

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons[®]

Historical **2nd Edition** Reference

Vikings

Campaign Sourcebook

by David "Zeb" Cook

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Distributed to the book trade in the United States by Random House Inc. and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd.

Distributed to the toy and hobby trade by regional distributors. Distributed to the book trade in the United Kingdom by Random Century Group.

Distributed to the book, game and hobby trade in the United Kingdom by TSR Ltd.

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ISBN 1-56076-128-8

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A Few Wrong Thoughts

Most of us are raised believing a lurid, though quite colorful, picture of the fierce Viking. This is primarily thanks to Wagner, comics, Hollywood, and Bullfinch's Mythology. While rooted somewhere in a grain of truth, our popular image of Vikings has become little more than a cartoon—literally so through such strips as *Hägar the Horrible*, *Prince Valiant*, and *Bugs Bunny* forays into opera. Before going any further, it is best to put to rest some of the misconceptions:

Vikings loot and pillage. No one can deny the Vikings did loot and pillage, but not every Norseman was a ravening warrior who lived to kill and destroy. The people of Scandinavia included kings, earls, farmers, shipwrights, poets, smiths, priests, merchants, and artists. In fact, the word "Viking" only applies to those Northmen who made a habit of raiding—"to go a-viking" was an expression that described their voyages. For this book, Viking refers to all the people of Scandinavia.

Vikings are bloodthirsty pagans. At the start of the great Viking age (around A.D. 800), there is no question the Vikings were a pagan people. Before the end of their time, however, the Viking nations had converted to Christianity. The pagan ways were repressed or, in some cases, added to the Christian tradition. Bloodthirsty, well . . .

Vikings are ignorant savages. While those victims of the Viking raids saw them as savage, the Vikings developed an impressive culture. Sagas and poems still remind us of their achievements. They were among the first to practice fledgling democracy. Their ships were built with an eye for beauty and were technologically superior to anything on the seas at the time. They founded cities, ruled in foreign lands and undertook dangerous sea voyages few others would dare.

Vikings wear horned helmets. Sorry, they never did.

About This Book

This sourcebook is more than just a setting for Vikings in a fantasy campaign; it is a passport into the real world of the Vikings. With the material here, DMs and players have a unique opportunity to try a new role-playing experience—historical fantasy adventuring.

Historical fantasy adventuring is just that—an opportunity for campaigns and adventurers to role-play in the real worlds and lands of history. In this sourcebook, players are carried back to tenth century Scandinavia. There players can assume roles as Norsemen of various stripes—fighting men, explorers, and *skalds*, or bards. With the *Vikings* sourcebook, players can adventure in a "real" fantasy world—the world as the Vikings themselves believed it.

In addition to warriors and *skalds*, players can become rune-casters, berserkers, or one of the ominous troll-born. Their encounters will range beyond history to include clever giants, magical dwarves, beautiful valkyries, murderous berserkers, foul sea ogresses, treacherous sorcerers, and mythic dragons. They can sail to lands beyond the real world—Mirkwood, that separates the world of men from the gods; Jotunheim, home of the giants; or even to the lands of the gods themselves. Wondrous treasures might be theirs for the taking.

Finally, the *Vikings* sourcebook can be used to recreate a Viking setting in other campaign worlds. Details on placing and adapting Viking culture and beliefs to the FORGOTTEN REALMS®, GREYHAWK®, and DRAGONLANCE® campaigns is given. Instructions on adapting the *Vikings* sourcebook to the DM's personal campaign is also provided.



How to Get Started

For those unfamiliar with Viking history (approximately from A.D. 800 to A.D. 1100), a brief overview of the time period, describing major personalities, events, and trends is given in the first chapter, *A Mini-Course in Viking History*. Players already familiar with the time period can skip this section if they want. This section is not intended to create experts in the Viking age, only provide a general background of the period.

Before proceeding further, the DM should decide what type of campaign he wishes to play. The material in this book is written with a historical fantasy campaign in mind — a campaign set in Scandinavia but filled with magic, giants, ogres and trolls. If the DM intends to use the setting in his own campaign world, he should make notes or changes as needed when he reads.

After choosing his campaign, the DM can read through the remaining material. The chapters can be read in whatever order the DM desires. Player character information and most game rules are in the first part of the book. Facts and details about the Viking way of life and their world, both real and legendary, form the second section of the book. Some players may want to learn about the character classes immediately; others may want first to gain more background on the Viking age. Players are encouraged to read the sections that most interest them in whatever order they desire. Finally, there are several short adventures which can be used as the base for a campaign world.

The appendices contain tables and lists useful to players and DMs. There is also a pull-out map to be used by the players, showing a stylized (and in places incorrect) Viking view of the world.

