

Module 1, Weeks 1-6

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Medieval Empires, Barbarians and Others



Welcome to Module 1 of History 1F90: Medieval empires, barbarians and others.

In this module you will be introduced to the study of history in general and the study of medieval history in particular.

Lectures cover a variety of topics related to early medieval empires.

Seminars cover a variety of texts related to the Vikings. Seminars, which are a vital part of the course, provide you with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience practicing history, honing and developing your skills as an historian.

Attendance at both lectures and seminars is vital to your success in the course.

Upon completion of the module you will:

- Understand the distinction between primary and secondary sources
- Be able to perform basic analysis of several types of primary sources relating to medieval Europe (and by extension to any period of history)
- Be able to develop and present source analysis orally in seminar and in written form in a short essay

- Understand how historians use primary sources to develop interpretations about the past, and begin to apply this knowledge to developing your own interpretations of events based on the reading of documents
- Have begun to read, write, and think historically
- Demonstrate historical knowledge of some key events, figures, chronologies, topics and problems in the history of medieval Europe between about 500 and 1300 relating to the broad theme of medieval Empires, barbarians and others, including: the Germanic peoples and the “decline and fall” of the Roman Empire; the Carolingian and Norman Empires; the Vikings and the Viking impact; the unity of the medieval Christian world; Brock’s Clopton charter; and the Crusades 1095-1291

Texts for Module 1

There are three texts required for Module 1, available at the Brock University Bookstore.

- M.L. Rampolla, *A pocket guide to writing in history*
- J. Richards, *The Vikings: a very short introduction*
- *The Vinland Sagas*, trans. K. Kunz

How to use the texts:

Rampolla provides guidelines for the preparation of all essays in this course. You should use this text especially when writing and formatting essays.

Richards provides background and context for seminar materials. You should read all of this text before week 3 in the course.

The Vinland sagas provides the basis for one seminar discussion in week 5 as well as the essay for module 1.

Texts for Seminars

For each seminar students read a different primary source relating to the Vikings and the Viking Age.

These documents are available on the SAKAI site for the course in a folder clearly labelled “Seminar Readings”.

If you have problems with Sakai you should seek assistance at the Help Desk.

MODULE 1: Weekly lecture and seminar topics and readings

Important information:

For each week, you will find below the topic(s) to be covered in lecture and seminar.

Readings for lecture and seminar are separately and clearly identified.

With the exception of the week for which *The Vinland Sagas* text is used, all readings for seminar will be found on the SAKAI site for the course in a folder clearly labelled “Module 1 Seminar Readings.” Students are expected to read and reflect upon the documents before coming to seminar, and it is always a good idea to bring the documents with you to seminar.

J.D. Richards, *The Vikings: a very short introduction*, provides context for the documents relating to the Vikings that are read in seminar. Students should read this text in its entirety by week 3 of the course.

There is no “text” to support lectures; for each lecture topic one or two short readings are indicated. These are available electronically and stable URLs are provided. Students should read these articles BEFORE coming to lecture.

Students are responsible for ALL course material (lectures, lecture readings, seminars and seminar readings) for the progress examination in December.

Materials supporting module 1 may be placed on the SAKAI site for the course.

Week

1. Introduction. Getting started: a sense of history.

**** NO SEMINARS THIS WEEK: SEMINARS BEGIN WEEK 2 ****

2. The Problem of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Readings for lecture:

1. W. Goffart, “Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians,” *American Historical Review* 86 no. 2 (April 1981), pp. 275-306: stable URL: <http://proxy.library.brocku.ca/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/1857439>

Seminar: Introductory: History, historians and the raw materials of history

Seminar readings:

- ❖ Why study history through primary sources? PDF file available on SAKAI site for HIST 1F90 → in “Module 1” folder, file name: “Why study history through primary sources?”

Points to ponder:

What is a **primary source**? What is a **secondary source**? How hard and fast is the distinction? Can a secondary source also serve as a primary source? Without restricting yourself to a particular time period, how many different types of primary source materials can you think of? How many of these would be relevant to the study of the middle ages? What challenges exist with medieval sources? What questions do historians ask of sources in order to begin analyzing them?

3. Charlemagne, the Carolingian Empire, and the Birth of Europe

Readings for lecture:

1. R. Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age: Reflections on its place in the history of the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 64 no. 2 (April 1989), pp. 267-306; stable URL: <http://proxy.library.brocku.ca/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/2851941>

OR

2. D. A. Bullough, “Europae Pater: Charlemagne and His Achievement in the Light of Recent Scholarship,” *English Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 334 (Jan., 1970), pp. 59-105. Stable URL: <http://proxy.library.brocku.ca/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/563053>

Seminar: The Northmen in their own words: The Voyage of Ohthere

Seminar readings:

- ❖ “The Voyage of Ohthere” – PDF file with primary source text and short introductory comments on SAKAI
- ❖ Tips: Read the document through once, in its entirety, to gain a “feel” for it. Read it through a second time. Identify unfamiliar terms. Find definitions for them. Apply the questions and techniques discussed in seminar 1 to the document.

Points to ponder:

Consider the opening sentence of the text. What does this reveal about the nature of the document? What problems and possibilities are presented by this opening. Consider strengths and weaknesses of the document. How reliable is it? How valuable is it to historians? What historical questions/problems/topics could the document be used to shed light upon?

