

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Religious Conversion and Political Legitimacy in Viking-Age Denmark

BENJAMIN S. WILSON  
SPRING 2022

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in History, Medieval Studies, and Political Science  
with honors in History

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Benjamin Hudson  
Professor of History and Medieval Studies  
Thesis Supervisor

Cathleen Cahill  
Associate Professor of History  
Honors Advisor

\* Electronic approvals are on file.

## ABSTRACT

Old Norse paganism provided Scandinavians with a religion, societal structure, and set of values. Beginning with the legendary kings of Denmark, Scandinavian rulers used religious belief for their own agenda. The process of conversion to Christianity was remembered in sagas and histories describing the Viking Age, the period of Scandinavian expansion from the ninth to twelfth centuries. As the Vikings converted to Christianity, the process was recorded in several sagas and histories. Conversion to Christianity took more than a century, depending on the region and élites, but echoes of non-Christian belief continued for centuries in both historical and literary texts.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Early Scandinavian Paganism .....	4
Legendary and semi-legendary kings of Denmark .....	6
Chapter 3 Conversion to Christianity .....	11
Documentation of the conversion .....	14
The Sagas .....	16
The Histories .....	21
Conversion under the House of Gorm .....	25
Alternate Sources .....	30
Chapter 4 Legal conversion .....	34
England .....	34
Iceland.....	38
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	47

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 Stora Hammars I Stone.....	9
Figure 2 Jelling Stone .....	24
Figure 3 Jelling Stone (side 2) .....	27
Figure 4 Jelling Stone (side 3) .....	27
Figure 5 Ledberg Stone.....	44

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The Viking Age began with the 786/789 attack in Southern England and the 793 raid on Lindisfarne and ended with the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 and then with the death of Magnus “Barefoot” in Ireland in 1103. Viking history was recorded by Scandinavians themselves in the form of runestones, in sagas that detailed the legendary exploits of famous Vikings, by historians both in and outside of the clergy, foreign travelers, and in legal documents. Vikings gained fame first as fierce raiders, and later as skilled merchants whose innovations in ship building allowed them to reach remote locations with relative ease and speed. Almost as famous as the Vikings themselves were their gods and the stories they created about them, in a religion known by many names such as the Old Norse religion, Nordic paganism, or *Forn Siðr*, meaning “the Old Way.” Viking actions revolved around their faith in their gods, which were rather wrathful in comparison to other religions at the time. The values and morals favored by the Vikings and their Norse gods were recorded in a variety of sources like the *Poetic Edda*, *Prose Edda*, and the various Viking sagas. Straddling the line between fact and fiction are the sagas concerning the Vikings, usually by unknown authors. Some sagas have survived to the current day, while some are known to us only because they are mentioned in other sagas or historical documents. The *Saga of Ragnar’s Sons* contains both fact and fiction. The accuracy of this story of the life of the legendary king Ragnar Lothbrok and his sons, is debated. While they certainly may have been real people, the details are not necessarily true just because they appear in a saga. The saga also preserved elements of Old Norse paganism, such as the use of “blood

eagle” ritual sacrifice and the belief in *berserker*, which were powerful Viking warriors with supernatural strength and ties to the gods. The saga preserves the cultural values of the time, and also served the important function of legitimizing the rule of the kings of Denmark. The early tenth-century prince called Gorm the Old was supposedly the great grandson of Ragnar Lothbrok, making all of the House of Gorm worthy of inheritance of the right to rule through their birthright. Sagas were also used to retroactively prove legitimacy of rulers, such as the *Saga of Ragnar’s Sons* describing Ragnhild Sigurdsdottir as the granddaughter of Sigurd Snake-in-Eye (making her the great-granddaughter of Ragnar Lothbrok), and she was the mother of Harald Fairhair, the first king of Norway. Legitimacy proven through sagas would later be replaced by the church keeping records of family lines, showing the shift from pagan methods to Christian ones.

Another example is *Egil’s Saga*, which is a family saga from about 850 to 1000 AD. While Egil was a real person, the details of his life are entwined with myth, such as the fact that his family contained shapeshifters and sorcerers. The saga contains information on pre-Christian values and practices of the time and comparing the events of the saga to Christian-era Scandinavia yields information about how life and values changed after the conversion.

Some of the most important sources about Old Norse religion come from the *Poetic* and *Prose Eddas*. Both were written at the start of the medieval period by Christian writers who heard the stories from others, and therefore give a telling of how Christians perceived the religion rather than how it was believed by the Vikings. Some contemporary sources detailing the Vikings and their mythology come from Arabic and Christian accounts, legal texts, and rune stones. Archaeological evidence of the belief has been found as well, most commonly Thor’s hammer and other jewelry.

The great reverence in which the Vikings held their religion made their conversion to Christianity more impactful as it took place during the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The details of the conversion itself vary by country and ruler, with some being more successful than others. Areas such as Iceland experienced a much more peaceful conversion, while some places like England experienced a bloody and violent series of events before Christianity became the dominant Viking religion.

## Chapter 2

### Early Scandinavian Paganism

The Nordic gods were worshipped as early as the Iron Age, long before the formal beginning of the Viking Age, and the gods underwent changes in their prevalence over time. Gold jewelry depicting Tyr, Fenrir, and Baldr (all influential figures in the Ragnarök myth) appear during this time. Inspiration for the Nordic gods possibly came from the Mediterranean, seeing as many Nordic gods share similarities with the Roman gods.<sup>1</sup>

Tacitus, a Roman historian in the first century AD, commented on the similarities of a northern German (likely referring to what would become the nation of Denmark) god, comparing Tyr to Mars. Some inscriptions named Tyr as Mars Thincsus, or Mars of the Ping.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the god of war was noted as Tyr and not Thor or Odin, with Thor being compared to Jupiter. This could be evidence that the god of war changed over time, showing the shift in the political viewing of war as something brave and heroic, to war being a violent necessity used to get their way.

The Old Norse religion not only served as a system of faith, but also provided and supported the societal structure of the day. In broad terms, Viking society was divided into three classes: jarls, free men, and slaves. At the top were the élites or jarls, made up of chieftains, warlords, and the governing class. They had followings of warriors from their time in battle or raids, and often passed their wealth onto their children. The next class was the freemen (and

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Old Religion,” National Museum of Denmark, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/the-old-religion/>.

<sup>2</sup> “The Germany and the Agricola of Tacitus., by Tacitus,” accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7524/7524-h/7524-h.htm#linknoteref-64>.



women), and consisted largely of farmers, fighters, craftsmen, and merchants. Many warriors were of the freemen class as well, wanting to achieve more wealth or gain land that otherwise would be unavailable. They would utilize war and raiding as a form of upward mobility within the social strata. On the bottom of society were the slaves, often used for intensive and repetitive labor. The slave class perpetuated itself through slaves having children, taking slaves in battle, or from people going bankrupt and trading their freedom for food and shelter.<sup>3</sup>

A mythological origin for these classes is presented in *Rigspula*, attributed in its present form to the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century scholar Saemund Sigfusson.<sup>4</sup> This tale tells of the adventures of Rigr (also known as Heimdall). He first visited a couple called Ai and Edda, meaning great grandfather and great grandmother, who fed Rigr bread and broth, and, eventually had a child called Thræl. Thræl grew up to have shriveled skin, knotty and thick hands, a hideous countenance, but possessed great strength. He grew a family with his wife Thy, and their descendants became the social class of thralls, forced to live in slavery. Next Rigr went to a couple called Afi and Amma, meaning grandfather and grandmother; their child was named Karl. He is described as having red hair and the skills necessary to operate a farmstead. With his wife Snor they begat the social class of the freemen. Finally, Rigr went to the house of Fadir and Modir, meaning father and mother, where he was fed cakes, meats, and wine. Their child was called Jarl and had bright hair and fair skin. Jarl learned to make shields, bows, arrows, and how to use weapons. Rigr himself declared Jarl to be his own son and taught him to read runes. Jarl

---

<sup>3</sup> “The Viking Social Structure,” *Norse Mythology for Smart People* (blog), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://norse-mythology.org/viking-social-structure/>.

<sup>4</sup> K. Kris Hirst, “Viking Social Structure Class Systems and the Norse in Scandinavia and Beyond,” Old Norse, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://oldnorse.org/portfolio/viking-social-structure-class-systems-and-the-norse-in-scandinavia-and-beyond/>.

conquered lands and took Erna as his wife. Their descendants were warriors and leaders, making up the highest class of Viking society.<sup>5</sup>

The story clearly outlined the social classes by occupation and appearance, but it also gave a divine order to society. By describing the lower classes as appearing shriveled, knotty, and hideous, the society could justify their discrimination and disdain for those that appeared unattractive; conversely, they could justify their reverence for those who had bright hair and fair skin, which were desirable traits. The division of labor and society in a story that involved the powerful gods they worshipped reflects how the Western Scandinavian people were able to justify both their social divisions and societal emphasis on beauty. The lowest were unattractive and less skilled, leading to their enslavement as decided by the gods. The middle class had fairer skin and were farmers, which was an important and common profession for the Vikings. The highest class had fair hair and skin, could use weapons which were highly valued in Viking society, and were personally trained by the god Rig in how to lead and hunt. This close association of the gods with those in higher society showed the emphasis that was put on those who were seen as beautiful, warriors, and leaders.

