

Course Syllabus

Jump to Today

Scandinavian 60 (4 units)

Spring 2018

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MWF 1-2, 109 Dwinelle

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Heroic Legends of the North

L&S Breadth: Arts & Literature

Scandinavian 60 is a requirement for the five major concentrations in Scandinavian.

A hamstrung goldsmith. A cross-dressing god. A teenage dragonslayer. A warrior who fights in the form of a bear. A deceived queen who takes a terrible revenge on her closest family. A king who tortures his subjects into changing their religion. These are just a few of the remarkable characters whose stories have survived almost a thousand years from when they were composed by anonymous Scandinavian poets and authors. What gave these narratives their contemporary relevance, and why have they survived so long?

The time these stories come from (c. 800-1300 CE) was a period of radical change in Scandinavia, from the pagan warrior societies of the Viking Age, to the Christian, literate, centralized world of the Middle Ages. In this course, you will learn about the literature and other media of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia, and explore how these stories of gods, kings, warriors, shield-maidens and tragic lovers can be related to the social changes taking place at the time they were enjoyed by their first audiences. You will acquire tools for reading and interpreting texts and artifacts from distant times and places, and explore some of the recent resonances of these narratives in various media (e.g. music, film, TV, graphic novels, games).

Texts

The Poetic Edda, trans. by Carolyne Larrington, revised edition (OUP: 2014).

The Saga of the Volsungs, trans. by Jesse Byock (Penguin: 2000).

The Saga of King Hrolf kraki, trans. by Jesse Byock (Penguin: 1998).

Njal's saga, trans. by Robert Cook (Penguin: 2001).

Further texts will be provided on bcourses.

Prerequisites: none. The course and readings are in English.

In this course you will:

- learn about the society, literature, culture and media of Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia;
- get acquainted with some of the best-known heroes of the north;
- and acquire tools for reading and interpreting texts and other artifacts from distant times and places.

Calculation of final grade:

Class participation: 20% (10% attendance, 10% participation)

Midterm: 20%

Term paper: 30%

Final exam: 30%

Extra credit: write your own saga / skald competition: 1% each (completion), plus everlasting fame

Workload:

Midterm test (20%: short answer questions plus text analysis); a term paper (30%: 5-6 pages on a set question); a final exam (30%: short answers, text analysis and essay questions); writing your own legendary saga and heroic poem (1% each extra credit, ungraded). The test and exam are closed book.

Disability and accommodation:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation due to a disability should contact the **Disabled Students' Program** (<https://dsp.berkeley.edu/>). You are also welcome to contact me confidentially to discuss your needs.

Attendance and participation:

Regular attendance and participation are necessary to do well in the course. Both are graded. Participation includes

- asking a question
- contributing to whole-class discussions
- working in class with other students in a small group
- completing in-class writing tasks.

Two unexcused absences will have no impact on your grade (life happens). Further absences must be documented with a note from your doctor, coach, director, etc., if they are to be excused.

Plagiarism:

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

"Plagiarism is defined as use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source, for example:

- Wholesale copying of passages from works of others into your homework, essay, term paper, or dissertation without acknowledgment.
- Use of the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment.
- Paraphrasing of another person's characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device without acknowledgment."

It is the policy of the Scandinavian Department that any cases of plagiarism or other cheating will result in a grade of "F" for the assignment in question and will be reported to the Center for Student Conduct. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes plagiarism, including resubmitting work you have previously done for another class. If you have questions about plagiarism, please visit the **website** (<http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity>) for the Center for Student Conduct or ask me.

Technology etiquette:

Please silence your phone and put it away during class. You may need to use a laptop and/or tablet in class to access bcourses or take notes (although reading and note-taking the old-fashioned way, on paper, aids learning and retention, see **here** (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>)). Please do not use these devices for recreational purposes during class, as this distracts both yourself and your classmates.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Abbreviations

PE = *The Poetic Edda*, trans. by Carolyne Larrington

HK = *The Saga of King Hrolf kraki*, trans. by Jesse Byock

SV = *The Saga of the Völsungs*, trans. by Jesse Byock

NS = *Njal's saga*, trans. by Robert Cook

bcourses = available on the SCAN 60 bcourses site

Introduction

Wed Jan 17 Course introduction; what is Old Norse?

Fri Jan 19 Historical and cultural background

Background reading: Pedersen, 'Power and aristocracy'; excerpts from *Penguin historical atlas of the Vikings* (both on **bcourses**)

Super(natural)heroes: Thor and Volund

Mon Jan 22 The *Prose* and *Poetic Eddas*

Wed Jan 24 Snorri, *Thor's contest with Utgarða-Loki* (**bcourses**)

Reading: Lindow, 'Thor' (**bcourses**)

Fri Jan 26 **PE** (*Thrym's Poem*)

Mon Jan 29 *PE (Poem of Volund) I*

Wed Jan 31 *PE (Poem of Volund) II + visual sources*

Fri Feb 2 Modern reception: excerpts from *Thor* (dir. Branagh, 2011)

Reading: Jón Karl Helgason, 'The most exciting superhero', Martin Arnold, 'The mighty Thor' (both **bcourses**)

Feedback questionnaire

King Hrolf kraki and his champions

Mon Feb 5 *HK*, chs. 1-12

Time, place, author/narrator

Wed Feb 7 *HK*, chs. 13-23

Character, perspective

Schjødt, 'Notion of berserkir', Liberman, 'Berserks in history and legend' (both **bcourses**)

Fri Feb 9 *HK*, chs. 24-34

Plot structure, motivation

Fates of the Volsungs

Mon Feb 12 Heroic lineage: *SV* chs. 1-12

Quinn, 'Realisation' (**bcourses**)

Wed Feb 14 Sigurd the dragonslayer: *SV* chs. 13-20

Fri Feb 16 A love square: *SV* chs. 22-34

Heinemann, 'Brynhild's mousetrap' (**bcourses**)

Submit your own saga

Mon Feb 19 *Presidents' Day – no class meeting*

Tristan and Isolde in the north

Wed Feb 21 *Tristrams saga (bcourses)*, chs. 1-29

Guest lecture, Rosie Taylor

Fri Feb 23 *Tristrams saga (bcourses)*, chs. 30-60

Guest lecture, Rosie Taylor

Mon Feb 26 *Tristrams saga (bcourses)*, chs. 61-101

Guest lecture, Rosie Taylor

Wed Feb 28 Hrolf, Tristram, Sigurd et al. What is a saga hero?

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Fri Mar 2 Review

Mon Mar 5 **Midterm**

The Volsungs in the Poetic Edda

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Wed Mar 7 *Saga of the Volsungs* and the *Poetic Edda*: a tangled web

Fri Mar 9 Helgi: the hero and the valkyrie: **PE** (*Helgi poems*)

Mon Mar 12 Sigurd the dragonslayer: **PE** (*Poem of Regin, Poem of Fafnir*) + visual sources

- Wed Mar 14 Sigurd betrayed: **PE** (*Fragment of a Poem about Sigurd*)
- Fri Mar 16 Gudrun in grief: **PE** (*First Poem of Gudrun*)
- Mon Mar 19 Brynhild justified: **PE** (*Brynhild's Ride to Hel*)
- Wed Mar 21 Afterlife of the Volsungs (guest lecture, Adam Carl)
Sanders, 'Adaptation' (**bcourses**)
- Fri Mar 23 Endless vengeance: **PE** (*Poem of Atli*)
- Spring break – Mar 26-30*
- Olaf Tryggvason: a Viking saint?*
- Mon Apr 2 **Term paper due – no class**
- Wed Apr 4 A king goes to Valhalla: *Eiriksmal* (**bcourses**)
- Fri Apr 6 *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason I* (**bcourses**)
- Mon Apr 9 *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason II* (**bcourses**)
- Wed Apr 11 *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason III* (**bcourses**)
Grønlie, 'Missionary saint and saga hero'

Njal: a farmer-hero in Iceland

Fri Apr 13 **NS** (chs. 1-40)
Hamer, 'Pre-Christian society in *Njáls saga*' (**bcourses**)

Mon Apr 16 **NS** (chs. 41-81)
Andersson, 'Displacement of the heroic ideal' (**bcourses**)

Wed Apr 18 **NS** (chs. 82-106)
Miller, 'Conversion and the genius of the law' (**bcourses**)

Fri Apr 20 **NS** (chs. 107-132)
Ai, 'Skarp-Heðinn's grin' (**bcourses**)

Mon Apr 23 **NS** (chs. 133-159)
Clover, 'The same thing, sort of' (**bcourses**)

Wed Apr 25 Discussion of *Njal's saga*
Vésteinn Ólason, 'Great oaks' (**bcourses**)

Fri Apr 27 **Skalds' competition**

Week 15 – RRR week Review session tba

Week 16 – Final exam Exam group 5: Tues 8 May, 8-11a

[CHECK on official Schedule of Final Examinations, available after Spring Break]