Course description: This seminar explores the late eighth to twelfth centuries, from our earliest evidence of Scandinavian raiders, known to the modern world as Vikings, sailing across the seas to Ireland, Scotland and England, to the establishment and fall of dynasties at home and abroad, conversion and cultural assimilation. This period allows students to investigate different aspects of medieval history ranging from political, military and economic events and processes to the myriad of social and cultural changes that were to have a long-term impact on Ireland and the North Sea world. We will work with historical and archaeological sources to understand some of the challenges and scholarly debates that surround the long-term interaction between the Irish, their neighbors and the Scandinavians. Although the Irish experience of the Viking Age will be at the heart of this course, the entire north Atlantic region will be examined both to add context to our consideration of this period and to appreciate different facets of this interrelated and varied area during this time. Text-based classes and discussions focusing on particular sources, individuals and events will give students a grounding in critical thinking and how to approach historical texts and offer the chance to gain an in-depth understanding of this exciting period of change, conflict, engagement and opportunity.
Learning Objectives:
- critical thinking
- source criticism
- professional writing skills
- examining and interpreting fragmentary evidence
- using evidence to construct arguments and understand larger contexts
- research skills
- public speaking skills
- ability to use academic referencing systems
- understanding of the medieval North Atlantic
- understanding of ‘foreign’ thought-worlds and cultures of the past
- learning how to understand different sources, i.e. texts, objects, archaeological sites, etc.

Assignments and Grading Scheme:
Assessment will be based on the following:

Critical responses to reading/primary source critiques: 15% (your three best will be used to produce the final grade but you must turn in all responses to qualify for this) — due weeks 2–6 and week 8, 1–2 pages long
Midterm essay: 20% — due at the end of week 7, 4–5 pages long
Oral presentation and responses to presentations: 20% — each student will present twice: once on a primary source of choice (not necessarily medieval) and once on a class reading; students not presenting will write down questions and comments on their peers’ presentations based on the readings; both your presentation and responses make up the combined mark
Annotated bibliography for final research paper: 10% — due at the end of week 11
Final research paper: 25% — due at the end of week 14, 8–10 pages long
Participation in class: 10%

During weeks 2–6 and week 8 you are expected to write short blog-style papers in response to the reading assigned for that week. These should be emailed to me by 5.00 pm the day before each class in which that reading will be discussed. In some weeks, particularly in the first 4 weeks of the course, prompts will be given or particular passages from primary sources will be highlighted for you to analyze in these critical responses. The three best pieces that you produce over the course of these weeks will be selected and used in calculating your final grade, however, in order to qualify for this you must turn in every response. If any responses are not received, then all your responses combined will make up your final mark.

Each student will give two 5–10-minute oral presentations; one on the challenges that primary sources present to scholars of the field, using an example of a primary source, and one on one of the class readings. All students listening to the presentations will be expected to fill out a form provided in which they write down one question and one observation for the speaker based on their own reading of the sources prior to the class. You will also be expected to ask questions in class and contribute to discussion after each presentation. Each presenter will be handed back all of their comments from their peers in subsequent weeks for their own benefit.
A midterm essay on any topic from the first 6 weeks will be due at the end of week 7 and specific essay questions will be handed out in the third week of the course. You will also need to complete a final research paper, which can be on any topic discussed throughout the course provided it is not the same one that you wrote about in your midterm essay. You are encouraged to choose your own topics for this, which must be approved by me by week 10 at the latest. An annotated bibliography consisting of the sources you plan to use for this paper and a few sentences regarding the relevance of each to your topic should be submitted in week 11 and will be returned to you in week 12 with comments. I am happy to read drafts of both your midterm and final papers but these must be submitted to me one full week before the final deadline.

All complete assignments must be emailed to me by the due date as a word document or PDF or submitted online on NYU Classes and must include your full name, the date and the assignment title. Late submission can have a negative impact on your grade for that assignment, so please do submit material on time. If for any reason an extension is required, you must make a request to me via email in advance of the due date for the assignment and this will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Class participation is based on your attendance and your ability to make meaningful contributions based on your reading throughout each class. This should be supported by both your written critical responses and how you use the reading to engage with other students’ presentations and comments.

**Attendance:**
Attendance at all class sessions is compulsory. Your mark for participation in class will be affected adversely if your absence is not excused. Any requests for excused absence should be submitted by email to me as far in advance as possible. An excuse that is submitted after the class takes place will only be accepted in exceptional cases. Even if your absence is excused (and indeed, if it is not), you still are expected to complete all the reading for the missed class and all other assignments required.

**Reading:**
It is not required to buy any books for this course as all primary sources, chapters and articles will be available on NYU Classes for you to read. However, you may find it easier to have your own copy of some of the books that we will use frequently. These are listed below and will also be available in the library.

- B.E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987)
- R. Hall, *Viking Age Archaeology in Britain and Ireland*, Shire Archaeology 60 (Princes Risborough, 1990)
- D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972)
  
  
  
  * A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, eds., *The Viking Age: A Reader, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed.* (Toronto, 2014)
  

Bibliographies will also be handed out each week with additional relevant material that will help you for your papers. If you are interested in any of the sources on these bibliographies and they are not available in the library, please email me and I will try to send you the relevant article, etc.