### **Legendary and semi-legendary kings of Denmark**

Not only did the Vikings use religion as a way of legitimizing their social structure, but they also used it to legitimize their leaders. Before they were able to gain credibility through the Christian church with the divine right to rule, such as Christian kings gaining authority through the Pope, many non-Christian societies such as the Vikings used the stories of their gods as

---

<sup>5</sup> Lee Hollander, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, 2nd ed. (University of Texas Press, 1990).

evidence for their right to rule. A king's list written by Ari Þorgilsson recorded Óðinn, Njǫðr, and Freyr at the beginning of the line of kings, making the following kings descendants of the gods and continuing their divine right to rule.<sup>6</sup> of Several king's lists from the time originate with the first king being the god Odin, making the kings descendants of the gods and therefore having the divine right to rule.<sup>7</sup>

Ragnar Lothbrok offered a useful example of how myth and biography blended to create authority while having a background theme of violence, while exposing the English to the themes and values of the Vikings and the Old Norse Religion. Ragnar was a legendary figure in Viking history, and some accounts of his exploits may be based on more than one real person.<sup>8</sup> His name came from a story in which he wore shaggy pants to protect himself while he killed a giant snake that was protecting the woman who would become his wife. By embodying favorable traits such as cleverness, strength, and honors, Ragnar was able to cement his legendary status among the kings of the day. Stories also mention Ragnar invading England, as well as fathering several prominent Viking warlords. While these events may not have actually happened, Ragnar was still a powerful warlord and chieftain who died at the hands of the Northumbrian king Aella around the year 865. Ragnar left behind several sons, a few of which are Halfdan Ragnarsson, Ivar the Boneless, and Ubba; their actions are detailed in the *Tale of*

---

<sup>6</sup> Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók: The Book of the Icelanders; Kristni Saga: The Story of the Conversion*, trans. Siân Grønlie, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, v. 18 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2006). 31

<sup>7</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga Saga*, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> "The Real Ragnar Lothbrok," Historic UK, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Ragnar-Lothbrok/>.

*Ragnar's Sons*.<sup>9</sup> The exploits of Ragnar's sons served as both a record of early Viking incursions into England as well as a record of the values and cultural influence that the Vikings had in the British Isles, specifically using violence. One concept introduced in the *Tale of Ragnar's Sons* was the blood eagle, which impacted the English perception of the Vikings and their religion. Controversy exists over whether or not the Vikings actually practiced this action, but the legend of the action was enough to inspire fear regardless of its historical accuracy.<sup>10</sup> After King Aella of Northumbria killed Ragnar Lothbrok by stripping him and throwing him to a pit of snakes, he was captured by Ragnar's sons. As the *Tale of Ragnar's Sons* states, "They now had the eagle cut in Ella's back, then all his ribs severed from the backbone with a sword, so that his lungs were pulled out." This form of execution was a brutal way to take revenge on the man who killed their father, a form of punishing a king for his actions, and a political message. Executing a Christian king using a pagan execution method made a political and religious example of Aella.

---

<sup>9</sup> Tunstall, Peter. *The Tale of Ragnar's Sons*, n.d.

<sup>10</sup> Smithsonian Magazine and David M. Perry Gabriele Matthew, "Did the Vikings Actually Torture Victims With the Brutal 'Blood Eagle'?", *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/did-the-vikings-actually-torture-victims-with-the-brutal-blood-eagle-180979148/>.



**Figure 1 Stora Hammars I Stone**

The controversial blood eagle also appears on the Stora Hammars I stone (Figure 1), from Gotland, Sweden. The stone appears to show a victim having their back cut open, with large birds carved above and behind them. The method of killing carved in the stone appears similar to the killing described in the *Tale of Ragnar's Sons*, and could be a visual representation of this type of ritual killing. As with the death of King Aella, this method of killing was culturally significant enough to the Vikings to warrant multiple forms of its documentation, while inspiring fear and awe in those who heard about it.

The next legendary king of Denmark was Sigurd Snake-in-Eye, one of Ragnar's sons and so named because he had the image of a serpent in the pupil of his eye. Following the death of Ragnar and the vengeance on King Aella, the lands of Ragnar were divided among Ragnar's sons. Sigurd Snake-in-Eye became the king over Zealand, Skane, and Halland.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Magazine and Gabriele <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/did-the-vikings-actually-torture-victims-with-the-brutal-blood-eagle-180979148/>.

<sup>12</sup> Tunstall, Peter. *The Tale of Ragnar's Sons*, n.d.

Harthacnut was Sigurd Snake-in-Eye's son and was the last of the legendary kings of Denmark. His exploits were detailed by Adam of Bremen in the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. He may have been called by the name Hardegon of Northmannia. He is credited with conquering most of modern-day Denmark, defeating Sigtrygg Gnupasson of the House of Olaf (another semi-legendary king of Denmark ruling in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), bringing Jutland under his control.<sup>13</sup> Harthacnut was to be the father of Gorm the Old, who was the father of Harald Bluetooth. The shift from the legendary kings of Denmark into the rule of the House of Gorm (beginning in the early of the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>) brought with it a time of religious conversion.

---

<sup>13</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans, with introduction and notes by Francis J. Tschan, *Records of Civilization Sources and Studies*, liii (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 282.

<sup>14</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum, the History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher (Oxford Medieval Texts, n.d.). 671-673

## Chapter 3

### Conversion to Christianity

The actual conversion of the Vikings and Scandinavia was a long and arduous process. Different countries and peoples converted in different ways and on different timetables. While some leaders may have claimed personally to have converted to Christianity or the law assembly declared the country's conversion to Christianity (such as in Iceland), the actual shift in people's beliefs and policy was not instantaneous. Siân Grønlie differentiates "conversion," the moment and act in which the change to Christianity is made, from "Christianization" as the actual process in which institutional changes occur.<sup>15</sup> The process of conversion and Christianization was recorded in several different fashions, such as written history in the forms of sagas, histories, and in legal codes, and in tangible evidence such as with archaeological sites. The process of conversion also took place in several steps, such as the powerful Holy Roman Empire (a large kingdom that dominated central and southern Europe during the Middle Ages) converting parts of Scandinavia to Christianity, and then those same countries converting other places such as Denmark converting the Wends to Christianity during the Wendish Crusade.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most contested events involving the conversion of the Danes to Christianity is exactly how the process began. Some accounts record Harald Bluetooth converting following a military defeat at the hands of Otto I "the Great," the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>17</sup> While Henry I (Otto's father) ruled over a large stretch of land to the south of the Danes during the reign of

---

<sup>15</sup> Siân Grønlie, introduction to *Íslendingabók*. vii

<sup>16</sup> Carl Phelpstead, "Converting to Europe: Christian Themes in 'Knýtlinga Saga,'" *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 166-168.

<sup>17</sup> Haki Antonsson, "Traditions of Conversion in Medieval Scandinavia: A Synthesis," *Saga-Book* 34 (2010): 25-74. (at page 37).

Harald's father Gorm, the area was not united. When Otto came to power, the Holy Roman Empire (as it would later be known) began the process of uniting parts of Western, Central, and Southern Europe. This powerful political entity posed both a military and cultural threat to the other kingdoms around it, especially to Denmark in the north. This power allowed the Holy Roman Emperor to exert influence over other kingdoms throughout the Middle Ages, as Otto did with Harald. Other records say that a bishop named Poppo performed a miracle that caused the Danes to convert to Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Another bishop named Poppo (it could be the same or different Poppo) performed the same miracle at a later date,<sup>19</sup> and another Poppo was involved in Eric of Sweden's invasion of Denmark.<sup>20</sup> The difference between forced and willing conversion could prove a useful piece of propaganda depending on the side.

Oddr Snorrason, a 12<sup>th</sup> century monk who lived in Iceland, recorded that Otto I bullied Harald Bluetooth into accepting Christianity following his invasion of Denmark, and his reason for recording of this event was to highlight the help Otto received from Olaf Tryggvason.<sup>21</sup> The event was recorded differently by Theodoricus Monachus, who said that Otto II (not the first) placed "the gentle yoke of Christ" on Harald.<sup>22</sup> Antonsson wrote that the "tradition of enforced imperial baptism originates, of course, in German historiography," and that Adam of Bremen redacted a German invasion of Denmark to align it with the early years of Harald's reign and conversion.<sup>23</sup> Adam of Bremen kept Harald as the pivotal king in the conversion of the Danes who was "noted for his piety and bravery, had long before benignantly admitted Christianity to

---

<sup>18</sup> Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum, the History of the Danes*. X.11.3-5

<sup>19</sup> Haki Antonsson, "Traditions of Conversion," 67.

<sup>20</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Tschan 78.

<sup>21</sup> Haki Antonsson, "Traditions of Conversion," 55.

<sup>22</sup> Antonsson. "Traditions of Conversion," 55.

<sup>23</sup> Antonsson. "Traditions of Conversion," 55.



his kingdom and held it firm unto the end.”<sup>24</sup> Adam of Bremen also recorded that Harald’s life ended in martyrdom and that miracles occurred at his resting place in Roskilde. He noted that the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen were frustrated by the Danes not being as deferential to the Germans or Christianity itself as they would have liked.