4. Medieval Europe and the Vikings: Viking impacts and Viking Empires

Readings for lecture:

1. LUND, NIELS, "Allies of God or Man? The Viking Expansion in a European Perspective," *Viator*, 20 (1989): Stable URL:

<http://proxy.library.brocku.ca/login?url=http://pao.chadwyck.com/PDF/1345731516840.pdf>

Seminar: The Vikings in the words of others: European sources on the Viking raids of the ninth century

Seminar readings:

- ❖ "The Annals of Ulster on the Vikings in Ireland"
- ❖ "The Annals of St. Bertin on the Vikings on the Continent, 843-859"
- ❖ Both documents available on SAKAI

Points to ponder:

What is an annal? How valuable are these texts to historians, and what can they tell us? What do they not tell us? Why do you think the form and nature of these documents can lead to debates by historians about their validity as sources?

5. West meets East: The Crusading Movement 1095-1291

Readings for lecture:

1. C. Tyerman, *The Crusades: A very short introduction* (Oxford 2004), chapters 1 and 2: electronic access:

<http://proxy.library.brocku.ca/login?url=http://books2.scholarsportal.info/viewdoc.html?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/oxford/2009-11-30/1/0192806556>

Seminar: The Vinland sagas and the Norse voyages to North America.

Seminar readings: Full text and translator's introduction of *The Vinland Sagas* (Penguin paperback).

N.B. Readings for seminar this week comprise the same texts on which you are writing your essay, due next week. Use seminars as a forum for discussing ideas about the documents.

Points to ponder:

The two texts belong to a genre of medieval Icelandic literature known as a saga. Based on your reading of the texts, what do you think a saga is? What challenges exist with using these texts as historical sources? How much is fact and how much is fiction?

N.B. Don't worry if there is disagreement on many of these issues: Modern scholars remain divided over the historical value of the saga texts.

6. Documents in the attic: A medieval mystery at Brock University

Special guest: David Sharron, Head of Special Collections and Archives in the James A. Gibson Library

Seminar: A Muslim diplomat's view of the Vikings/ Icelandic historical texts on the settlement of Iceland

Seminar readings: READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- ❖ **Ibn Fadlan's account of the Rus: available on-line at:**
<http://www.uib.no/jais/v003ht/03-001-025Montgom1.htm> [from *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* vol. 3 (2000)]; link provided in SAKAI

OR

- ❖ **"The Book of Icelanders" and "The Book of Settlements" on the discovery and settlement of Iceland: available on SAKAI**

Points to ponder:

DEVISE AND BRING YOUR OWN POINTS TO PONDER THIS WEEK!

**** END OF PROF. McDONALD'S MODULE ****

Assignment for Module 1

You will complete one written assignment worth 10% of your final grade in the course for this module of History 1F90.

Topic: Compare and contrast two different saga accounts of Norse voyages to North America.

Two Icelandic saga texts collectively known as the “Vinland sagas” – *Eirik the Red’s saga* and the *Saga of the Greenlanders* – contain detailed accounts of the Norse voyages across the North Atlantic to North America around the year 1000.

However, “when it comes to the Vinland voyages themselves, the sagas give two versions” [Kunz p. xviii].

Your task in this assignment is to write a short paper that (i) compares and contrasts the accounts of these voyages given in *Eirik the Red’s saga* and *Saga of the Greenlanders*, and (ii) offers some analysis of the value of these sagas as historical documents.

Details:

- **A hard copy of the essay is due at the beginning of lecture in the final week of the module (i.e. week 6); essays that are received after the start of lecture will be considered late and treated according to the guidelines provided in the course outline.**
- **The essay should be 1000 words in length +/- 100 words. Papers that are either too long or too short may receive a penalty of 5%.**
- **Late papers will be penalized according to the guidelines provided in the course outline; it is your responsibility to ensure that your paper is received on the due date.**
- **Be sure to keep all rough notes for the paper as you may be asked to submit these.**
- **Be sure to keep an electronic version of the paper in case you are asked for this, but note that electronic submissions via e mail are not acceptable.**
- **Your essay must be properly formatted according to the conventions laid down in Rampolla, *Pocket Guide to Writing History*. Essays that are not properly formatted will be penalized by 5-10% depending on the nature of the problem. Improperly formatted papers may also be returned for revision and resubmission at the instructor’s discretion.**

- Give your paper a title that accurately reflects its content and argument; do NOT title it “HIST 1F90 ESSAY”, “ESSAY 1”, etc.
- **Title page must be formatted according to the template provided on SAKAI; essays without title pages or that do not utilize the template format will receive a penalty of 5%.**
- Essays should have page numbers placed at **bottom centre commencing on first page of text [not title page]** and running continuously to last page.
- YOU MAY UTILIZE THE TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION TO THE *VINLAND SAGAS* TEXT, BUT YOU SHOULD NOT UTILIZE ANY OUTSIDE SOURCES IN PREPARING YOUR PAPER. THE ESSAY SHOULD REPRESENT YOUR OWN ATTEMPT AT ANALYSIS AND YOUR OWN THOUGHTS ON THE TOPIC.
- Papers are marked on CONTENT, ORGANIZATION, STYLE, and FORMATTING. Style and organization are particularly important: be sure that your paper is effectively organized and is free of errors of spelling and grammar. Please consult the grading rubric on p. 6 of the course outline for further guidelines.
- As indicated in the course outline you must submit your paper to turnitin.com before handing in the hard copy, and you must submit a copy of the turnitin.com report along with your essay. Please see specific guidelines on p. 3 of the course outline for more information.