**THE VIKING MIGRATIONS**

**ORIGIN**

The origins of the Vikings are shrouded in mystery. Although they have been traditionally connected to the modern people of Scandinavia, there is additional evidence indicating that they were related to the Germanic tribes of the ancient Sarmatians which originally came from the lands between the Black and Baltic Seas.

The movement of the early Vikings possibly started in a region of the Sarmatian homelands called Gotland (Land of the Gods). It would be the original movement of these nomadic warriors that gave the Vikings their original name. The Baltic word “Vykti” actually stands for the action of moving towards “God‟s Luck or Wealth.” Eventually, the word Viking would come to mean “Knight of the Gods” or “Knight in search of God‟s Luck.”

The Vikings who migrated into western and eastern Europe were chiefly from the regions around Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Their language became the mother tongue of present day Scandinavia, Iceland, and Greenland. By the 9th Century A.D., they had started establishing settlements in northeastern Europe, Britain, France, and other Germanic regions.

**CAUSES**

* Viking population was outgrowing the agricultural potential of their Scandinavian homelands.
* Developed occupations as Farmers, Blacksmiths, Shipbuilders, and Toolmakers
* Decline in trade along the traditional trade routes linking Scandinavia to the Roman Empire, the Baltic Sea, and the Middle East during the 5th Century A.D. required the Vikings to search for new trade partners.
* Climatic changes during the 5th – 8th Centuries A.D. melted ice packs, allowing the Vikings to begin exploration outside their traditional northern regions.
* Development of superior naval technologies supported the Vikings efforts to explore and discover new lands.
* Knowledge of the growing weakness of the Western Roman Empire and the feuding Germanic Kingdoms enticed the Vikings to seek expansion into southwestern and northeastern Europe.
* Encroachment into Viking territories by Germanic Christians forced the Vikings to either convert or fight fiercely against their religious persecutors.
* Since the Viking clans were warrior societies, some may have migrated merely for adventure, exploration, and the thrills of battle.

**First group (Viking Traders in the Roman Empire)**

Migrated from Scandinavia south along the western European coast to the Mediterranean.

This was about the 5th Century A.D.

Primary contact was for trade in luxury goods from the Middle East and Asia.

**Second group (The Invaders of Britian)**

Migrated from Scandinavia south to the British Isles during the 6th Century A.D.

Viking pirates first raided Britain in 787 AD, as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Raids continued for the next century, with Vikings seizing land all over the British Isles.

**Third group (The Slavs and Rus)**

Migrated into the areas in northeastern Europe in the late 6th and early 7th Centuries A.D.

Slavic clans settled along the Volga river and developed strong agricultural centers.

Local villages were unified as the “Rus” under the leadership of the Scandanavian King Rurik around 870-880 A.D.

“Rus” eventually made trade contacts with the Byzantine Empire and adopt Eastern Orthodox Christianity under Princess Olga and Prince Vladamir.

**Fourth group (The Invaders of France)**

Migrated into the areas of southwestern Europe (Kingdom of the Franks) in the 8th and 9th Centuries A.D.

Vikings initially came in conflict with the Franks around the 8th Century.

The Viking King Rollo was defeated at the Battle of Chartres by the troops of the Frankish King Charles the Simple in 911 A.D.

King Charles the Simple granted King Rollo the lands in France eventually known as “Normandy” (Land of the Norsemen) in exchange for loyalty and service against other raiding tribes.

**WAYS OF LIFE**

**Economic**

The Vikings developed into good agriculturists.

The Vikings were experienced fisherman of the northern seas

They were pastoralists who kept animals like horses, cattle, pigs, goats.

They were hunters who hunted wild game for meat.

They were also smelters and also made weapons and farming implements

Their economy was based on long distance sea and land trade .

Eventually traded with the Romans, Germanics, and even as far as the Middle East.

**Social**

Early tribes were centered on the old system of *leidang* – fleets where every ship was a unified family of sailor warriors

Lived in large households (called “long houses).

Households were grouped into clans.

Roof was thatched with grass.

Diet included fish, meat, and vegetables.

Animal hides and furs used for clothing.

Primarily oral cultures with a limited writing system.

Series of stories called *sagas* made up the basis of their world views.

Social Structure included Freeman, Tradesmen, Blacksmiths, and Slaves.

**Political**

Family household under eldest male member.

Family formed into warrior clans which attached themselves to a tribal lord by oaths of loyalty

Villages were often headed by a chieftain.

Larger political regions were headed by a tribal chief or king respectively.

Vikings credited with one of the oldest forms of Parliament (open-air Althing), where free men came to resolve feuds and establish laws for their community.

**Religious**

Polytheistic religion based on fertility gods thought to help with food production, daily concerns, and natural dangers.

Key gods known as Odin and Thor were worshipped primarily by the aristocratic and warrior elite.

Vikings believed that their gods were almost exclusively concerned with the wisdom and warrior like activities of only Slavic people.

Contact with Germanic Christians and the Byzantine Empire eventually converted the Vikings to Christianity.

**EFFECTS**

**POLITICAL**

Viking traditions of loyalty to tribal chiefs and obligated service to their lords influenced the development of Feudalism in Europe.

Viking practice of primogeniture was carried on in Europe as the Vikings and Germanic people inter-married and developed new kingdoms.

Viking settlements and alliances with Germanic tribes helped to create strong new kingdoms in Normandy (France) in 911 CE, and Kiev (Land of the Rus) by 890 CE.

**NAVIGATION**

The construction and design of Viking longboats or dragonships *(drakkar)* would influence the adaption of shallower drafts in traditional European ships by the 15th Century.

**ECONOMY**

Viking navigation skills allowed them to establish and expand trade routes between Northern Europe, Brittany, Spain, the Mediterranean, and up the Danube and Volga Rivers.

The Rus and the Byzantines established trade links between Central Europe and the Mediterranean Sea.

**MILITARY**

The long Viking traditions of their warrior society would inspire the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 and the Norman Crusades into the Holy Lands between 1096 – 1213.