One notable event was that Henry I, the Duke of Saxony and King of East Francia (what would become the Holy Roman Empire under his son Otto the Great) frightened King Gorm (Harald Bluetooth’s father) enough that he allowed Archbishop Unni of Hamburg to preach to the Danes, which caused Harald’s early exposure to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Adam of Bremen recorded various kings turning away from Christianity, but paints King Sven Estridsen of Denmark (the son of Estrid Svendsdottir, grandson of Sven Forkbeard by his mother) in a positive light, as the king who finally upheld both the Church and Christianity itself the correct way. A reason Antonsson gives for the uncertainty surrounding the Danish conversion to Christianity is that Adam of Bremen’s account of Harald being central to the conversion was never fully accepted into Danish historiography. Unlike Olaf of Norway, Harald’s baptism was not central to the conversion story, and due to this, the written tradition was less clear in Denmark, leading to confusion over the validity of the existing stories.<sup>26</sup> A physical memorial to Harald’s true role in the conversion is the Jelling Stone with its record of Harald’s claim of converting the Danes. While his real role may have varied from what is claimed, the Jelling Stone served as Harald’s

---

<sup>24</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Tschan 282.

<sup>25</sup> Antonsson, “Traditions of Conversion in Medieval Scandinavia: A Synthesis.” 56

<sup>26</sup> Antonsson. “Traditions of Conversion,” 56-7

way of taking responsibility for the conversion, which could have advanced his relationships with other nations as the political climate shifted in favor of Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

### **Documentation of the conversion**

Sagas bridged fact and fantasy. Many of them contained verifiable history and served as a preservation of tradition in the Old Norse world as they corroborate details with each other, such as *Knytlinga Saga* and *Heimskringla*. They recorded deeds, ancestries, and major historical events. Conversely, many sagas were rooted in fantasy and legendary figures, such as the *Saga of Ragnar's Sons*. Events that appear in both Norse/Icelandic sagas and in other histories, such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* and Adam of Bremen's *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, allow for the recognition of events that were important both inside and outside of Scandinavia. While the similarities of the sagas and histories are important for realizing information, when one source lacks a person or event that the others exclude, this can give insight into how the author may have seen the event and recorded it with bias.

Written histories and sagas have their own difficulties due to their age and content. Over time different versions of the same literature were produced, which could further distort the original version. One example of this is with *Knytlinga Saga*, which was not only written several hundred years after the events in its pages took place, but the current iteration is not the original.<sup>28</sup> The saga was written, copied and readied for publishing, but then the original was destroyed in a fire, leaving a copy of the copy as the only remaining one. Some accounts begin

---

<sup>27</sup> "The Jelling Stone," National Museum of Denmark, accessed March 25, 2022, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/the-monuments-at-jelling/the-jelling-stone/>.

<sup>28</sup> The version cited in this paper was translated into English for the first time by Herman Pálsson and Paul Edwards. The translation was presented by the City of Odense in 1986 for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of King Cnut the Holy, who is buried in Odense.

and end suddenly, implying at one time there were more chapters at the beginning or the end.

Some sagas and histories contain citations, which not only serve as a way of giving credibility, but also preserving knowledge of the works themselves. While some literature references works that exist today, some reference other works that no longer exist, meaning other vital records were lost to time.

Other formal sources preserve Danish history at this time, such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, Svend Aggesen's *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie*, and the *Chronicon Roskildense*, which is unique in that it covers many of the same events recorded by Grammaticus and Aggesen, but from the "losing" side. Having similar sources that cover opposite sides of the same story, especially ones that cover the "losing side" that is usually lost to history, offers the unique ability to check for inaccuracies that may have been ignored by one scholar, or details that may have been exaggerated due to a bias for or against a specific people. These various sources also offer a host of different accounts of the conversion to Christianity. Each of the histories offer different insight into the conversion, such as *Res Gestae Saxonicae* offering an outside perspective and the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* offering an ecclesiastical account.

A major difference between the sagas and histories is that the histories were written by mainland Europeans; Widukind of Corvey was a Saxon and wrote in Medieval Latin, Saxo Grammaticus was a Dane who wrote in Danish, and Adam of Bremen was German and wrote in Medieval Latin. The geographical difference in location for the writers could have led to different information about the events spreading, or the authors having a different set of biases when they were writing. For instance, Adam of Bremen and Widukind of Corvey were members of the clergy and may have been more inclined to paint the pagans in a poor light and focus on

the actions of the church. The different accounts also feature different details about both the way in which the Viking conversion took place, as well as the ways the Vikings affected the societies they interacted with.

While many sagas and written histories contain similar information, there are also some conflicting accounts that may include or omit people or entire events. Earl Hakon of Norway is a prominent example of how a figure and the events surrounding them can be represented in different ways or excluded altogether. *Knytlinga Saga*, *Heimskringla*, and *Jomsvikings Saga* all include accounts of Earl Hakon of Norway being present during Harald's conversion to Christianity. Following his conversion to Christianity, these accounts recorded that Hakon turned back to paganism. Hakon's betrayal of Christianity led to Harald Bluetooth invading Norway (to varying degrees of success depending on the source) to punish him. The *Res Gestae Saxonicae*, *Gesta Danorum*, and the *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* not only do not mention Hakon of Norway in their accounts of the conversion, but do not mention the subsequent attack on Norway either. Interestingly, the sources that mention Hakon of Norway are all sagas written by Icelanders, while the sources that do not mention him are all histories written in Denmark and Germany. This demonstrates how the perspective from which a source is written can dictate the information it contains. Iceland had close ties with Norway, which allowed for the sharing of and emphasis on certain information that historians in mainland Europe could have found less important.

### **The Sagas**

*Knytlinga saga*, written in Iceland in the 13th century, gives details about the kings of Denmark from the beginning with the ascension of Harald Bluetooth and ending with Knut Valdimarsson. The saga contains information on major historical events of the time and

information on the kings themselves; thus, it serves as a way to verify historical information from other sources.

During the reign of King Harald Gormsson, Otto “the Red” (Otto II) was the Holy Roman Emperor. Otto attacked Harald and attempted to convert the Danes to Christianity, but along with Earl Hakon of Norway, Harald resisted. After an initial loss, Otto routed Harald and Hakon and forced Harald to embrace Christianity, which Harald then spread to Denmark. After Harald’s conversion, Otto became the godfather to Harald’s son Sven Forkbeard, who was baptized as Otto-Sven.<sup>29</sup> Following Harald’s conversion, he encouraged Earl Hakon to convert as well. Harald provided him with priests and clergy for baptism, and Hakon swore an oath to have everyone in Norway baptized. On his return to Norway, Hakon deposited all of the holy men at Hals in Limfjorden, renounced his faith, and held pagan sacrifices. Following this, Harald invaded Norway and, except for five farms, laid waste to the entire coast from Lindesnes to Stad. Hakon’s breaking of his oath provided the perfect opportunity for Harald to invade Norway, allowing Harald to be justified in his invasion.

*Knytlinga Saga* splits conversion into two types: conversion of the Danes and the Danes converting others. In its present form (many versions and chapters have been lost since its original edition), *Knytlinga Saga* begins with the conversion of the Danes to Christianity and ends with the conversion of the Wends at the hands of the Danes, effectively framing Danish history between conversions, and within the conversion of Europe as a whole. Phelpstead asserts that in both cases, “the evangelistic impulse is inseparable from territorial ambition.”<sup>30</sup> As the

---

<sup>29</sup> Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986). 23

<sup>30</sup> Carl Phelpstead, “Converting to Europe: Christian Themes in ‘Knýtlinga Saga,’” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 165.

Holy Roman Emperor expanded his influence to Denmark, he forced Harald to become a Christian, who in turn forced it on his people. This top down change in religion caused the people to associate Christianity with the monarchy,<sup>31</sup> allowing for an easier conversion and a natural integration of religion into both politics and the societal structure of Denmark.

Harald's invasion of Norway could have been a way to exert religious authority over Hakon and the Norwegians, but it did not necessarily mean Harald truly converted to Christianity. Despite his apparent conversion and his opposition to the blood sacrifice performed by Hakon, Harald still used a shape-changing sorcerer to "travel" to Iceland to gain information about a possible invasion.<sup>32</sup> The Danish monarchy campaigned to convert their Wendish neighbors to Christianity, presenting it as a holy war in *Knytlinga Saga*. The crusade was likely partially motivated by worries over national security and desire for more land. This part of *Knytlinga Saga* includes explicit details of King Valdimar I the Great's (king of Denmark in the mid to late-12<sup>th</sup> century) piety such as him sitting reading psalms and being pleased to see the bishop. The saga specifically details the destruction of a pagan Wendish idol: wrapping a rope around its neck, chopping it up, and burning it. Following this, 1,300 people were baptized in one day. The politics of conversion were clear here, with the pagan idol being brutally destroyed by the Christian warriors. The trend of a powerful Christian nation converting their pagan neighbors was common in this time in northern Europe, and it likely was due to a similar use of religious politics to further a goal.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Phelpstead. 165

<sup>32</sup> Palsson and Edwards, *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*. 24-25

<sup>33</sup> Phelpstead, "Converting to Europe." 166-8

*Heimskringla* is an Old Norse kings' saga written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Snorri Sturluson and contains its own account of the conversion of Denmark to Christianity. In this account, Emperor Otta (Otto) was in Saxony and sent a message to Harald Bluetooth that said he must convert to Christianity and be baptized, with a threat of invasion with an army if he did not. Harald resisted and had fortifications made and contacted Earl Hakon of Norway to come to his aid.<sup>34</sup> Following a series of battles, Otta emerged victorious and negotiated with Harald his conversion to Christianity. Bishop Poppo taught Harald about the Christian faith and carried hot iron in his hands with no injury to convince Harald of the power of his religion. Following this, Harald "allowed himself to be baptized."<sup>35</sup> This phrasing of Harald "allowing himself" to be baptized stands in stark contrast to the next section, in which Harald contacts Hakon (who was fleeing), and "when they met the king forced the earl to allow himself to be baptized."<sup>36</sup>

The difference in Harald simply allowing himself to be baptized implies it was a choice and he was not directly forced to convert, unlike Hakon, who Harald forced into baptism. This difference in phrasing still gives Otta and Poppo the credit for the conversion of Harald (and therefore the Danes) to Christianity but manages to give Harald (at least some) sense of choice in the matter, while not allowing Hakon to choose at all. Immediately after this, Hakon rejects his new faith, so the recording of his conversion could have been altered because they knew the events that would follow.

