

Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin



Vikings - how some got it wrong

27-Jan-2024



Legal Stuff

- The presentation does not represent any official statement or opinion of the Society
- It is based on research found in the public domain



Assumptions

- The presentation discusses how others “got it wrong”
- The presentation assumes that
 - Behaviors and actions of the Nazis were wrong
 - Techniques deployed by the January 6 group storming the Capital were inappropriate
 - White Supremacy is not real
- This will not be a political debate and will not debate any political ideology
- This is for educational purposes from public domain information



Viking Horns

- Would you like to fight in a battle with swords and have horns on your helmet?
- The roots of the stereotype is from the 1800's when an opera costume designed Vikings in horned helmets.
- This is theater folks !



Definition

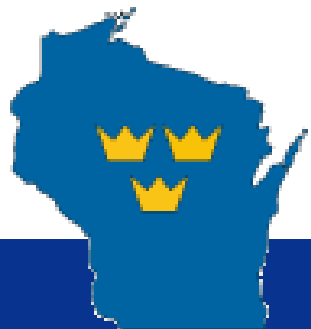
- Viking, member of the Scandinavian seafaring warriors who raided and colonized wide areas of Europe from the 9th to the 11th century and whose disruptive influence profoundly affected European history
- These pagan Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish warriors were probably prompted to undertake their raids by a combination of factors ranging from overpopulation at home to the relative helplessness of victims abroad
- At home, these Scandinavians were independent farmers, but at sea they were raiders and pillagers
- Their burning, plundering, and killing earned them the name víkingr, meaning “pirate” in the early Scandinavian languages.



Origins for the word Viking



- The word Viking entered the modern English language in 1807, at a time of growing nationalism and empire building.
- In the decades that followed, enduring stereotypes about Vikings developed, such as wearing horned helmets and belonging to a society where only men wielded high status
- Vikings were a specific group of traders defined by their mobility, and this did not include the bulk of the Scandinavian population that stayed at home



Germanic Master Race

- Vikings were praised as prototypes for European colonists.
- The idea of a Germanic master race nurtured by Nazi ideology, took root in the 1930s
- These theories have long been debunked
- The notion of the ethnic purity of the Vikings still seems to have popular appeal—and it is embraced by white supremacists.



Are you a Viking?

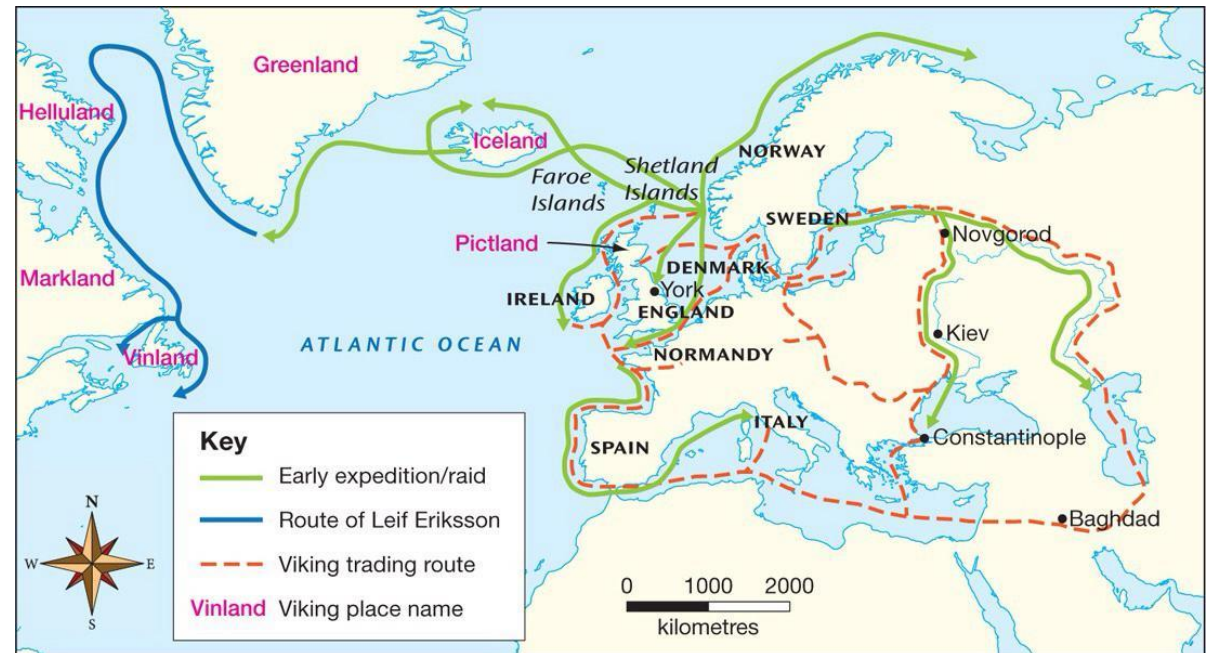


- Viking was a profession, not an ethnicity
- All our male ancestors **did not** go into vikingur, sailing the oceans, trading in foreign places and robbing and fighting when they found it suitable
- The population that we have in Scandinavia these days are a mixture of Scandinavians from ancient time, and all the newcomers, who arrived through the ages
- Modern Scandinavians feel at the same time related to the Vikings, and strongly alienated from them



