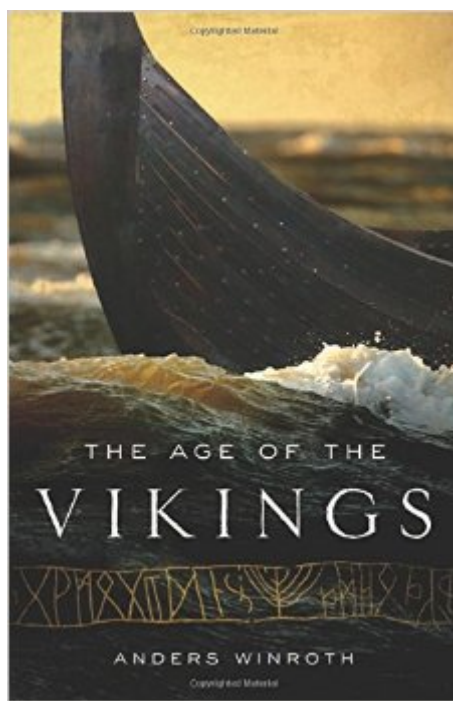


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The Age Of The Vikings



Synopsis

The Vikings maintain their grip on our imagination, but their image is too often distorted by myth. It is true that they pillaged, looted, and enslaved. But they also settled peacefully and traveled far from their homelands in swift and sturdy ships to explore. The Age of the Vikings tells the full story of this exciting period in history. Drawing on a wealth of written, visual, and archaeological evidence, Anders Winroth captures the innovation and pure daring of the Vikings without glossing over their destructive heritage. He not only explains the Viking attacks, but also looks at Viking endeavors in commerce, politics, discovery, and colonization, and reveals how Viking arts, literature, and religious thought evolved in ways unequaled in the rest of Europe. The Age of the Vikings sheds new light on the complex society, culture, and legacy of these legendary seafarers.

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Customer Reviews

Anders Winroth is the author of the magnificent book *The Conversion of Scandinavia*, where he takes an interdisciplinary approach to recreate Scandinavia's conversion to Christianity from their own perspective (if you haven't read that book, go read it now). Here in *The Age of the Vikings*, he takes a similar in depth approach into the Viking Age in general. Every aspect of the Viking Age, from raiding, to trade, to religion, to art is explored carefully and vividly reconstructed. This book makes use of various sources from across all regions with Viking contact creating a very complete picture of the time. Winroth does all this in a lively writing style that is sure to keep you entertained as you go along on this informative journey. I recommend this for graduate students and casual readers alike.

The most interesting aspect of this book is the answer to the question why the Vikings were considered such vicious marauders while Charlemagne is considered a hero in Western Europe. After all, they used many similar methods in achieving their aims: increasing their wealth, status and territory. The answer provided by the author is that the Vikings aimed many of their raids at the only literate group of the time, monks and other churchmen. Those were the people that wrote histories. And why did the Vikings attack monasteries? To paraphrase, that's where the wealth was. So this book is in part a commentary on the economics of the time. Charlemagne supported the Christians and vice versa, increasing both his wealth and territory and theirs. Moreover, rather than being just raiders, the Vikings were traders and settlers, ultimately seeking territory for their families and friends. Thus, they aggravated the other powerful group of the time, the rulers of the territories they encroached, including the heirs of Charlemagne. Beyond these questions this book is a fairly straightforward history of the period based on what little was written at the time and archeological findings. The most interesting other parts to me concerned the Viking ships and runestones, one source of information about the people of the Viking age. Considerable effort is put toward explaining Viking poetic sagas, which appear to be deliberately vague. I would have preferred to see more about their role as explorers and settlers of new territory.

This is a sober, even-handed and very entertaining account of the Viking Age, with attention to its unique artistic and poetic culture (to include the incredibly complex and obscure epic poetry of the skalds). It's a very good introduction for the general reader who wants to learn about the (in)famous Northmen of the early Middle Ages.

I bought this book specifically to prepare for a visit to the Viking Ship museum in Oslo. The book places the Vikings in the proper context of peoples in Europe in the 9th century. Life for everyone was nasty, brutish and short. The Vikings were just the best able to take advantage of the situation with their skill as marine engineers, seamen and traders and when profitable, as very effective warriors. Reading this prepared me well for the Viking ship museum. This small venue is not to be missed when in Oslo.

This is something of a revisionist history. It is excellently written and the graphics are good, as you would expect from Princeton. There are scores of books about the Vikings, and many of them are good. This one is very good, and might be a good place to start. The revisionist stuff? Winroth says that the macabre and famous "blood eagle" is a myth, and the famed and equally macabre

"berserkers" are also myth. He situates the Vikings as a vigorous group of peoples in a violent age. The merit of his approach is that the Vikings are presented as violent but no more so than their neighbors, not so much the scourges of God as opportunistic predators, a common if gory element in Europe at that time. The book has chapters on violence in a violent age, Viking age migrations, ships and boats to sea and the afterworld, trade, religion, chieftains and kings, home on the farm and Viking arts. The arts chapter is a tough read, as it is mostly a description of the highly elaborate verse and the complexity of the poets' kenning. I personally found the chapter on ships and boats to be the most interesting.

TRULY A FABULOUS BOOK About the Vikings, who were active and prosperous during Europe's Dark Ages. When you have read this book, you do not need to read anymore books on The Vikings. Contains a heart-warming story of a real Viking woman's life, her trials and tribulations, and how she left us a message on RUNESTONES. Also contains some territory gathering, slaves gatherings, and much booty (treasure) raids to secure same.

This is a great book for a non-specialist who is willing to read material that is a bit denser than your average popular history. The author hones in on some essential and interesting questions about what the Vikings were like and gives answers that are grounded in historical and archaeological facts. Thus the book takes advantage of the author's expertise without getting bogged down in the details of dynastic infighting that I've seen in other books of medieval history. The book argues that Vikings were no worse than the rulers of their victims, leaders such as Charlemagne who plundered neighbors and wreaked havoc to enforce a protection racket against weaker kingdoms. It's an interesting case, but the very scarcity of written Scandinavian sources from the Viking era that accounts for our one-sided view of the Vikings, also limits our ability to see whether the writings of their victims were distorted or not. Nevertheless, Winroth paints an interesting, colorful, and thoughtful portrait of the pre-literate predecessors of the Christian kingdoms that emerged after 1000.

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