

PROCLAMATION !

UPCOMING AMRS EVENTS

Wed., Feb. 22 - Professor John Soderberg will give a talk titled *Medieval Ireland's Monasteries: An Archaeologist's View*. The talk will be held at 4 PM in Corns 312.



THE STAFF OF THE TRIDENT

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Special thanks to Hannah Simpson for the interview!

Want to write a story? Have ideas for the next issue?

Send them to jmwaterw@owu.edu.

ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL, AND RENAISSANCE STUDIES

THE TRIDENT

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HISTORICITY IN HISTORY'S *VIKINGS*

By: Matthew Pheneger

The last few years of the decade, the medieval Vikings have experienced a resurgence in the imagination and popular culture. With the release of popular video games like *Skyrim*, the debut of the hit drama *Vikings*, and

the building of a Norse Pagan Temple in Iceland, the Norse seafarers seem to be striking a chord with in our 21st century world.

The History Channel's *Vikings* met success despite having to compete with popular shows like HBO's *Game of Thrones*.
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 of *Thrones*. The show has exceeded expectation continuously since its release three years ago and was renewed for a fourth season—which aired this November. *Vikings* is inspired by a number of the Old Norse Sagas and is loosely based on events that occurred throughout the closing centuries of the Dark Ages. Though many actual figures from medieval history feature prominently in the show (Rollo the Viking King of Normandy and Albert the Great to name a few), the story primarily follows the life of Ragnar Lodbrok, who in the historical record seems to be half myth and half history. In the pilot, Ragnar is an ambitious farmer with a dubious claim of descent from the Norse God Odin. He dreams of exploring the western lands after hearing talk of the mysterious west from a strange wanderer. The historical Ragnar Lodbrok in *Ragnar's Saga Lodbrokar* is the son of the Swedish King Sigurd Hring and a relative of the Danish King Gudfred. Gudfred distinguished himself by taking part in many raids in Francia and Anglo-Saxon England.

Ragnar's Saga—preserved along with many of the other Norse stories in 13th century Iceland—is a continuation of the more famous



Völsunga Saga. In it, the poet tells of Ragnar's quest to win the hand of Thora Town-Hart (Thora Borgarhjöt) by slaying a great serpent, Ragnar's second marriage to the Queen Aslaug and the deeds of their sons, and finally Ragnar's death at the hands of the historical King Aella of Northumbria. The latter of these characters appear as major players in The History Channel's adaptation. Similar legends are told in *The Tale of Ragnar's Sons* (*Ragnarssona þátr*), which features Bjorn Ironside; he's also a prominent character in the T.V. show.

Despite some of the more story-like aspects of his exploits, Ragnar is accepted by many scholars to have been a living historical figure, if not one who walks the line between myth and reality. In

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some respects, the stories about him mirror the literature of the Norse people as a whole, as it transitioned from fantastic myths concerned with gods, heroes, and dragons to more believable accounts of men. Scholars read the latter as semi-historical accounts.

References to his life can be found in other works—most notably in the two poems *Ragnarsdrapa* and the *Krákumál*, and Book IX of Saxo Grammaticus's 12th century work *Gesta Danorum* (literally, *Deeds of the Danes*.)

It was in the *Gesta Danorum* that the often contradictory events and feats attributed to Ragnar Lothbrok were consolidated into a cohesive piece of historiography, though the modern scholarly seems to favor the opinion that Grammaticus described the lives of several historical figures rather than one. As a consequence, the more-or-less factual deeds of different persons may have been attributed to one man, Ragnar, whose legend continues to stir the imagination.