Before beginning a Viking campaign, the DM should read through all the material presented here at least once. When he is ready to begin a campaign, he should use this book as a

resource, just as he would any other rulebook or gazetteer. The maps provided in the book provide the campaign base and larger area maps of the true world. The DM can expand on these as the campaign grows.

The Viking Campaign Sourcebook and AD&D® 2nd Edition Rules

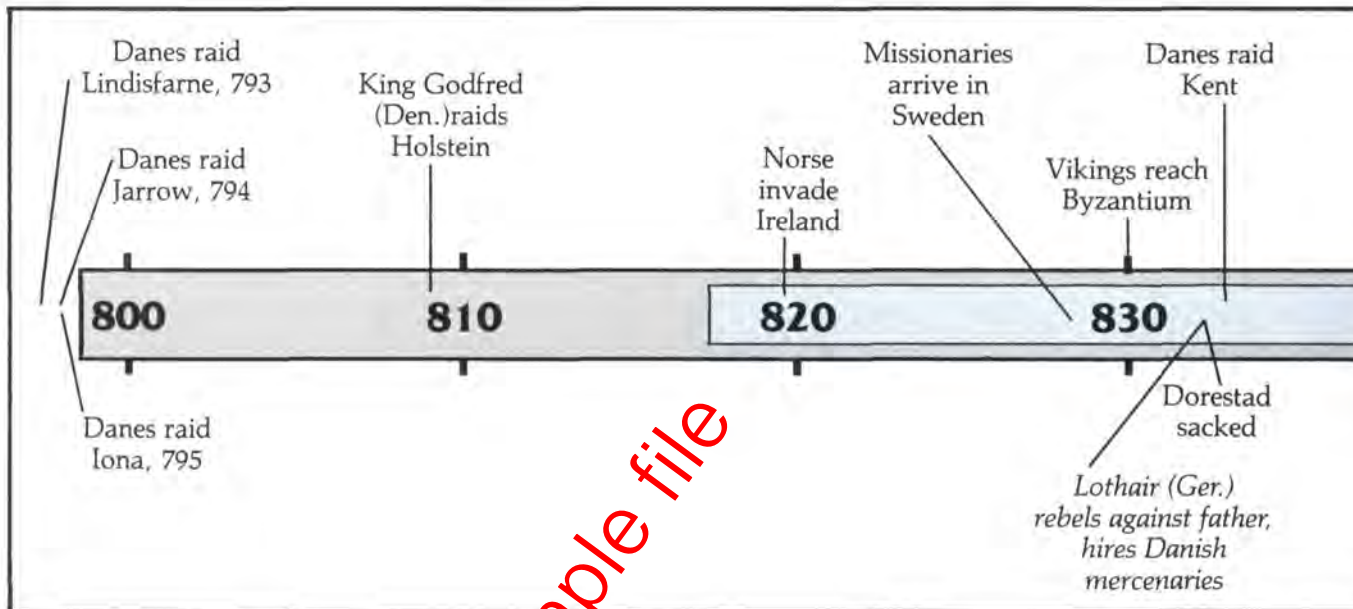
This sourcebook is meant to be used with the AD&D® 2nd Edition rules. However, the AD&D rules reflect the “realities” of a fantasy world, not the real world. Therefore, changes, exceptions, and prohibitions exist in these rules that do not apply to a normal fantasy campaign. (For example, priests are not allowed as player characters in this sourcebook.) When playing in a Viking setting, the rule changes given here should be used. These changes ensure the style and mood of the campaign will match the Nordic setting. If there are contradictions, the rules found in this sourcebook take precedence.

Not all campaigns will use the historical setting given here. In this case, certain rules presented in this sourcebook may not apply or may need modification.





A Mini-Course of Viking History



789: *And in (King Beorhtric's) days there came for the first time three ships of Northmen, from Horthaland: and the reeve rode thither and tried to compel them to go to the royal manor, for he did not know what they were, and they slew him. These were the first ships of the Danes to come to England.*

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles

So came, in blood and violence, the first notice of a new force to Northern Europe—the Vikings. During the next three centuries, the sailors from Scandinavia would make their mark raiding, conquering, exploring, and settling from as far east as Constantinople to as far west as Vinland.

