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# The Sea Wolves: A History Of The Vikings



## Synopsis

In AD 793 Norse warriors struck the English isle of Lindisfarne and laid waste to it. Wave after wave of Norse Æðseawolves followed in search of plunder, land, or a glorious death in battle. Much of the British Isles fell before their swords, and the continental capitals of Paris and Aachen were sacked in turn. Turning east, they swept down the uncharted rivers of central Europe, captured Kiev and clashed with mighty Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. But there is more to the Viking story than brute force. They were makers of law - the term itself comes from an Old Norse word - and they introduced a novel form of trial by jury to England. They were also sophisticated merchants and explorers who settled Iceland, founded Dublin, and established a trading network that stretched from Baghdad to the coast of North America. In *The Sea Wolves*, Lars Brownworth brings to life this extraordinary Norse world of epic poets, heroes, and travellers through the stories of the great Viking figures. Among others, Leif the Lucky who discovered a new world, Ragnar Lothbrok the scourge of France, Eric Bloodaxe who ruled in York, and the crafty Harald Hardrada illuminate the saga of the Viking age - a time which "has passed away, and grown dark under the cover of night".

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I finished this book on my flight tonight. I've listened to two podcasts from Lars Brownworth's "12 Byzantine Rulers" about a selection of Roman emperors after the fall of the West...actually, now that I think about it, at least one of them was before that, Diocletian. It provided the inspiration for a much longer podcast series that I also enjoyed, "The History of Rome." And "Norman Centuries," a history of the former Vikings who took back to the sea and made war across the Channel in England, and in the Mediterranean in Sicily and the Holy Land. I enjoyed both of them. They showed his key strength, writing a lengthy, coherent narrative about a story in history, while tying the story into wider world history in many places. This book did not disappoint. It traces the Vikings leaving their homes in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, mostly Danish Vikings brutally attacking the Carolingian Empire, then its successor states the Francian kingdoms. Mostly Norwegian Vikings went west to Shetland, Orkney, Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland, and the America. Mostly Swedish Vikings went East and founded a kingdom in the Slavic lands, including much travel all the way to Constantinople and service for the Emperor, when they weren't fighting against him. The kingdom they founded developed into Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. He once again did a great job at telling a gripping story, and tying it to dozens of previously (to me) unrelated stories in Europe, in the East, and in the West. I know much more about European, American, and Russian history after reading this book, and I enjoyed it!

For me, this was by far the best history of the Vikings I have read. From the get go, the author drives the story forward in a historical way, covering the start of the Viking era as we know it, with the attack on the monastery at Lindesfarne, to the last major Viking battle at Stamford Bridge. I don't think anything is left out here, be it the Vikings prowess as ruthless warriors, to their exploration of Island, Greenland, the North Eastern US mainland, today's Russia, countries around the Mediterranean, their gifts as tradesmen and merchants.

The book is very informative. I had no idea how far reaching the Vikings expeditions were. A little difficulty with moving back and forth on the time line as he starts a new chapter. Did appreciate the author pointing out that motivations for looting changed over time to wanting land ownership and settling down. I missed an explanation regarding the early phase of looting and taking prisoners for the slave trade, it seems that some Vikings were away from home for many years. Pointing out

stories of legend and myth building is a good added aspect to the material. Good read; keeps the motivated, moving forward.

As an introduction, it is a worthy read. It is only occasionally cited, which is a bit suspect. Brownworth often confirms that he has read the Icelandic Sagas by introducing ideas..."in many/some of the Sagas..." while rarely mentioning them by name. This is unfortunate. But, as a starting narrative framework, it does the job. I gave it four stars, because I just like reading about Vikings, and this made good reading on the T. After reading this book, I recommend reading the Icelandic Sagas, if you really want to be enthralled. Also, for a more penetrating scholarly analysis of Viking culture and society, read "Viking Age Iceland" by Jesse L. Byock.

The author did a remarkable job of retelling the Viking History in such an engaging way. The book takes you from their early raiding off the Irish coast, through England, France and even Russia. They settled in barely habitable land in Iceland and Greenland. They even briefly touched North America. The emperor of Constantinople was so impressed with the Viking Warriors, they became loyal members of the Byzantine royal army for many years. They smashed most of Europe for a brief three centuries and helped create many of the descending nation states of the medieval age. They touched and conquered many parts of Western Europe at one point or another. Very entertaining read.

The only reason I didn't give it five stars was that it really needed to be longer in order to fill in many details. It is a thoughtfully composed and enjoyable history of the Norsemen and their conquests leading to a remaking of Europe as we know it today. Reading it encouraged me to read his other written history of the Normans which I am now enjoying. I give Brownworth a big thumbs up.

A good basic history of the Vikings. Some details seem to conflict with other histories of Russia and the Mediterranean. The role of the Vikings in Normandy was a bit confusing. The best part was the delineation of the travels of the Vikings from the various countries to their destinations and their motives. The best clue to the character of the book is the lack of an index.

I've always had an interest in the Vikings.....big, aggressive, innovative, with one of the all time great mythologies...Ygdrasil, the tree of life, Ragnarok, twilight of the gods, Valhalla, where warriors go to fight and feast after they died. I grew up with Swedes and Norwegians in Northern

Maine, perhaps that was an influence, always liked their culture too. But I digress, the book. Brownworth gives a nice chronology, from the early raiding (Hey Ragnar, is that an Abbey on Lindisfarne?) to the kingdom makers like Cnut, how they triumphed, failed, and influenced European civilization. I watch both "The Last Kingdom" and "The Vikings" (of course), and this book helped to tie the two together. For example, Ubba, the great Viking warrior killed by Uhtred in the former is the son of Ragnar Lothbrok in the latter! It's well written and easy to follow, I've read books where just keeping the characters straight was a chore, I mean, how many Magnuses were there? Recommended for Norsephiles, Lars has a book on the Normans I, also Viking stock, and they influenced history just a bit.....

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