FURTHER READING

Historicity in History's Vikings Historical Literature Featuring Ragnar Lodbrok:

Gesta Danorum, Book IX

Ragnarsonna þátr

Ragnars Saga Lodbrokar

Ragnarsdrapa

Krakumál

Ragnar in Modern Fiction:

The Hammer and the Cross

The Sword of Ganelon

Sea-Kings in England

The Viking



allows for stronger attacks and the ability to chop and slice with the edge. Given the multiple examples of spearheads which were long enough to be thrust entirely through a person before reaching the end, it seems likely that these were used to cut. While using a spear in both hands would allow for a longer spear, it doesn't seem Dark Age warriors took advantage of the possibility, likely to avoid overreach with a spear. Because a spear is ineffective when an opponent is closer to the soldier than the spear-tip, it is likely that all soldiers would want spears of roughly equal length.

The single-handed spear would be by far the most common weapon during the Dark Ages, according to both written and artistic sources. The debate over whether a soldier would use the spear underhand, with the spear held high and the spearhead closest to the pinkie, or overhand, with the spear held lower and the spearhead closest to the thumb is relatively pointless. The evidence is largely inconclusive, and it is likely that either grip could be used depending on the situation. A spear held in the underhand can be easily thrown if necessary, and allows for a stronger thrust. However, it

also has to be held much closer to the balance, so it has a shorter reach than an overhand grip, which allows for the best use of the spear's great length, but doesn't have the same punch as an underhand grip.

The javelin or dart are essentially the same weapon, a short spear cast as a missile with the aid of a cord. A javelin would be tapered from the center of balance (roughly 2/5 the way from the point) to each end; this point of balance allowed for a good mix of a strong force on impact and range. One of the most important—yet least known—aspects of a javelin was the use of a cord (Latin *amentum*); it would have a loop at one end and the other would be tied to the javelin behind the balance point, and wrapped in loose spirals so that the warrior would fit the first one or two fingers through the end loop of the cord. They would then hold the javelin like a pencil forward of the balance point. When used properly, the throwing cord gives the javelin a spiral, allowing for a longer throw and stronger impact than a javelin thrown by hand alone.

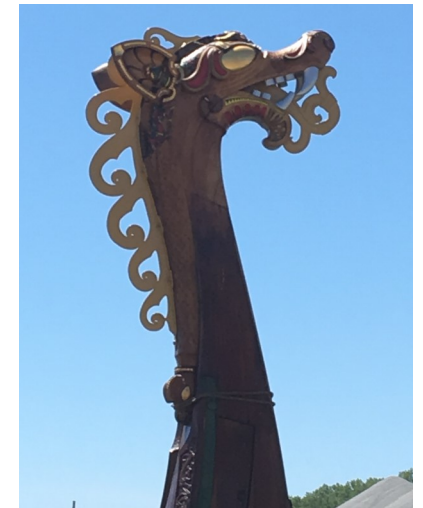
DRAKEN HARALD HÅRFAGRE: A LONG NAME FOR A SMALL SHIP

By: Josephine DiNovo

When I returned home after graduation, I was not looking forward to the Republican National Convention occurring in downtown Cleveland; I was nervous for the crowds and chaos. And I wasn't the only one. The semi-regular Tall Ships Festival, which normally stops in Cleveland, had to change its route to avoid the same crowds I feared, and instead the ships docked in the small town of Fairport Harbor. For a few days, residents could imagine the arrival of pirates and Vikings in their 21st century town.

While there were plenty of cool ships at the Tall Ships Festival—a massive Spanish galleon was the highlight of the lineup—I was most excited to see the Draken Harald Hårfagre—a replica Viking ship from Haugesund, Norway. This trip to America was its first Transatlantic voyage—and its first journey from its hometown. As my family waited in line to tour the Draken Harald

Hårfagre, no one could believe that this (comparatively) small ship travelled across the ocean. Naturally, I have read in my high school and college courses that Vikings travelled across the Atlantic before Columbus's (in)famous voyage in 1492, but I had never previously considered the gravity of sailing across the tumultuous ocean in a ship that doesn't even have a belowdecks. The only place to sleep is on tents on the deck, and those same tents are the only protection from rain and wind. With all our GPS equipment, we still lose ships



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and airplanes to the ocean, so I was amazed to think of such an old style of ship safely journeying across the ocean.