The accounts in *Heimskringla* and *Knytlinga Saga* are strikingly similar, both including Harald and Hakon suffering a military defeat by Otto, but they differ in that *Heimskringla*

---

<sup>34</sup> Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/598/598-h/598-h.htm>. King Olaf Trygvason's Saga, section 24

<sup>35</sup> Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, King Olaf Trygvason's Saga, section 27

<sup>36</sup> Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, King Olaf Trygvason's Saga, section 27

includes information about Bishop Poppo's involvement with Harald's instruction and conversion. Of the sources examined, *Knytlinga Saga* is the only one that does not mention the bishop Poppo. He appears in the *Gesta Danorum*, *Res Gestae Saxonicae*, and *Heimskringla*, each time having a slightly different role and appearing in a different time. In all three, Poppo bears hot iron and emerges unscathed, although who he performs this miracle for and the reasons for performing it vary from source to source.

*Jomsviking Saga*, written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown Icelander, is about the Danish attack on Norway and Hakon in the 10th century, but documented that the Danes were unsuccessful in their invasion. It detailed the battle of Hjorungavagr, a semi-legendary naval conflict between a Danish force led by the Jomsvikings, and Hakon of Norway. While the exact date is unclear, it was fought between 974, when Hakon and Harald united against Otto, and the death of Hakon in 995. The location of the attack could have been Hladir, which was Hakon's center of power. The battle was likely caused to punish Hakon for rejecting Christianity and refusing to pay tribute to Denmark.<sup>37</sup> *Jomsviking Saga* records this event differently than *Knytlinga Saga*, because in this version the Danes are unsuccessful in their attack and Hakon maintained his independence, at least for a time.

Similarly to how the accounts of the conversion of the Danes to Christianity vary depending on the source, variation exists in the record of what came after. Much like in *Knytlinga Saga*, *Heimskringla* records that shortly after the baptism of Harald and Hakon, Hakon deposited all of the holy men on an island. Hakon then went on to plunder whatever land he saw and made a large blood sacrifice to the pagan gods.<sup>38</sup> Upon hearing this, Harald gathered an

---

<sup>37</sup> N. F. Blake, trans., *Saga of the Jomsvikings* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, n.d.). xiv

<sup>38</sup> Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, King Olaf Trygvason's Saga, section 28



army and invaded Norway, laying waste to the lands that Hakon controlled, leaving only five houses standing. After the Danish invasion, Hakon eventually resettled the area, but never again paid tribute to Denmark.<sup>39</sup>

### The Histories

Widukind's *Res Gestae Saxonicae* recorded that the Danes were Christians but continued to worship their pagan gods as well. They believed that while Christ was a god, there were other more powerful gods – such as Thor and Odin -- that showed themselves to humans more often. A cleric called Poppo claimed there was only one true God, and that the pagan gods people claimed to see were actually demons. King Harald Bluetooth asked Poppo to demonstrate his faith, and Poppo agreed. Harald ordered that a heavy piece of iron be heated and told Poppo to carry it to show his devotion to his faith. Poppo carried the glowing iron around as commanded and showed his unharmed hands to everyone. As a result, Harald became a Christian and decreed that only God was to be worshipped, and idols were to be rejected.<sup>40</sup>

In Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, after suffering a loss against the Swedes and being turned away by the English, Sven Forkbeard turned strongly to Christianity. He worshipped privately so he would not be turned on by those who joined him because of his impiety. Sven was split about his religion, fearing both losing his realm and risking the wrath of God. To help the nation grasp the new religion, God sent a bishop called Poppo to the Isore seaport (this is in northwest Zealand and is "a suitable location for the Danes to accept the

---

<sup>39</sup> Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, King Olaf Trygvason's Saga, section 36-7

<sup>40</sup> Widukind, *Deeds of the Saxons*, translated by Bernard S. Bachrach and David Stewart Bachrach, *Medieval Texts in Translation* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014). Page 139, section 65

strength of the new faith, and Saxo will use it again later for the acclamation of new kings,”<sup>41</sup> showing the link between politics and religion). Poppo performed a miracle for them in which he inserted his hand into a heated metal glove and carried it around, and upon removing it he was completely unharmed. Poppo won over the crowd. An outcome of this event was the abolishment of single combat as a form of dispute settlement, as the Danes now thought that divine judgment was better than human contests for settling disputes.<sup>42</sup> Saxo Grammaticus may have been more inclined to write about the conversion to Christianity being more peaceful because he himself was a Dane and would possibly have disliked writing about his own country’s military defeat. Instead of being conquered by a foreign power, God assisted Sven after he was betrayed by the English by sending Poppo.

After settling his own disputes, King Otto turned his army towards Denmark as revenge for the murder of an entire Saxon colony in *Haddeby*. Otto devastated the countryside and fought King Harald Bluetooth at Schleswig. After a long battle, the Saxons emerged victorious, and Harald submitted to Otto. In return for his kingdom, Harald agreed to Christianize the Danes, beginning with himself, his wife Gunnhild, and his son whom he christened Svein Otto in honor of the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>43</sup>

Adam of Bremen’s account notably omits Poppo, except when he is mentioned much later in the text after the details about Otto forcing the conversion to Christianity. This could possibly be due to Adam’s dislike of Poppo and the Danish church, which used an English model (which Sven Forkbeard brought back from England) that did not feature the church having as

---

<sup>41</sup> Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum, the History of the Danes*. 718

<sup>42</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, edited by Karsten Friis-Jensen and translated by Peter Fisher, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015). x.10.2-x.11.6

<sup>43</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Tschan 55-57

active a role in government as in the Holy Roman Empire. This omission is of particular interest because of the records the church kept likely would have included Poppo, and Adam would have made efforts to include the names of other members of the clergy. “At that time Denmark on this side of the sea, which is called Jutland by the inhabitants, was divided into three dioceses, and subjected to the bishopric of Hamburg. In the church at Bremen are preserved the royal edicts which prove that King Otto held the Danish kingdom in his jurisdiction, so much so that he would even bestow the bishoprics.”<sup>44</sup>

This omission could have been purposely done to give Otto (and therefore Hamburg-Bremen) authority over Denmark and the diocese that were created there. If Poppo was responsible, then Otto would not necessarily have had claim to the land and church, but by only including Otto in the Danish conversion and putting off Poppo’s miracle until the attack of Eric of Sweden, Adam was able to give authority to Otto.

Despite their differences, the sagas and histories share many similarities with each other. One detail is that the conversion began with Harald Bluetooth (or Sven Forkbeard in the singular case of *Gesta Danorum*). By beginning the conversion of the nation with the king, this allowed the people to associate the new religion with the established monarchy. Early integration of religion into their political structure was done through the wars that surrounded conversion, such as the Holy Roman attack on Denmark and the Wendish Crusade. Societal structure, which was traditionally structured after the class system set out in the *Lay of Rig*, was affected by the conversion because of the introduction of the clergy into society, in addition to the shift that came with the turning away from the pagan religion. As Otto flexed his influence in Scandinavia,

---

<sup>44</sup> Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Tschan. 56

the people of the north found themselves (at least partially) under the influence of the Holy Roman Empire and the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen.



45

**Figure 2 Jelling Stone, "King Harald ordered these stones made in memory of Gorm, his father, and in memory of Thyra, his mother; that Harald who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian"**

Religious conversion also affected statecraft because it was used as an excuse to attack neighbors. The Jelling Stone (figure 2) famously claimed that Harald Bluetooth “won for himself all of Denmark and Norway,” and he was able to claim Norway for the then-Christian Denmark because Hakon of Norway renounced his Christianity. Selective use of religious structure was also used to further specify the way that religion affected the existing state and society. Sven

---

<sup>45</sup>[https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm\\_friJellingesten\\_10\\_162558a299\\_89120d5b6c.png](https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm_friJellingesten_10_162558a299_89120d5b6c.png)

Forkbeard's adoption of an English system of diocese allowed him to avoid having the church hold the same powerful place in politics that the Holy Roman Empire experienced, while still appeasing the foreign Christian powers enough that they would not attack again.

### **Conversion under the House of Gorm**

There was a distinct lack of information about the pre-Christian kings of Denmark (this may have been the product of historians not wanting to be associated with the pagans), with the first works on the pre-Christian kings coming from the Roskilde Chronicle in the late 1130s. This was more than 150 years after Harald Bluetooth claimed to have converted the Danes to Christianity. The long delay between the events and their recording could have caused a shift in narrative. They could have been a product of cultural memory instead of communicative memory, which comes from information being reinvented over time to serve a present purpose, rather than being passed down as it truly happened.<sup>46</sup>

Converting to Christianity, or at the very least prime signing a conversion to be able to identify as Christian, was a practice seen among the Vikings. It is possible that this is what Harald Bluetooth tried to accomplish through his so-called conversion to Christianity. Despite his conversion to Christianity, Harald still honored his pagan parents Gorm the Old and Thyre. Harald may have been trying to appeal to both the growing Christian population and the existing pagan population.

