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Legacy of the Vikings

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Legacy of the Vikings

Abstract

Suggested resources for the Penn Alumni Travel cruise from Scotland to Scandinavia. See the Library Guide for this bibliography http://guides.library.upenn.edu/alumnitravelreading_vikings.

Keywords

scotland, vikings, glasgow, copenhagen, bibliography, penn, alumni, travel, readings, guidebooks

Comments

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Alumni Travel Reading List

Legacy of the Vikings

June 13th – 21st, 2014

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“Join us for a unique, comprehensive, nine-day journey to Scotland's rarely visited Inner Hebridean, Orkney and Shetland Islands and Norway's majestic fjords. Cruise from Glasgow to Copenhagen aboard the exclusively chartered Five-Star Small Ship M.S. Le Boréal. Travel in the wake of early Viking explorers, cruising into ports accessible only to small ships, and visit three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Highlights include Eilean Donan Castle on the Isle of Skye, the Callanish Stones on the Isle of Lewis, the Neolithic Ring of Brodgar, Skara Brae and Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands, and Edvard Grieg's former home with private recital in Bergen. Edinburgh Pre-Cruise and Copenhagen post-cruise options.” (From the Penn Alumni Travel website)

Suggested Resources

Viking History & Culture

Oliver, Neil. *Vikings*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012.

This is a very accessible general history of the Vikings by the creator of a BBC documentary also called *Vikings*. Oliver covers the whole sweep of Viking history, beginning with the prehistoric ancestors of the Scandinavian peoples, and builds up a picture of a society through archaeological evidence, grave goods and wall paintings. He also includes the less familiar side of the Vikings as merchants, traders and settlers. Drawing on monastic chronicles and sagas alongside more archaeology, he is able to create a very vivid picture of the Vikings both in their Scandinavian homeland and in their diaspora - Iceland, Greenland, the Scottish isles and Ireland, but also more unexpected places such as Russia and Constantinople.

Hall, Richard. *The World of the Vikings*. Thames & Hudson, 2007.

Another nice, very recent, survey of Viking history, this one with many great illustrations. The author is one of the foremost archaeologists of Viking culture. He does a good job covering the latest archaeological discoveries, from burials to hoards to settlements with plenty of photographs, drawings, site plans, reconstructions and maps.

The Old Norse Sagas

These are stories about ancient Scandinavian and Germanic history, about early Viking voyages, the battles that took place during the voyages, about migration to Iceland and of feuds between Icelandic families. They were written in the Old Norse language, in prose, mainly in Iceland. They represent one of the major contributions of Scandinavian culture to world literature. Most have been translated into English and they often read much like modern novels.

Njal's Saga. Transl. Robert Cook. Penguin, 2001.

One of the longest and most famous sagas. This tells the story of a beautiful yet spiteful woman, Hallgerd, who begins a blood feud that burns for several decades between the Sigfussons and Njalssons. Njal himself being a man of law who has a close friendship with Gunnar (Hallgerd's husband) and finds himself caught up in the chain of events as they develop.

Erik the Red, and Other Icelandic Sagas. Transl. Gwyn Jones. Oxford University Press, 1999.

The title saga chronicles the events that led to Eirik the Red's banishment to Greenland as well as Leif Ericson's discovery of Vinland the Good (present day Newfoundland?) after his longship was blown off course. The book also contains eight shorter sagas: "Hen-Thorir," "The Vapnfjord Men," "Thorstein Staff-Struck," "Hrafinkel the Priest of Frey," "Thidrandi whom the Goddesses Slew," "Authun and the Bear," "Gunnlaug Wormtongue," "King Hrolf and his Champions."

Grettir's Saga. Transl. Jesse Byock. Oxford University Press, 2009.

This is the story of the life and death of Grettir, a great rebel, individualist, and outlaw. As a youth of sixteen Grettir kills a man and is outlawed; all the rest of his life he devotes, with remarkable composure, to fighting more and more formidable enemies. He becomes increasingly isolated, although he wishes to live in society, and indeed can hardly bear solitude. Driven back and forth from Iceland to Norway, harried around Iceland, he continually flees subjection and confinement only to find a perilous freedom beset both by the external hazards as well as loneliness and pride.

Scotland: History & Culture

Magnusson, Magnus. *Scotland: The Story of a Nation*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000.

Very readable one volume history of a “nation of storytellers”, a people who hold their literary and oral traditions close to their hearts. Magnusson begins the story in ancient Scotland (before there were any "Scots" in it), moves into semimythic figures like Macbeth and Wallace, and then to the modern era of union with England and revived Scottish nationalism. By starting each chapter with a lively excerpt from an earlier Scottish history, Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*, the author gives his work a charming storybook feel.

Trevor-Roper, Hugh. *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*. Yale University Press, 2008.

Fascinating analysis of three myths that have played a central role in the historical development of Scottish identity: the political myth of the “ancient constitution” of Scotland; the literary myth, including Walter Scott as well as Ossian and ancient poetry; and the sartorial myth of tartan and the kilt, invented—ironically, by Englishmen—in quite modern times.

Fallow, Jeff. *Scotland: A Graphic History*. Luath Press, 2013.

Yes, a comic book history of Scotland! And yes, as a quick primer it does a remarkable job covering the political history of Scotland. The author is clearly a Scottish nationalist but that is no handicap for a book like this.

Scotland in Fiction

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Kidnapped; and, Catriona*. Ed. with an introd. by Emma Letley. Oxford University Press, 1986.

One of the classic Scottish adventure stories, and definitely not only for children. It is set around 18th-century Scottish events, notably the "Appin Murder", which occurred near Ballachulish in 1752 in the aftermath of the Jacobite Rising. The novel is widely regarded for its evocation of Scotland, for its atmosphere, characters and action, but also for its moral ambiguities.

Brown, George Mackay. *Beside the Ocean of Time*. J. Murray, 1994.

This novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and judged Scottish Book of the Year 1994 by the Saltire Society. The plot follows Thorfinn Ragnarson from Norday in the Orkney Islands of the 1930s. The son of a tenant farmer, he regularly daydreams about historical fantasies. In a series of intriguing chapters, George Mackay Brown transforms Thorfinn into a Viking traveller, a freedom-fighter for Bonnie Prince Charlie and the colleague of a Falstaffian knight who participates in the Battle of Bannockburn. He is then hurled into the future as Thor, who returns to the Orkneys as an adult. Brown's lyrical descriptions and gift for local color are good at capturing the magic of the Orkneys.