Not a “pure” race

- The mobility of Vikings led to a fusion of cultures within their ranks
- Their trade routes would extend from Canada to Afghanistan.
- A striking feature of the early Vikings' success was their ability to embrace and adapt from a wide range of cultures, whether it was the Christian Irish in the west or the Muslims in the east.



Not a “pure” race

- It is too simplistic to think of early Viking raids as hit-and-run affairs, with ships coming directly from Scandinavia and immediately rushing home again



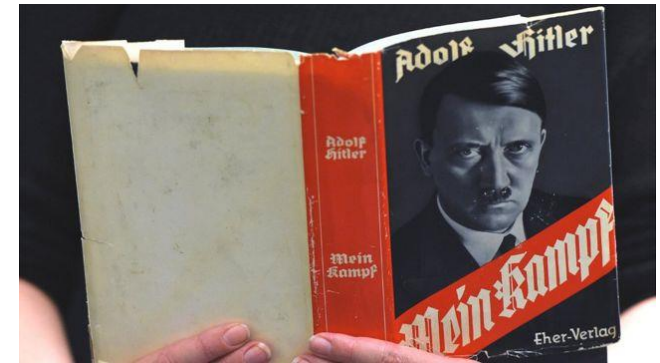
Ethnic Diversity

- Written accounts surviving from Britain and Ireland show Viking war bands were not ethnically exclusive
- Viking crews would frequently lose members and pick up new recruits as they traveled, combining dissident elements from different backgrounds and cultures
- Cultural diversity is a feature of Viking finds
- Analysis of skeletons at sites linked to Vikings point to a mix of Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian peoples without clear ethnic distinctions in rank or gender



Viking symbols and misconceptions

- All manner of Viking symbols and misconceptions about a golden age of Nordic racial purity have been appropriated by racist extremists looking to justify their xenophobia and acts of violence
- The precedent was set with the Nazis
- Hitler idealized the Norse people
- Even the swastika is based in part on a symbol based on Viking artifacts
- A popular text among the Nazis was Germania which describes Germanic people as a pure, uncorrupted race



Examples

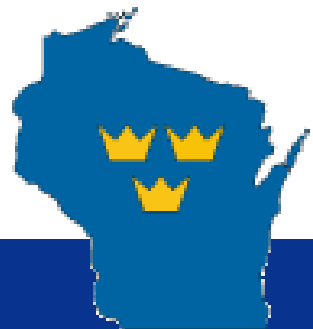


- The architects of Nazism in the 1930s erroneously viewed Norse mythology preserved in Iceland as a repository of “Germanic” culture and values
- They found support for their aggression in stories about a necessary war and plundered pre-Christian imagery for the iconography of the Third Reich.



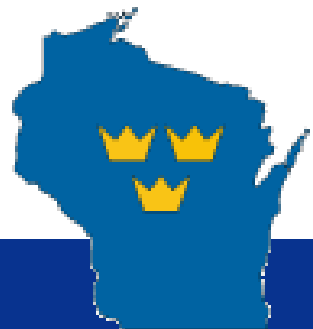
Do the research

- Neo-Nazis have never been particularly good at reading the medieval sources they are so drawn towards.
- They find what they want to find in Norse myth
 - Violence
 - Ruthlessness
 - An existential warwill lead to the rebirth of a new world – and they read no deeper
- Norse symbolism has long appealed to the far right.



Examples

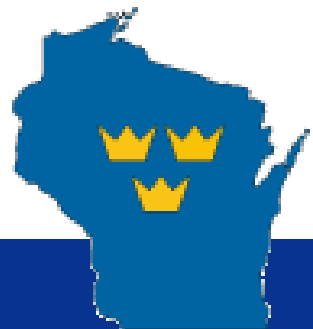
- When the Unite the Right rally took place in Charlottesville in 2017, some protesters carried banners featuring the Norse god Thor's hammer
- The perpetrator of New Zealand's Christchurch massacre wrote, "See you in Valhalla"



Examples

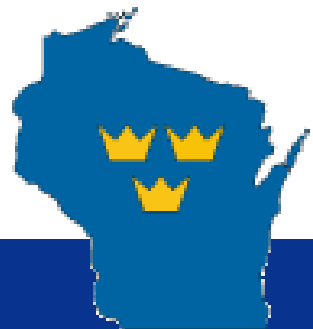


- Payton Gendron, the suspect in the killing of ten people in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York did it in the name of white supremacy.
- His hate-filled manifesto is full of baffling contradictions, vile stereotypes, unhinged conspiracy theories and, predictably, Norse symbolism.
- Gendron ended his manifesto with the contradictory message: “God bless you all and I hope to see you in Valhalla.”