Gorm the Old was buried in one of the giant mounds of Jelling, but following Harald's conversion to Christianity, he was dug up and reburied underneath the church that was placed

---

<sup>46</sup> Alban Gautier, "Remembering and Forgetting Pagan Kings of the Danes in the Eleventh Century, Diverging Choices Within an Early Christian Dynasty," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46, no. 3 (May 27, 2021): 285–303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1622280>.

next to the mound. While Gorm was retroactively included within the Christian sphere of influence, his son Harald legitimized his rule with reference to the pagan past as well as the Christian present. He ruled Denmark from his seat of political power at Jelling, located in the mainland of modern-day Jutland. The site contained many contemporary pagan and Christian symbols. Central to the fortress was a gigantic stone ship, which was symbolic of the Viking journey to the afterlife. There were also two giant burial mounds, which originally were believed to hold the bodies of Harald Bluetooth's parents, and these giant burial mounds were from pagan burials. Harald also built a church built in the center of the fortress, between the two burial mounds. Altering the landscape itself by creating two gigantic burial mounds and a gigantic stone ship showed the Danes' dedication to their beliefs and history, but the placement of the second burial mound on the back of the stone ship as a sort of anchor showed Harald's recognition of Christianity and his willingness to move on.



47

**Figure 3 Jelling Stone (side 2)**



48

**Figure 4 Jelling Stone (side 3)**

Harald also created the Jelling Stone in which political domination and religious orthodoxy combined. Technically it is a memorial with the statement that he raised the stone in memory of his father. His leadership is marked when he called himself the king of Denmark (this was the first time the word Denmark was recorded in Denmark itself) Then there is the bold statement that Harald made the Danes Christian. The entire site of Jelling contains a potent mixture of pagan and Christian imagery and symbols. While there is a gigantic stone ship that was symbolic of the Viking journey to the afterlife, there is also a church in the center of the

---

<sup>47</sup>[https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm\\_friJellingesten\\_08\\_d3589e563a\\_9790e92509.png](https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm_friJellingesten_08_d3589e563a_9790e92509.png)

<sup>48</sup>[https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm\\_friJellingesten\\_12\\_f7c67d0784\\_d03c163a67.png](https://en.natmus.dk/typo3temp/assets/images/csm_friJellingesten_12_f7c67d0784_d03c163a67.png)

ship. Even the Jelling Stone itself contains imagery from both pagan and Christian religions. One side appears to show the Viking World-Serpent wrapped around the Lion of Judah (Figure 3), and another side shows Jesus Christ in what could be the branches of a tree, possibly the World-Tree Yggdrasil (Figure 4). The simultaneous appearance of this imagery shows how Harald used religion as a political tool and a show of power, while trying to appeal to both the newly converted Christians and the pagans who stuck with the old way. Because the conversion to Christianity in name and the actual institutional changes that accompany the change to another religion are often not at the same time, appeals need to be made to both groups while the changes are occurring. The Jelling Stone shows how the “conversion” had taken place because Harald claimed the country had converted to Christianity, while the true “Christianization” (as described by Siân Grønlie in their account of the Icelanders) had not yet taken place.<sup>49</sup>

Not everyone appreciated the conversion to Christianity brought by Harald, and the reaction came from Harald’s son Sven Forkbeard. In the mid-980s, Sven revolted against his father, seized the throne, and drove Harald into exile, where he later died. Sven made a move back to the Old Norse religion, but continued to build some churches. One important example of Sven reverting to Old Norse values was when King Aethelred of England gave an order to kill Danes in a slaughter called the St. Brice’s Day Massacre, and Sven’s sister was killed. In retaliation (and to avenge her death as he was honor-bound to do), Sven Forkbeard invaded the Kingdom of England, and after a lengthy campaign became the first Danish king of England.<sup>50</sup> Prior to the St. Brice’s Day Massacre, there was a large Danish population living in England.

---

<sup>49</sup> Siân Grønlie, introduction to *Íslendingabók*. vii

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Bauduin, “Quasi in Domo Propria Sub Securitate Sanaretur: A Peace Agreement between King Swein Forkbeard and Duke Richard II of Normandy,” *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 3 (2021): 394–416, <https://doi.org/10.1111/emed.12480>.



What began with a series of raids into England shifted as the Vikings realized they could capitalize on the English by trading with them instead of attacking them, leading to increased numbers of Danes settling in England. Arable land was in short supply in Scandinavia, so expansion into England offered not only new financial opportunities, but also access to farmland that otherwise would have been unavailable.

Sven Forkbeard died shortly after annexing England, and his son Knut the Great was proclaimed king of England by the people of the Danelaw. Despite being Christian, Knut was careful about creating an open and aggressive alliance with the church. Like his father, he was a politician and statesman and knew that fully giving in to the demands of the church would endanger his imperial goals abroad.<sup>51</sup> Because his own mother was fiercely loyal to the Old Norse religion, as were many of the troops he brought from Scandinavia, Knut was at least tolerant of the heathens that lived in England. By allowing images of the pagan gods like Odin to be brought to England and in the Danish settlements, Knut permitted at least a small religious reformation in his new kingdom. Toleration of a religion thought to have been conquered in England caused difficulties for the English church. The subject of the throne of England was discussed in the Papal Court of Rome, evidenced by a letter sent to Knut urging him to praise God and promote peace. This letter began a relationship with the Archbishop Lifting of Winchester (who brought the letter) and his successor Ethelnoth, who exerted influence over Knut on behalf of the church.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Laurence M. Larson, "The Political Policies of Cnut as King of England," *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (1910): 720–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1836956>. 737

<sup>52</sup> Larson. 739

### Alternate Sources

While many historical records detail the interactions of the Vikings with Christian Europe, the Vikings also received visitors from the Muslim world. One such record was written by Ibn Fadlan, who traveled as part of an embassy from the Abbasid of Caliph of Baghdad to the Volga Bulgars during the tenth century. A large part of his account was about a people he called *the Rus*, which most scholars identify as the Varangians, the name given to the Vikings by the Romans.<sup>53</sup> Ibn Fadlan described the Rus as the most beautiful people he had ever seen, although he was disgusted by their hygiene. The account he wrote made the Vikings out to be unsophisticated savages and offered a contemporary account of how other cultures at the time may have seen the Vikings. A large portion of his account of the Rus detailed a funeral he witnessed. Ibn Fadlan described the process of preparation for the funeral, which included many days of drinking and celebration of the life of the deceased. This ultimately culminated in the rape of a slave girl, who was then sacrificed along with a litany of animals and burned inside a large wooden ship along with the deceased king and many grave goods.<sup>54</sup> The details of the funeral resemble the funerals described in *Beowulf*. The burning of the ship in Ibn Fadlan's account combines the elements of the ship burial of king Scyld Scefing and the burning of Beowulf, both with grave goods.

While many of the things Ibn Fadlan wrote were likely true, such as the Vikings combing their hair every day (this is supported through the number of combs found in archaeological

---

<sup>53</sup> "Ahmad Ibn Fadhlán in Northern Europe: A Survey of His Account of Russian Vikings in the 10th Century," *Muslim Heritage* (blog), April 3, 2008, <https://muslimheritage.com/ahmad-ibn-fadhlán-in-northern-europe-a-survey-of-his-account-of-russian-vikings-in-the-10th-century/>.

<sup>54</sup> Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, "The Rus," in *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*, trans. Richard Frye (Princeton, 2005), 63–71.

sites), some other items may have been less truthful. Cultural differences between the Muslims of the Middle East and the pagans of the north would likely have been exacerbated due to the nature of Ibn Fadlan's writing. Ibn Fadlan was part of a political retinue sent to the King of the Bulgars to convince him to change from Maliki rite to a Hanafi (Maliki and Hanafi are different schools of law of Sunni Muslim and differ in their interpretations of Islam), but the mission failed due to lack of funds.<sup>55</sup> Describing the Rus as dirty unsophisticated savages would have made for better political propaganda than describing them as an advanced and hygienic society. The account was also likely written before the true conversion of the Rus to Christianity, meaning the Rus would have been seen as non-Muslim pagans instead of Christians. Many of these pagan practices would have been abandoned following the conversion to Christianity, such as the elements of grave goods and human sacrifice.

While these accounts show the danger of applying one's own moral and ethical values to another culture, they still preserve history that otherwise might have been lost. The detail given to the ship burial preserved the importance of both ritualism and the ship to the Vikings. The ship was a symbol of military power and wealth due to the cost incurred by building a ship. The sacred space inside the ship where the bodies and goods were placed was representative of the reverence the Rus, and the Vikings as a whole, held for their rites. This burial ceremony inside a ship is also reminiscent of the massive stone ship in Jelling in which Gorm the Old was buried. While the veracity of the account itself may be questioned, its importance in preserving the values of both the Muslim and Rus culture is invaluable.

---

<sup>55</sup> "Ahmad Ibn Fadhlān in Northern Europe."