For each class, I will give you primary sources written during the period under study as well as secondary sources that concern them. You must read these BEFORE the start of each class and use them for your critical responses. For the primary medieval sources, I will in the majority of cases supply the entire text but will give you specific page numbers concerning what we will focus on for that week’s class. Where manageable, it is fantastic if you can read as much of the entire text as possible, particularly when it is a narrative prose tale or poem, as it gives you context and helps you to develop a better feel for the sources. And much of the literature related to the Vikings is highly entertaining so you don’t want to miss out!

All sources will be provided in English translation. Some titles remain in the original if that has become the customary way of referring to the source, but I will always explain this title and provide English translations on the handouts for each class.

**Office hours:** I will be available on **Tuesday 2.00–3.00** and **Wednesday 1.30–2.30** in **Glucksman Ireland House, Room TBA** for students to come see me with questions, concerns and additional help. I am also happy to arrange ad hoc meetings upon request. Please send me an email if you would like to arrange such a meeting.

**Disability Disclosure Statement:** Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
**Week 1, September 4th: Introduction: The World of the Vikings and the Celts**

i) Introduction to the course and discussion of the objectives
ii) Overview of the geography and languages of the medieval Celtic and Norse worlds and their neighbors
iii) Language, culture, geography, religion: What makes up a people of the past and can we really ever understand them? Group discussion and class exercise using excerpts from medieval annals
iv) Introduction to medieval manuscripts: how do we interpret our physical sources and the texts they contain? In-class group project in which students create an edition and translation of a note

**Week 2, September 11th: Worlds on a Collision Path: Ireland, Scandinavia and their Neighbors in the Early Middle Ages**

**Primary source:**

- ‘The Voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan’ in *The Viking Age: A Reader*, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 2–5

**Secondary sources:**

- C. Downham, *Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 61–91


**Week 3, September 18th: The First Encounter: The Vikings Appear in the Sources**

**Primary sources:**

- Excerpts from the Irish Annals (7 pages)


**Secondary sources:**


**Week 4, September 24th:** The Escalation of the Viking Incursion: 837–73: Raiders, Traders and Beyond

**Primary sources:**

- Excerpts from the Irish Annals (8 pages)

- ‘The Life of Saint Findan’ in The Viking Age: A Reader, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 195–8

**Secondary sources:**


**Week 5, October 2nd:** The Tenth Century: Warfare, Identity and Culture

**Primary sources:**

- Photos and descriptions of hoards and coins will be uploaded to the Resources folder in NYU Classes

- Excerpts from the Irish annals and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (10 pages)

**Secondary sources:**


Week 6, October 9th: The Vikings as Medieval Global Adventurers?

Primary source:

- Ibn Fadlan’s account of the Rus: Mission to the Volga, ed. and tr. J. Montgomery, (New York, 2017), pp. 191–257 (facing page translation: you only need to read the English, not the Arabic)

Secondary sources:


Week 7, October 16th: The Beginnings of the Sea Kings: Vikings, Politics and the Irish and North Seas

Primary sources:

- Excerpt from Historia Gruffud ap Kenan (7 pages)

- Excerpts from Orkneyinga saga (10 pages)

Secondary sources:


- D. Griffiths, ‘Irish Sea Identities and Interconnections during the Viking Age’ in The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and After the Battle of Clontarf, eds., H. B. Clarke and R. Johnson, (Dublin, 2015), pp. 470–84


MIDTERM ESSAY DUE
Week 8, October 23rd: Vikings, Saints and Pagans

Primary sources:

- Manx Crosses (photos and translation of inscriptions will be available in the Resources folder in NYU Classes)

- ‘The Norse Creation Myth’ in *The Viking Age: A Reader*, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), 40–49

- ‘The Conversion of the Icelanders’ in *The Viking Age: A Reader*, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 402–4


Secondary sources:


Week 9, October 30th: The Battle of Clontarf: A Viking-Irish Showdown or Medieval Propaganda at its Finest?

Primary sources:

- Excerpt from *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, ed. J. H. Todd (London, 1867), available on archive.org: http://archive.org/details/cogadhgaedhelreg00toddl, pp. 151–69, 197–211 (every other page is in the original Irish, which you are not expected to read)

- Excerpt from *Njáls Saga* (9 pages)
Secondary sources:


Week 10, November 6th: The Archaeology of the Viking Age

Primary sources:

- Photos and short descriptions of objects from Woodstown, Dublin, Skuldelev, Scar, the Isle of Man and York will be uploaded to the Resources file on NYU Classes for this week
- Excerpts from the sagas describing Viking swords and ships in The Viking Age: A Reader, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 128–30, 152–6

Secondary sources:


Week 11, November 13th: Viking Towns, Hinterlands and Kingdoms
Primary sources:


- Excerpt from *Knýtlinga saga* in *The Viking Age: A Reader*, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 435–48

Secondary sources:


**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

**Week 12, November 20th: The Vikings in Ireland on the Eve of the Norman Invasion**

Primary source:

- Excerpts from ‘The Song of Dermot and the Earl’ (24 pages)

Secondary sources:


**NO CLASS NOVEMBER 28th: THANKSGIVING RECESS**
Week 13, December 4th: Vikings and Celts Remembered: Later Medieval and Modern Sources on the Viking Age

Primary sources:

- Excerpt from Orkneyinga saga in The Viking Age: A Reader, eds. A. A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 14, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 2014), pp. 471–5

- students are encouraged to bring in examples of modern interpretations of the Vikings

Secondary sources:


- I will also provide a selection of short recent news articles on the misappropriation of Vikings, Celts and the Middle Ages by various groups for discussion

Week 14, December 11th: Vikings and Celts: Conclusions, Thoughts, Problems, Overview and Review

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE