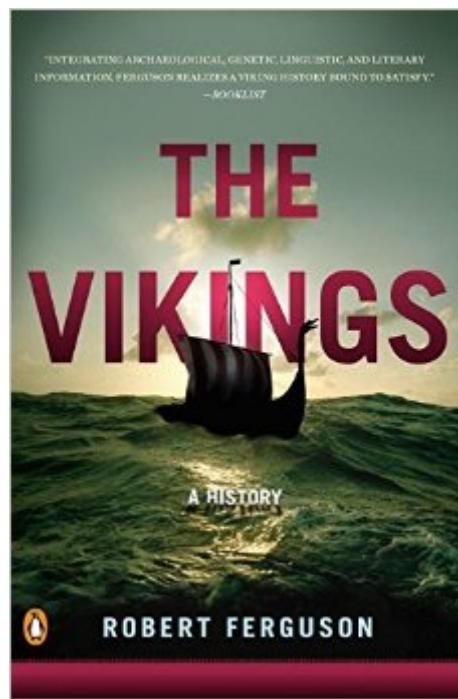


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The Vikings: A History



Synopsis

A comprehensive and thrilling history of the Vikings for fans of the History Channel series From Harald Bluetooth to Cnut the Great, the feared seamen and plunderers of the Viking Age ruled Norway, Sweden, and Denmark but roamed as far as Byzantium, Greenland, and America. Raiders and traders, settlers and craftsmen, the medieval Scandinavians who have become familiar to history as Vikings never lose their capacity to fascinate, from their ingeniously designed longboats to their stormy pantheon of Viking gods and goddesses, ruled by Odin in Valhalla. Robert Ferguson is a sure guide across what he calls "the treacherous marches which divide legend from fact in Viking Age history." His long familiarity with the literary culture of Scandinavia with its skaldic poetry is combined with the latest archaeological discoveries to reveal a sweeping picture of the Norsemen, one of history's most amazing civilizations. Impeccably researched and filled with compelling accounts and analyses of legendary Viking warriors and Norse mythology, *The Vikings* is an indispensable guide to medieval Scandinavia and is a wonderful companion to the History Channel series.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Robert Ferguson's new history of the Vikings is a remarkable book. It succeeds at setting out the broad historical outlines of Viking history and describing the unique character of Viking life and culture. He falls a bit short, however, in a thesis which he proposes, argues for strongly, and then mostly abandons. But first, this book's many strengths. Ferguson is especially good at incorporating archaeological evidence in his work. His first chapters deal with Viking burial remains, such as the Oseberg ship, and what such gravesites can--and cannot--tell us about the

Vikings. Further chapters discuss the Jelling Stones and the frequency of buried coin hoards. Ferguson also dwells at length on some of the less well-remembered journeys of the Vikings, such as their forays into Russia and Spain, and their gradual assimilation with preexisting cultures in places like Normandy and Russia. His chapter on the Viking presence in late Anglo-Saxon England is exceptionally good, perhaps the best chapter in the book. The only thing keeping me from giving The Vikings five stars is one of Ferguson's central theses, that the Viking Age began as a reaction to Carolingian efforts to convert continental Viking peoples (i.e: the Danes) to Christianity. Ferguson argues quite strongly in favor of this interpretation, claiming that the targets of Viking raids were pointedly Christian locations like monasteries (Lindisfarne) and other religious centers. The Viking Age, according to Ferguson, was a distinct dichotomy of heathen versus Christian, with the heathens doing the raiding and the Christians praying for it to stop. This is an interesting thesis but is hardly borne out by the facts. In fact, Ferguson's own book contradicts it repeatedly.

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