Burial practices, as well as sources that document the process itself, act almost as a time capsule for the religious state of the area at the time of the burial. Vésteinsson *et al.* use archaeological evidence to show the change from pagan to religion to Christianity in late 10th and early 11th century Iceland. By analyzing grave sites, their locations, contents, and orientations, they determine changes in practice that came with religious conversion.<sup>56</sup> Some written sources, such as the Icelandic sagas, were written centuries after the events they describe and were subject to historical revision and the politics of the author. Archaeological evidence is less likely to be influenced by these factors. A smith's mold discovered in Trend, Jutland could produce two Christian crosses and one Thor's hammer at the same time, demonstrating the coexistence of beliefs. In Gettrup, another area in Jutland, a medieval font was discovered that features both crosses and Thor's hammers, as well as several other ornamented hammers. A tomb in Schleswig-Holstein, located in the far north of modern-day Germany, contained a woman buried with a silver cross around her neck, likely designating her as Christian. Several Thor's hammers were nailed to the outside of her coffin, likely indicating she or her family wished for her protection in the afterlife, regardless of which religion was "correct."<sup>57</sup> While the woman buried with the cross necklace may have claimed to be Christian, her family clearly still believed in the Old Norse religion to some extent, and this evidence left behind showed their

---

<sup>56</sup> "Dating Religious Change: Pagan and Christian in Viking Age Iceland - Orri Vésteinsson, Árný Sveinbjörnsdóttir, Hildur Gestsdóttir, Jan Heinemeier, Adolf Friðriksson, 2019," accessed March 1, 2022, [https://journals-sagepub-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1469605319833829?utm\\_source=summon&utm\\_medium=discovery-provider](https://journals-sagepub-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1469605319833829?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider).

<sup>57</sup> "Christianity Comes to Denmark," National Museum of Denmark, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/christianity-comes-to-denmark/>.

beliefs in practice rather than just in theory. Archaeological evidence provides a relatively neutral source of information compared to the written documents of the day, which helps to eliminate the biases associated with sources such as the sagas and histories.

## Chapter 4 Legal conversion

Another source for information about the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity and its impact on Europe is the legal documents that came out of both Viking states and states that had large Viking populations living in them. The bias inherent in areas where Vikings were the minority can be compared to areas where Vikings made up the majority, such as with England and Iceland. Examining the language and content between the laws governing these two areas where Vikings settled can reveal how the conversion took place.

### England

Many of the ecclesiastical and secular law of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century England, such as the *Northumbrian Priests' Laws*, were written and enforced by both the king and the witan, which was the king's council of wise men composed of leading ecclesiastic and secular figures. The witan's role in the creation of these laws was crucial for its enforcement because the members of the witan were more in touch with both those who would enforce the law directly, as well as the people themselves. The laws that emerge in England during the Viking Age show the contrast between the Christian English and the pagan Vikings. Creating legal distinctions between the Christian English and the pagan Vikings legalized violent behavior targeting the Vikings, causing a more cohesive identity to form by othering the Vikings. Beginning in 886 with the Treaty of Wedmore, England had been divided between a kingdom in Wessex under English control, and a territory in East Anglia called the Danelaw where Danish law still applied. Over

time, the Danelaw was reclaimed until it was fully under the control of Edward the Elder by 918, but there was peace between the Danes and the English.<sup>58</sup>

King Edmund reigned England during the mid-tenth century and released a series of ecclesiastical laws targeting the pagan Vikings he encountered. These laws began to differentiate the rights of Christians as a group separate from non-Christians, and the Vikings living in England were expected to follow these laws because they were living under the jurisdiction of the English king. One such law states that “If anyone shed a Christian man’s blood, let him not come into the king’s presence, ere he go to penance, as the bishop may teach him, and his confessor direct him.”<sup>59</sup> This law implies that only shedding a Christian man’s blood was an offence and required penance, but the shedding of non-Christian blood was legal.

This trend was continued by King Aethelred II in a set of laws written in the year 1008.<sup>60</sup> The first several outline laws recorded the specific rights and responsibilities of Christian men, showing the continued importance of Christianity to the people of England, as well as setting them apart from the non-Christian Vikings. The first law listed was “that we all love and worship one God, and zealously hold one Christianity, and every heathenship totally cast out: and this we all have, both with word and with wed, confirmed; that, under one kingship, we will observe one

---

<sup>58</sup> Julian Richards, *Viking Age England* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2010). 35-37.

<sup>59</sup> Great Britain and Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Comprising Laws Enacted under the Angl-Saxon Kings from Aethelbirht to Cnut, with an English Translation of the Saxon; the Laws Called Edward the Confessor’s; the Laws of William the Conqueror, and Those Ascribed to Henry the First; Also, Monumenta Ecclesiastica Anglicana, from the Seventh to the Tenth Century; and the Ancient Latin Version of the Anglo-Saxon Laws* (London: Printed by G. E. Eyre and A. Spottiswoode printers to the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1840), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012285463>. p 247

<sup>60</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 305

Christianity.”<sup>61</sup> This law calling for the worship of the single Christian God made the Viking religion itself illegal, meaning any Viking who practiced “heathenship” was actively breaking the law.

The next law specifies that the king and his witan forbid the selling of Christian men out of the country, especially to heathen nations, and that the souls that “Christ bought with his own life” (Christian) be specially guarded.<sup>62</sup> By preventing the sale of Christian men out of the country, the Christians were given an extra layer of protection compared to the non-Christians in England. The “especially to heathen nations” portion of this law also caused a slight shift in trade policy with other nations, affecting not only the people within England, but non-Christians abroad. The laws also stated that Christian men are not to be condemned to death, but instead be punished in other ways, because it was wrong to destroy God’s handiwork by putting a Christian to death.<sup>63</sup> Once again, the Christians were offered unequal protection under the law by being given lesser sentences (in the instance of the death penalty) when compared to the non-Christians. The second to last law listed restates the first law, saying out “It is the duty of us all to love and worship one God, and strictly hold one Christianity, and totally cast out every kind of heathenism.”<sup>64</sup> The repeated call to cast out heathenism was Aethelred’s way of showing the importance Christianity had to his new kingdom, while warning the Vikings that their beliefs would not be tolerated.

By the time of the Viking domination of the English throne, the Vikings had largely converted to Christianity. To echo previous kings, as well as gain the support of the people of

---

<sup>61</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 305

<sup>62</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 305

<sup>63</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 305

<sup>64</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 313



England who would likely oppose a foreign ruler sitting on the throne, Cnut the Great released his own set of ecclesiastical and secular laws, compiled in the *Norðhymbra preosta lagu*, or the Northumbrian Priests' Law. The first ecclesiastical law of Cnut was that they (his subjects in England) should love and worship one God above all other things and observe one Christianity, as well as love Cnut with strict loyalty.<sup>65</sup> The secular laws of Cnut specifically mention the importance of "cleansing" the country of people who participate in evil deeds, such as witches, diviners, *morth*-workers.<sup>66</sup> Cnut called for these people to be driven out of the country, to totally perish in the country, or to desist their actions. Shortly after this, the secular laws have a special section regarding heathenism. The law defines heathenism as the "worship (of) idols ; that is, that they worship heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water -wells or stones, or forest trees of any kind; or love witchcraft, or promote *morth*-work -in any wise; or by *blot*,<sup>67</sup> or by *fyrht*;<sup>68</sup> or perform any thing pertaining to such illusions."<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Cnut enacted these laws over England despite his mother's adherence to heathenism. The difference in the enforcement of Christian religion showed the varying values and cultural importance of religion throughout Scandinavia and the rest of where the Vikings impacted. While forming these laws, Cnut created his own witan, which included Eadric the Mercian, Earl Eric of Norway and Northumbria, and Thurkil the Tall. A royal proclamation of Knut in 1020 declared that:

---

<sup>65</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe. 358

<sup>66</sup> Modernized from Old English *Morþ*, meaning death. A *morth*-worker was likely a mercenary

<sup>67</sup> Blot: sacrifice

<sup>68</sup> *Fyrht*: divination

<sup>69</sup> Great Britain and Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*. 379

Should anyone prove so rash, clerk or layman, Dane or Angle, as to violate God's law or the rights of my kingship or any secular statute, and refuse to do penance according to the instruction of my bishops, or to desist from his evil, then I request Thurkil the earl, yea, even co mand (sic) him, to bring the offender to justice, if he is able to do so<sup>70</sup>

His establishment of set rules and a promised punishment for any transgressions against both the church and state proved that Cnut (and the Vikings in general) brought a new sense of law and justice to England.

### **Iceland**

Denmark's conversion to Christianity took place in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, with cultural and archaeological evidence such as the Jelling Stone documenting the conversion. While this was a political claim by King Harald Bluetooth, it lacked the sudden sense of change Iceland's conversion did when they legislatively converted to Christianity. *Íslendingabók*, or the Book of the Icelanders, was written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Ari Þorgilsson, and contains the early history of Iceland and its conversion to Christianity. The account recorded that King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway brought Christianity to Iceland by sending a priest called Þangbrandr. While some converted to Christianity during his initial visit, most chieftains rejected it, and two or three even libeled Þangbrandr to the point where he killed them before leaving Iceland. The next summer, Óláfr sent another priest called Þormóðr to convert the Icelanders, along with two previously converted Icelandic chiefs named Gizurr the White and Hjalti. That year, these men spoke at the

---

<sup>70</sup> Larson, "The Political Policies of Cnut as King of England." 723

Althing, which was the national parliament of Iceland, made up of the most powerful men in the country. Initially, this Althing resulted in the Christians and the heathens distinctly separating from each other and declaring themselves to operate under their own laws. Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði was the lawspeaker of the Althing in 999 and 1000, and was charged with formulating, memorizing, and reciting the laws of the meeting. After a day and night of meditation, Þorgeirr, who was a heathen at the time, decided it was best for Iceland to convert to Christianity. He cited the discord in Norway and Denmark between heathens and Christians before their conversion to Christianity, and worried that similar discord would prove disastrous for Iceland.<sup>71</sup>

When formulating the new laws to govern the now-Christian Iceland, it was decided that all people in the country should be Christian and those who were unbaptized should be baptized. As a consolation to the heathens whose religion was being removed from society, the old laws regarding the exposure of children to the elements (a form of infanticide where a child was left outside to die if the parents could not take care of it, or if it was “deformed”<sup>72</sup>) and the consumption of horseflesh would still stand. Those who still subscribed to the Old Norse religion were also allowed to sacrifice in private, but public sacrifices were punishable by lesser outlawry. Several years later these provisions were removed from the law code, furthering the Christianization of Iceland.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*. 8-9

<sup>72</sup> “Children in the Viking Period,” National Museum of Denmark, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/the-people/children/>.