Vikings were not racially pure

- The most compelling evidence refuting racial purity is DNA analysis of skeletal remains from the Viking age, which reveals a high degree of ethnic exchange
- The Vikings travelled to what is now Newfoundland trading with people who were "probably the ancestors of the Inuit." They also travelled to Islamic Spain and to Baghdad and Constantinople



January 6th



- Angeli claims that he wears his bizarre costume to draw attention to himself
- Another reason for the bare chest is displaying these tattoos to full effect, and wants them to be seen



Decode the tattoos



Mjölner - Used by the original adherents of the Norse belief system to summon the protection of the god Thor



Yggdrasil - The giant ash tree that supports the Norse cosmos, its branches reaching into sky realms inaccessible to humans, and its roots to the subterranean realm of the dead

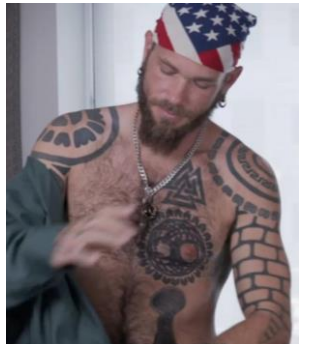


Snorri Sturluson – A famous Icelandic giant called Hrungrnir had a stone heart “pointed with three corners”. It has been used in more recent times by some white supremacists as a coded message of their belief in violent struggle.



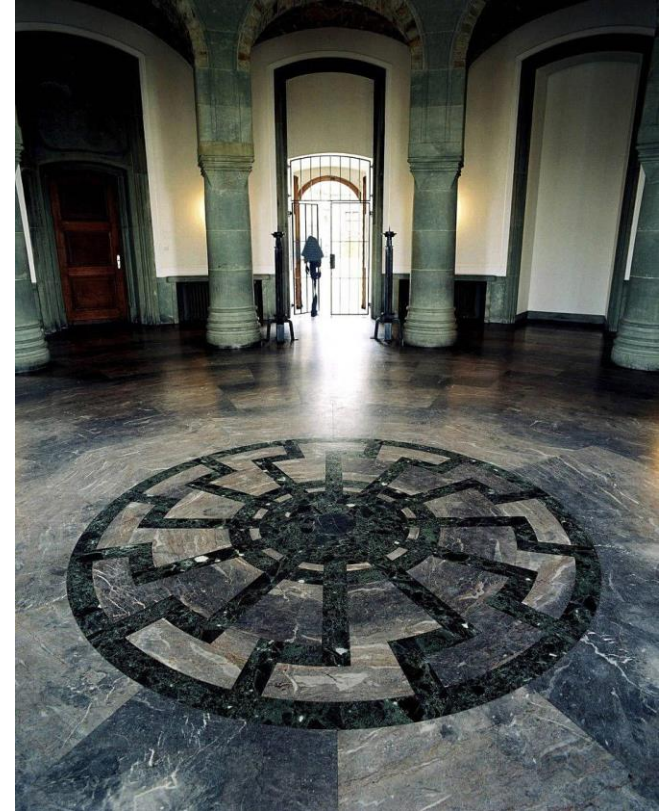
The Sun Wheel

- A tattoo that is less visible on his left shoulder seems to be a version of the Sonnenrad, or sun-wheel.
- This is a symbol listed by the Anti-Defamation League as "one of a number of ancient European symbols appropriated by the Nazis in their attempt to invent an idealised Aryan or Norse heritage"
- Often it contains a swastika or other hate symbol — but worn with nothing inside, it is very easy for other white supremacists to fill in the blank.



The Sun Wheel

- The sonnenrad is an invention of the Nazis
- It appears in a mosaic in a castle redesigned by Heinrich Himmler as a centre for the SS
- This has probably contributed to its appeal for neo-Nazis in the recent past, who display it as an alternative to the swastika that can be passed off as a medieval emblem without alerting others to their extremism



Are you a Viking?

- You can hardly find a modern society more different from Viking life than modern Scandinavia.
- Only 10% of Scandinavians have Viking DNA
- The renowned welfare states with
 - Complete protection of the individual
 - Political correctness
 - Openness
 - Humanismare SO far from the violent, robbing, slave trading reality of the Vikings.



Are Scandinavians proud of Vikings?

- Most Scandinavians are proud of their Viking heritage, although they realize that Vikings did not always do good things
- Like decedents of a conquering nation, they have pride in their people but recognize the problematic and sometimes dark history
- Today, someone from the United States may be “Proud to be an American”, however that same person understands that Americans destroyed many Native Americans’ lives during the founding of the country. Slavery was another dark stain on our country.

