

## HIST21141:

### Europe from the Vikings to the Crusades: Violence, Acculturation and Group Formation



King Æthelred 'the Unready', from the Abingdon Chronicle  
(British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B. VI, fo. 87v)

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In the late eighth century, Scandinavians – known today as ‘Vikings’ – made a violent entrance onto the wider European stage. Although their tactics were no more bloody than those of their Christian counterparts, their lack of Christian religion and, in particular, their attacks on Christian religious centres struck fear into the hearts of Christian authors, who conceptualized their new adversaries as fulfilling a Biblical prophecy of a mighty army coming from the far north. Yet far from fulfilling this semi-apocalyptic vision, Scandinavians gradually acculturated to European society, creating new polities, whether duchies or kingdoms, ruled over by Christianized Scandinavian elites.

This module will examine the various transformations which engulfed Europe between the ninth and twelfth centuries, both generally and through the case study of a group of Scandinavians who came to be known as ‘Normans’. The group formation of the Normans – whose group identity emphasized both their newly-assumed ethnicity and their Christian observance – can be traced to the time of their settlement in Normandy (in northern France). They subsequently expanded to rule over Italy, England, and Sicily, presiding over centralizing monarchies. European society was changing: alongside such reinvigorated monarchies, Christian structures were undergoing a transformation of their own. Monastic reform, the rising power of the papacy and changes in church doctrine – particularly the development of notions of holy war – reshaped the bounds within which violence could be exercised. The ensuing changes would see European groups (including Normans)

setting out on the Crusades to dispense what their Western European contemporaries viewed as exemplary and just violence. How much had the expectations of legitimate violence changed since the first Viking age? And how far can we see the acculturation of European crusaders with local Islamic and Eastern Orthodox Christian populations in the newly-formed Latin Christian states of the Middle East? Finally, to what extent did the European encounters with Islamic societies on the Crusades be linked to the so-called twelfth-century 'Renaissance' and the revival of learning?

### **Indicative topics:**

- Europe in the Ninth Century: Franks, Vikings, and Anglo-Saxons
- The Tenth Century: Continental Reshaping and English Renewal
- The Revival of Religious Life: Family and Marriage
- Warlords and the Return of the Vikings
- The Rise of the Normans
- A Norman Empire?
- The Gregorian Watershed
- From Piety to Fanaticism: the Genesis of Crusade
- Europe and the Middle East
- The Flowering of Europe

**Assessment:** 1 x Source Analysis (1,000 words = 35%) and 1 x Essay (2,500 words = 65%)

### **Indicative Reading**

- Elisabeth van Houts, *The Normans in Europe* (Manchester, 2000)
- Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200* (London, 1996)
- Nicholas Higham and Martin Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World* (New Haven, 2013)
- R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford, 2000)
- Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999)
- Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 2009)
- Leonie Hicks, *The Normans: A Short History* (London, 2016)
- Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (London, 1993)
- Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest. A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989)