But the Draken Harald Hårfagre makes up for its lack of 5-star sleeping accommodations with dragons—well, one dragon. Like the classic Viking ships, the Draken Harald Hårfagre has a dragon on the front. And this creature made it all the way to Cleveland from Haugesund without losing an ear or any other adornments. Since the voyage to America was the Draken Harald Hårfagre's first time leaving its hometown, it was also the first time its dragon joined the crew. When at home, Viking ships did not attach their frightening decorations, for fear of frightening friendly land spirits—and their fellows at home. While



the Draken Harald Hårfagre's crew hardly expected to scare anyone with their golden dragon, they still maintained the Viking tradition by only attaching it after they sailed from Haugesund.

Mostly, seeing the Draken Harald Hårfagre let my inner nerd out. Seeing how the boards fit together and smelling the scent of tar smeared on the ropes left space for my imagination to think about travelling on such a ship with only the stars for guidance. I really enjoyed seeing a “real” Viking ship, not just a scale model in a museum or a diagram in a book; climbing aboard the Draken Harald Hårfagre gave me a really cool opportunity to meditate on what I learned in my AMRS courses in a new way. And a chance to remind my family of my command of random knowledge about Vikings.

Josephine DiNovo graduated from OWU in 2016 with majors in English Literature and German Literature, and minors in History and Medieval Studies.

OPUS ANGLICANUM:

JONES' DEFINITION FROM *THE LONDON REVIEW*

By: Christopher Shanley

Opus anglicanum (English work in Latin) was a type of lavish embroidery



made in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was used to decorate items like ecclesiastical vestments, banners, and cushions. Fabrics of linen, wool, and silk were richly decorated with metallic thread, metals, and gemstones. London acted as the primary production center, few were made elsewhere in England. They were coveted by powerful Europeans. Matthew Paris even recorded that the “London merchants. . . sold them at whatever price they chose.”

Yet these creations were not very English despite their reputation. Many of the prominent artists immigrated from Germany and the Low Countries, several of whom worked for the English royals. They also had diverse patrons;

Roman cardinals and non-English officials purchased the embroidery as well. Another testament to the skill of these artisans is the presence of so many individual names. It is rare for a medieval artist to be specifically named, yet there is a relative wealth of names among these embroiders. But the embroiderers were often supplied with designs by other artists.

The materials used, though, made the most impact on the internationality of *opus anglicanum*. Linen was imported from France, Belgium, and Holland. Silk came from the Orient—and later from Europe. Wool was likely a local material, but some gold- and silversmiths in London created the fine thread needed for needlework.

The international aspect of this trade decreased over time, however. The Guild of Broderers (embroiderers) petitioned the mayor of London that no embroiderer in England should employ foreigners unless the Guild approved, turning the trade into a much more English affair. By that time, however, English embroidery was past its heyday. The request was unable to save the craft.

SPEARS IN DARK AGE WARFARE

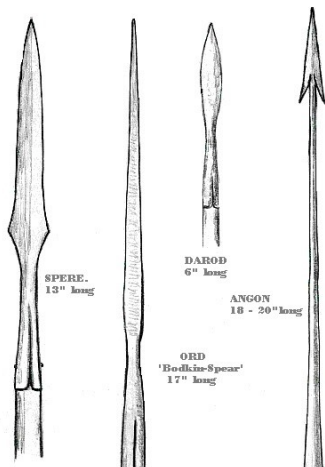
By: Colin McGarry

Peter Marren, author of *Battles of the Dark Ages*, describes spears as “the universal weapon of the Dark Ages,” and the assertion holds up: ‘spears’ was a frequent metaphor for soldiers. The Welsh poem *Y Gododdin* even refers to battle as “the conflict of spears,” and is by far the most frequent piece of military equipment found in graves—and one of the most common grave-goods overall. Legal texts also show the omnipresence of spears, with the weapon appearing in the wills of even the highest ranks of nobility.