<sup>73</sup> Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*. 9

*Kristni Saga*, or the Story of the Conversion, contains a slightly different account than the Book of the Icelanders. In *Kristni Saga*, the conversion of Iceland was largely due to a man called Þorvaldr Koðránsón and a bishop called Friðrekr, who met each other in Saxony before traveling to Iceland to convert the country to Christianity. Þorvaldr's father refused to convert until he knew if the bishop Friðrekr was more powerful than a spirit that lived in a stone his family used for sacrifices. Friðrekr chanted over the stone and broke it, resulting in much of Þorvaldr's family converting to Christianity. Several such instances of religious power are recorded in the saga, such as the consecration of a fire to destroy *berserkir*.<sup>74</sup> Later while attempting to attend a gathering, a group of chieftains and two hundred men tried to burn Þorvaldr and Friðrekr in their home, but a flock of birds spooked their horses, leading to many men breaking their limbs and injuring themselves on their weapons. The saga then describes Þorvaldr murdering a man while in Norway, leading to his separation from Friðrekr. The next section, titled *About Þangbrandr*, detailed his interactions with Óláfr Tyggvason and his conversion to Christianity. Following this, the saga contradicts itself. King Óláfr of Norway sent a man named Stefnir to Iceland to convert them to Christianity, but the saga recorded that he was badly received because "all people were then heathen in this country."<sup>75</sup> While most of the country was likely still heathen, the saga stating that all people still were discounts the earlier actions of Þorvaldr and Friðrekr. That summer at the Althing, it was made law that the kinsmen of Christians would be prosecuted for blasphemy, and shortly thereafter Stefnir was prosecuted and returned to Norway. Óláfr then sent Þangbrandr to Iceland, where he attempted to convert

---

<sup>74</sup> *Berserkir* were Vikings warriors who were blessed by the gods with supernatural strength and endurance, and were considered the epitome of Viking values. Sturluson, *Ynglinga Saga*. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók* =. 39

them to Christianity. The accounts of Þorvaldr and Þangbrandr share many similarities within *Kristni Saga* itself, such as the killing of people who libeled them and the consecration of holy fire to injure a *berserk*. The inclusion of consecrated fire in this story is reminiscent of the story of the furnace in Daniel 3<sup>76</sup> and in saints' lives,<sup>77</sup> and its repeated occurrence showed how the Viking introduction of Christianity began to influence the literary and cultural stories of Iceland.

*Kristni Saga* and the Book of the Icelanders share many details, such as two men being killed by an early proponent of Christianity, but still differ from each other in some key ways. The Book of the Icelanders begins with an account of Óláfr Tryggvason commanding the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, while *Kristni Saga* does not mention other nations being involved in the process, except for Þorvaldr and Friðrekr meeting in Saxony. *Kristni Saga* also recorded that a church was built in Iceland sixteen years before Christianity was made law, and it was miraculously protected when opponents of Christianity attempted to burn it down.<sup>78</sup>

*Kristni Saga* and Book of the Icelanders recorded different accounts of the men sent to convert Iceland, as well as who sent them. *Kristni Saga* claimed that king Óláfr of Norway initially sent a man named Stefnir (who was not mentioned in the Book of the Icelanders) to preach God's message to the Icelanders but following his failure he sent Þangbrandr to complete the mission as penance for his crimes as a robber. The Book of the Icelanders claimed that Óláfr

---

<sup>76</sup> This story told of how three Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were cast into a fiery furnace to be burned alive after not bowing down to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar or a golden idol he created. They prayed to God to consecrate the fire so they would be safely delivered from it. Daniel 3

<sup>77</sup> Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók* =. 60

<sup>78</sup> Ari Þorgilsson. 37

initially sent Þangbrandr but following his failure he sent Þormóðr along with the chieftains Gizurr the White.<sup>79</sup>

The history of Denmark, from its societal structure to its early kingship by the legendary rulers, was deeply rooted in the Old Norse religion. There was not an active campaign by the Vikings to convert others to their pagan religion, but they still exerted aspects of their religion onto others, such as the use of the blood eagle to kill a foreign Christian king. Beginning with the supremacy of the House of Gorm there was a change in religion to Christianity as the kings and the country itself were converted.

The difference in the conversions of England, Iceland, and Denmark show the differences in their political systems. England lacked a moment of conversion because the country was large, established, and divided. The ecclesiastic and secular laws were not effective at encouraging the Vikings to convert to Christianity, and the ongoing struggle between the English and Vikings rulers in England undermined the advancement of conversion. Another factor that affected the Viking conversion in England was many Danes in England were killed during the St. Brice's Day Massacre, meaning they never had the chance to convert. The conversion of Iceland, likely at the behest of King Óláfr of Norway, occurred at one time because of the decision of the Althing in 999 or 1000.<sup>80</sup> The smaller size of Iceland, combined with its history of the law-speakers memorizing the laws and the recording of its history, allowed for records of such events to be kept. The formal and well-documented (legal) conversion to Christianity was representative

---

<sup>79</sup> *Kristni Saga* claimed that Gizurr the White was converted to Christianity by Þangbrandr when he was three years old, but the *Book of the Icelanders* claimed that he was sent to Iceland with Þangbrandr. Evidence shows that Ari Þorgilsson personally knew Gizurr, meaning that the *Book of the Icelanders* is likely the more reliable source {Ari Þorgilsson. xv}

<sup>80</sup> Ari Þorgilsson. 8-9

of the parliamentary style in which Iceland was ruled, and the provisions that recognized and legitimized the older pagan ways showed respect for tradition and recognition that the Christianization of Iceland would not be immediate.<sup>81</sup> Denmark's monarchic system in which Harald Bluetooth declared the conversion of Denmark to Christianity in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, contained less of these more advanced provisions during its conversion. While the Jelling Stone contained pagan imagery in the form of the branches of the World-Tree and the presence of the World-Serpent, this was not the same as specific provisions to recognize the traditions of the state like there were in Iceland. Because Denmark was ruled by a monarch, it was also more subject to the individual beliefs of the king affecting the enforcement and support of Christianity. The assembly-style of government in Iceland allowed for a more consistent transition to Christianity. Overall, the conversion to Christianity was more effective in countries like Denmark and Iceland. This was likely due to more specific efforts made to accommodate those who were not ready to convert yet, as well as an understanding of and respect for the Old Norse religion itself.

---

<sup>81</sup> Ari Þorgilsson. 9

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Even after the official and legal conversion to Christianity for much of Scandinavia, paganism endured. Not ready to fully embrace Christianity on its own, many Scandinavians simply added Christ to their pantheon of gods to worship to. Landnambók, an Icelandic book about Helge Eyvindarson, an influential Viking warlord and early settler of Iceland in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, detailed how Helge believed in Christ, but while at sea or faced with a difficult situation, he would pray to Thor instead.



82

**Figure 5 Ledberg Stone**

The Old Norse religion also endured through both art and literature. Images of warriors are carved into the Ledberg Stone (figure 5, composite image showing all 3 sides), which was

---

<sup>82</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ledbergsstenen\\_20041231.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ledbergsstenen_20041231.jpg)



found in present day Sweden. On the front side (left image) the Ledberg Stone depicts two warriors with round shields and a wolf between them. One warrior is holding a sword and an axe, and the other holds something that could be a spear. The back side (right image) shows two similar warriors but without weapons, which could signify defeat and death. The wolf is shown biting the foot of one warrior, while the other warrior is missing his legs. The edge side (center image) depicts a cross carved like a tree with roots, and features a younger Futhark inscription, dating it to around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The scenes with the warriors and wolves are believed to show Ragnarök and Odin's fight against Fenrir. These pagan images shown alongside the Christian cross show the influence and recognition of the conversion to Christianity, while still maintaining at least some of the inherited Norse faith.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the Vikings largely converting to Christianity, the effects of their gods and values can still be felt today. While pagan belief may not be as prominent as it once was, Asatro is a modern religion that worships the Old Norse gods as well as giants and ancestors. In media such as Marvel's Thor movies and comics, the History Channel's *Vikings*, and the critically acclaimed video games God of War and Assassin's Creed Valhalla, Vikings and Scandinavian culture are directly represented. Many fantasy elements such as elves, dwarves, and trolls originate in the Norse myths, and works such as the *Lord of the Rings* and the *Elder Scrolls* draw upon them for inspiration. Through the representation and perpetuation of Viking society, their mythology, and their values, the influence of the Vikings can be felt today.

While the structure of society and many beliefs and values of Viking-Age Denmark and Scandinavia originated in the Old Norse religion, these societies were still able to transition to

---

<sup>83</sup> Anders Hultgård, "Myth on Stone and Tapestry: Ragnarök in Pictures?," *Stockholm University Press*, June 3, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.16993/bay.e>.

