy, not superstition, which was behind this campaign, however; Harald never hesitated to gut a priest or burn a church when crossed. His aim was to break the power of the independent jarls and make his own authority absolute, and he succeeded.

Harald made his last mark on history in 1066. Upon the death of the Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor, in January of that year, Harald claimed the throne of England for himself — as did also William the Bastard, duke of Normandy. Accompanied by Earl Tostig, the disaffected brother of Edward's English successor, Harold Godwinson, Harald, in his flagship Dragon sailed with a Viking fleet to England in September to assert his claim.

Death at Stamford Bridge

After Harald's army had seized the town of York, King Harold Godwinson offered his brother Tostig half the kingdom in return for peace. But to Harald Sigurdsson he gave only his famous offer of “seven feet of English ground — or as much more as he is taller than other men.” With that, the English and the Vikings prepared for battle on September 25.

As the Viking army arranged itself around Harald's banner Land-Waster, near Stamford Bridge, Harald thought of his Rus princess back in Norway, and he

composed his last verse:

*She told me once to carry
My head always high in battle
Where swords seek to shatter
The skulls of doomed warriors.*

End of an Age

Harald, of course, lost his life that day at Stamford Bridge, but the damage he did to Harold Godwinson's army undoubtedly was a major cause of the English defeat by the Normans at Senlac Hill a few days later. And with Harald Sigurdsson died the Viking Age.

The Vikings' fighting spirit had been sapped by Christianity, but an even larger factor in their demise was their inability to keep in check their quarrels among themselves, combine their forces against outsiders, and thus match the growing power of kings in more unified lands than their own. Excessive individualism took its final toll.

Ever since the close of the Viking Age men in whose veins Viking blood still runs have dreamed of the freedom and the challenge and the glory of those bygone days. Perhaps nowhere is this better expressed than in a stanza from an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Wanderer*:

*What has become of the steed?
What has become of the warrior?
What has become of the seats of banquet?
Where are the joys of the hall?
Oh, for the bright cup!
Oh, for the mail-clad warrior!
Oh, for the glory of the prince!
How that time has passed away
And grown dark under the cover of night,
As if it had never been.*

Semites and Vikings: No Love Lost

One would expect to find a spiritual difference between a race bred a hundred generations in the marketplace, where survival depended primarily on a glib tongue and an eye for a bargain, and a race shaped by the killing winters of the North, accustomed to combat and hardship. This difference — the difference between the Jewish spirit and the White spirit — is manifested in the world around us in a thousand ways.

Perhaps nowhere has the contrast between the natural, healthy, adventurous spirit of our race and the spirit of the Jew been more sharply drawn, however, than in a couple of recent issues of the student newspaper published on the Los Angeles campus of California State College. In the first issue was printed a poem by Dr. Peter Peel, who teaches history there. The second issue contained a response to the poem from a Jew at the same college.

Here is the poem, which was titled “*Goetterdaemmerung*”:

*When Spring lightly touches
With hand green and golden
The mountains and fjords, Then shouts the sea rover,
“A-viking! A-viking!”*

*The hammers are busy
On weapon and harness.
Then flashes the broad blade
In every sea hamlet.
The dragon ships, thirsty
For bounding blue water,
Leap down to the seashore.*

*And Olaf of Norway
And Erik of Gotland
And Thorwald the Mighty,
Whose grandsire was Wotan,
Stand fast on the poop deck
With golden hair streaming,
With spear brightly glinting,
With eye fierce and blazing,
Sail out on the swan’s bath —
The grey widow-maker —
For England or Iceland,
Byzantium, Vinland,
Far land or ancient
And ripe for the plunder,
The burning of roof-trees,
The seizing of women,
The tooting of treasure,
The flowing of red blood,
And wine for the victors.*

*Ah, whence fled those great days,
The days of our fathers,*

*The days of the valiant,
Of gods and of heroes,
Or fair maids and foul dwarfs,
And lindworms and dragons,
Of Beowulf, Dietrich,
Strong Harald, grim Hagen,
Wolfhart and Siegfried,
The greathearts, the mighty?*

*Yea loathsome today is
The seed of their strong loins —
The petty, the small, the clod and
the crawler.*

*The music has gone from the souls of our people.
The thunder has vanished away with Valhalla.
Now meekness and weakness
And womanly virtues
Have shackled, degraded
And shamefully softened
The sons of our fathers,
The sons of the mighty.*

*And now have we traded
The lightning of storm gods,
The arms of Valkyries,
The halls of Valhalla,
The kiss of wish maidens,
For wings and a nightshirt,
A harp and a halo,
A psalmbook and psalter?
Oh, no, my Lord Bishop!*

*Hark, grey Galilean,
The Wolf Age is coming,
The great fimbul winter,
When all sick things perish.*

A few days after this poem appeared, the following letter headed “Bloodthirsty Sickness,” showed up on the editorial page of the student newspaper:

The poem about the Vikings in the Nov. 25 issue by Peter H. Peel had real soul and beauty — the soul and the beauty of the bloodthirsty. Let it speak for itself:

*“With golden hair streaming,
With spear brightly glinting,
With eye fierce and blazing ...
And ripe for the plunder,
The burning of roof-trees,
The seizing of women,
The looting of treasure,
The flowing of red blood,
And wine for the victors.”*

Murder! rape! loot, plunder, blood and wine — the wanton destruction of the productive by bloodthirsty savages.

And what do these vicious predator-warriors denounce?

*“Now meekness and weakness
And womanly virtues
Have shackled, degraded
And shamefully softened
The sons of our fathers,
The sons of the mighty.”*

Yes, how could one be more degraded in the eyes of these savages than to become like those inferior creatures called women.

Beware you women, blacks, Latins and other lesser creatures. The Blonde Beast “With golden hair streaming” and warm, red blood dripping from his mighty sword shall rise again. Beware you weak and sick of all races for

“The Wolf Age is coming ... When all sick things perish.”

Meanwhile, I wait for the day when this bloodthirsty sickness of the Blonde Beast shall perish forever from the face of the earth.

—R.A. Klein