However, ancient peoples did not seem to view a spear as a single weapon. Many ancient cultures had multiple words we would translate as “spear.” Most Anglo-Saxon terms for spear contain the words *gar* or *spera*, similar to the Old Norse *spjót*, which is closest to a generic spear and made compound words like Old English *barspere* (“boar-spear”) or Old Norse *höggspjót* (“chopping-spear”). However, not all

words translated as “spear” do, such as Old English *aesc*, which seems to indicate a two-handed spear with a large head, possibly a similar weapon to the Old Norse *atgeirr*. Another common difference is between a weapon used in the hand and a thrown spear, such as Old English *daroo* and Old Norse *darraðr* (both “dart”). For the purposes of this discussion, we will divide spears into three categories: two-handed spears (such as the *aesc*), single handed spears (such as the *barspere*), and javelins/thrown spears (such as *daroo* or *darraðr*).

The two handed spear is perhaps easiest to discuss. Using the spear in two hands



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COASTAL WOES

By: Kyle Rabung

Hurry, hurry, rush and run, flee away!

Ships embark across the whale-road.

Warriors come, axe in hand, this day,

Hurry, hurry, rush and run. Flee away.

My grief is great as is dismay,

Our land once fair now is harrowed.

Hurry, hurry, rush and run, flee away,

Ships embark across the whale-road.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?: ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

By: Jordan Waterwash

“Want to know my first experience with Shakespeare?” Hannah Simpson, actor and recent OWU alum, says with a mischievous grin.

“Definitely,” I respond eagerly.

“My brother was more of a theatre kid than I was at the time, so we watched a production of *Macbeth*. When Duncan’s bloody ghost came on and went *BLAAAH!* I got so scared, and I did not sleep for three days.”

Luckily, Hannah was able to get over her initial reaction to Shakespeare’s theatrics and became a bit of an expert on his works. She petitioned to minor in Shakespeare, but, unfortunately, it is not possible. She didn’t let it stop her, though. Throughout her OWU career, she took every Shakespeare course offered. But the fascination had to start somewhere.

“I played the apothecary and some other randos in *Romeo and Juliet*,” she says with a bag of pretzels in her hand. “I know I read *Hamlet* my senior year of high school,” she continues, with her usual animated demeanor. “Dr. Long encouraged me to

apply to the Travel-Learning Course [“Shakespeare at the Globe”] and I got accepted. That’s when I realized that [Shakespeare] was something I was good at, and it’s important. I didn’t take any Shakespeare my sophomore year, and I realized I never wanted to do that again.”

While at OWU, Hannah spent her final year creating and acting in her own version of *Hamlet*, in which all the parts were played by women—a twist on the Renaissance practice of only allowing male actors on stage. Now, she’s acting in a theatre company in the heart of Chicago called Odd’s Bodkins. The group was founded in 2015, and is entirely run by



women. They perform Shakespearean plays as well as some modern productions. What’s interesting about Odd’s Bodkins, though, is its mission statement: They aim to diversify their casts and bluntly defy norms.

“We have seven members, and we try to replicate the original practices, but we’re particular about the practices that we use,” she says. “We’re just a bunch of Shakespeare lovers.”

She explains that they take the practices that benefit the experience the most. They do not use lights or sets, but

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don’t use other techniques Renaissance theatre companies would have employed.

Hannah has acted in two Shakespearean productions so far—Touchstone in *As You Like It* and Balthasar and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*—and has composed the music for *Much Ado* on her ukulele. Though, she continues to credit her education at OWU for how far she’s come.

“I’m really lucky I was able to tailor my education at OWU to Shakespeare. If I didn’t have that training or education, I wouldn’t be here now.”

Hannah’s next Shakespearean role will be in *Midsummer’s Night Dream* as Bottom.

Hannah graduated in 2015 with majors in Theatre and English and a minor in Women and Gender Studies.