Christianity by the late Viking Age. The difference in governance type as well as location caused a difference in the conversion and subsequent Christianization of the states. Iceland, which was isolated and governed by a parliamentary assembly, was able to document a legal conversion that still protected the rights of pagans who were not ready to convert yet and was still able to accomplish this while facing pressure from the king of Norway to convert. Denmark, arguably a more powerful nation that was closer to other foreign powers, faced foreign pressure to convert to Christianity. King Harald Bluetooth proclaimed he had converted Denmark to Christianity but lacked the legal system and provisions that Iceland had. The allowances of the continuance of paganism in Iceland, combined with the oppositional continuance in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia, allowed for the survival of paganism. While legally the states had converted to Christianity, the process of Christianization and institutional changes that would come with it would take much longer.

Location and perspective played a significant role in the success of the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity and how it was recorded. Records of the conversion that originate in Viking societies, such as the Icelandic sagas, record details that were more important to the society as well as hold a deeper understanding of the more intimate details surrounding the conversion. Records originating in mainland Europe, such as the records written by the clergy, offer different details involving foreign politics that may have been unknown to the Vikings as they experienced their conversion. Both types of records offer unique perspectives on the process of conversion, and both are necessary to fully understand how and why the events took place. The conversion of the Vikings was largely conditional on the location and government under which they lived. As the early medieval Danish kingdom revealed, religious orthodoxy could run a parallel course with political expediency.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam of Bremen. "History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen." Translated by Francis J Tschan, n.d., 282.
- Muslim Heritage. "Ahmad Ibn Fadhlán in Northern Europe: A Survey of His Account of Russian Vikings in the 10th Century," April 3, 2008. <https://muslimheritage.com/ahmad-ibn-fadhlan-in-northern-europe-a-survey-of-his-account-of-russian-vikings-in-the-10th-century/>.
- Antonsson, Haki. "Traditions of Conversion in Medieval Scandinavia: A Synthesis." *Saga-Book* 34 (2010): 25–74.
- Ari Þorgilsson, ed. *Íslendingabók: The Book of the Icelanders ; Kristni Saga: The Story of the Conversion*. Translated by Siân Grønlie. Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, v. 18. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2006.
- Bauduin, Pierre. "Quasi in Domo Propria Sub Securitate Sanaretur: A Peace Agreement between King Swein Forkbeard and Duke Richard II of Normandy." *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 3 (2021): 394–416. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emed.12480>.
- Blake, N. F., trans. *Saga of the Jomsvikings*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, n.d.
- National Museum of Denmark. "Children in the Viking Period." Accessed March 16, 2022. <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/the-people/children/>.
- National Museum of Denmark. "Christianity Comes to Denmark." Accessed February 22, 2022. <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/christianity-comes-to-denmark/>.
- "Dating Religious Change: Pagan and Christian in Viking Age Iceland - Orri Vésteinsson, Árný Sveinbjörnsdóttir, Hildur Gestsdóttir, Jan Heinemeier, Adolf Friðriksson, 2019." Accessed March 1, 2022. [https://journals-sagepub-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1469605319833829?utm\\_source=summon&utm\\_medium=discovery-provider](https://journals-sagepub-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1469605319833829?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider).
- Gautier, Alban. "Remembering and Forgetting Pagan Kings of the Danes in the Eleventh Century, Diverging Choices Within an Early Christian Dynasty." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46, no. 3 (May 27, 2021): 285–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2019.1622280>.

- Grammaticus, Saxo. *Gesta Danorum, the History of the Danes*. Edited by Karsten Friis-Jensen. Translated by Peter Fisher. Oxford Medieval Texts, n.d.
- Great Britain, and Benjamin Thorpe. *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Comprising Laws Enacted under the Angl-Saxon Kings from Aethelbirht to Cnut, with an English Translation of the Saxon; the Laws Called Edward the Confessor's; the Laws of William the Conqueror, and Those Ascribed to Henry the First; Also, Monumenta Ecclesiastica Anglicana, from the Seventh to the Tenth Century; and the Ancient Latin Version of the Anglo-Saxon Laws*. London: Printed by G. E. Eyre and A. Spottiswoode printers to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, 1840. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012285463>.
- Hirst, K. Kris. "Viking Social Structure Class Systems and the Norse in Scandinavia and Beyond." Old Norse. Accessed March 25, 2022. <https://oldnorse.org/portfolio/viking-social-structure-class-systems-and-the-norse-in-scandinavia-and-beyond/>.
- Hollander, Lee, trans. *The Poetic Edda*. 2nd ed. University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Hultgård, Anders. "Myth on Stone and Tapestry: Ragnarök in Pictures?" *Stockholm University Press*, June 3, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.16993/bay.e>.
- Ibn Fadlan, Ahmad. "The Rus." In *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*, translated by Richard Frye, 63–71. Princeton, 2005.
- Julian Richards. *Viking Age England*. Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2010.
- Larson, Laurence M. "The Political Policies of Cnut as King of England." *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (1910): 720–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1836956>.
- Magazine, Smithsonian, and David M. Perry Gabriele Matthew. "Did the Vikings Actually Torture Victims With the Brutal 'Blood Eagle'?" Smithsonian Magazine. Accessed March 25, 2022. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/did-the-vikings-actually-torture-victims-with-the-brutal-blood-eagle-180979148/>.
- Palsson, Hermann, and Paul Edwards, trans. *Knytlinga Saga: The History of the Kings of Denmark*. Odense: Odense University Press, 1986.
- Phelpstead, Carl. "Converting to Europe: Christian Themes in 'Knytlinga Saga.'" *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 163–77.
- Snorri Sturlason. "Heimskringla." Accessed November 3, 2021. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/598/598-h/598-h.htm>.
- Sturluson, Snorri. "Ynglinga Saga." Accessed March 25, 2022. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/heim/02ynglga.htm>.

“The Danish History, by Saxo Grammaticus.” Accessed November 3, 2021.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1150/1150-h/1150-h.htm>.

“The Germany and the Agricola of Tacitus., by Tacitus.” Accessed October 6, 2021.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7524/7524-h/7524-h.htm#linknoteref-64>.

National Museum of Denmark. “The Jelling Stone.” Accessed March 25, 2022.  
<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/the-monuments-at-jelling/the-jelling-stone/>.

National Museum of Denmark. “The Old Religion.” Accessed February 28, 2022.  
<https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/religion-magic-death-and-rituals/the-old-religion/>.

Historic UK. “The Real Ragnar Lothbrok.” Accessed March 25, 2022. <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Ragnar-Lothbrok/>.

Norse Mythology for Smart People. “The Viking Social Structure.” Accessed February 28, 2022.  
<https://norse-mythology.org/viking-social-structure/>.

Widukind, Bernard S. Bachrach, and David Stewart Bachrach. *Deeds of the Saxons*. Medieval Texts in Translation. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014.

## ACADEMIC VITA

### Education

---

<b>The Pennsylvania State University</b> , College of the Liberal Arts	August 2018-Present
<b>Schreyer Honors College</b>   Bachelor of Arts in History, Political Science, Medieval Studies University Park, PA	
<b>Danish Institute for Study Abroad</b>	June-July 2021
Copenhagen, Denmark	
<b>Paterno Fellows Program</b>	Fall 2019-Present
Honors Program including advanced academic coursework, thesis, study abroad and/or internship, ethics study, and leadership/service commitment	
<b>Honors Thesis</b>   Advisor: Benjamin Hudson, PhD.	Spring 2020-Present
Performs research connecting Viking Age to the modern age	

### Work Experience

---

<b>Resident Assistant</b>	August 2020 – Present
East Halls, University Park, PA	
Serves as live-in campus resource for over 40 new students as employee of Residence Life, builds resident community through promotion of interaction and facilitation of events, provides professionalization opportunities for residents	
<b>Student Cashier</b>	August 2018 – Present
Redifer Commons, University Park, PA	
Facilitates communication between guests and staff, trains new workers and cashiers, assisted creation and implementation of work procedures.	
<b>Sales Associate, Center Store Associate</b>	November 2016 – January 2020
Weis Markets, Emmaus, PA	
Worked efficiently in high-traffic hours as cashier, center store stocker, customer service desk worker, front-end monitor. Interacted directly with customers and vendors, supervised other associates in same department	

### Volunteer Service

---

<b>THON</b> – Volunteered time for raising funds and awareness through the Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity
<b>Teams for Evangelism</b> – Coordinated block parties and held youth ministry through Bethel Bible Fellowship Church, landscaped and performed construction in church and local community, offered musical talent at local events

### Involvement

---

<b>Phi Alpha Theta Honor Society</b>	April 2020-Present
<b>Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity</b> – Risk Management Chair	January 2019 – Present
Organize paperwork for 60+ members to maintain updated record, streamlined new organization system for information collection. Lead chapter-wide seminars for enhanced safety and professionalization. Coordinate with executive board to uphold tripod of academic excellence, leadership, fellowship	
<b>PSU Athletics Band</b> – Officer, Librarian, Secretary	August 2018 - Present
Perform administrative tasks and assist band directors in 140-member band, worked diligently to digitize band library	

### Awards and Honors

---

<b>Norene Purtell Memorial Scholarship</b>	2021
<b>Lee Global Trustee Scholarship</b>	2021
<b>Douglas Honors Study Abroad Scholarship</b>	2021
<b>Clark Global Scholars Fund recipient</b>	2021
<b>Certificate in Collaborative Dialogue</b>	2020
<b>Linda and Alan Belfus Undergraduate Scholarship</b>	2019, 2020
<b>Herr's Student Scholarship</b>	2018, 2019, 2020, 2021
<b>Kearney Family Fund Scholarship</b>	2018