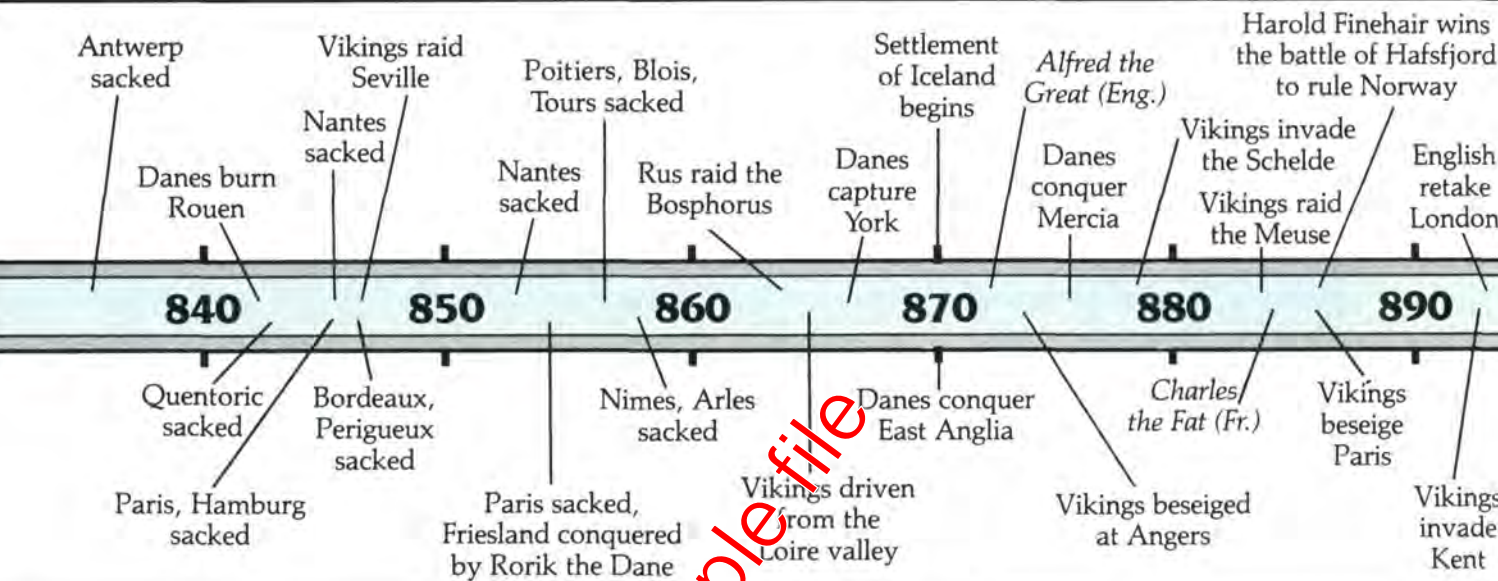
The Beginning

This chapter provides a brief overview of the Viking period. It is a game overview, and does not take the place of historical refer-

ences! Players and DMs who want to learn more about the Vikings and their times are encouraged to pick up some of the books listed at the end of this chapter.

Although the Norsemen lived in the rocky and cold lands of Scandinavia for millennia, it was not until the early 800s that they made their presence known to the world. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, raiders in long wooden ships descended upon the coasts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France. Their first notoriety came from a series of raids, primarily targeting the rich monasteries at Lindisfarne, Iona, and Jarrow. Soon they were raiding cities all along the coast and well inland.

The raiders came from several northern lands—Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Though they called themselves Vikings, they were referred to by the rest of the world as Nordmanni (Frankish), Dene, Dani (both Anglo-Saxon), Ascommani (Germanic), Finn-gaill, Dubh-gaill, Lochlannach (all Irish), al-



Sample file

Madjus (Arabic), Rus (Slavic), Rhos (Greek), and Ruotsi (Finnish).

The world the Vikings found on their early raids was a divided and weak one. Few lands had rulers strong enough to organize defenses against the sudden Viking raids. Most found it easier to suffer through these attacks or pay off the Vikings in hopes they would not return. Such payments seldom worked; they had quite the opposite effect, encouraging the Vikings to come back for more "protection money."

England was not yet a unified country. The land was divided between the kings of Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and others. Struggling against each other for control of all England, these feudal lords were ill-prepared to face a threat from overseas.

Ireland was even more disorganized than its neighbor. The island, once the center for Christian learning in the north, was divided between a score of petty kings. These kings

were too weak individually and too distrustful of each other to form an effective defense against the Viking invaders.

Scotland was no better, perhaps even worse. Divided between a host of chieftains, Scotland's best defense was its own poverty. With little worth taking, the Vikings headed their ships toward more profitable shores.

Charlemagne's Frankish Empire (modern France and Germany) at first profited from the emperor's strong and vigorous rule. Coastal defenses were built and, under the control of a strong government, were ready to drive away any attackers. With Charlemagne's death in 814, the Frankish Empire gradually began to decline. Split between warring sons, the empire turned on itself, leaving the coasts vulnerable to attack. By 835 the Danes were raiding cities that only decades before had driven back their ferocious attacks.

To the east, there was no organized rule.