



VIKINGS

Dress, Culture, and Society

- GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION
- CULTURAL BELIEFS
- CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS
- CULTURAL ISSUES
- CULTURAL INFLUENCED

By: Mcneil, Terria

1. Identify the geographic location – **Explain in detail how the location influences dress, culture, and society.** (past and/or present) (show 5 picture examples on a second page)

Vikings were Scandinavian warriors known for their seafaring skills, who invaded and settled in various parts of Europe from the 9th to the 11th century, leaving a lasting impact on European history. These Pagan warriors from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden began their raids due to a mix of overpopulation in their homelands and the weakness of their targets. They were farmers who owned many boats and dominated the seas with their longships, conducting quick hit-and-run attacks on coastal cities and towns. During the 9th to 11th centuries, they found plenty of small villages to raid, earning the term "vikingr," which means pirate in their language.

Vikings originated from the Scandinavian regions, specifically Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, key areas for exploration and trade. The Swedish Vikings focused on expanding eastward, setting up trade routes that reached parts of what are now Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (*The Editors*). On the other hand, the Danish Vikings were known for their raids and settlements in Western Europe, particularly their invasions of England, where they created the Danelaw. This Danelaw covered parts of northern and eastern England, and the Vikings also set up cities like Dublin. They conducted raids across the British Isles, including England, Scotland, and Ireland. They settled in places like the Shetland, Orkney, and Hebrides islands, using these locations as bases for further expansion. Additionally, they launched significant attacks in France, including notable assaults on Paris, and in Eastern Europe, the Byzantine Empire became an important center for trade (*The Editors*).

The culture and society of Scandinavia were heavily shaped by its climate and geography, particularly its access to waterways that connected them with nearby areas.

During the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries, the region experienced harsh winters, which made it necessary for people to wear warm, durable clothing. Layers of wool and linen were common, with wool being the go-to fabric for winter, while lighter materials like linen were preferred in the summer. The Vikings were known for their extensive trade networks, which linked them to warmer regions. Their communities were typically small and self-sufficient, built on strong family ties and loyalty. They often ventured abroad to raid and set up settlements in places like England, Ireland, and Normandy. In these societies, women took care of the farms and households while men went off to raid, like the traditional roles seen in some modern families.

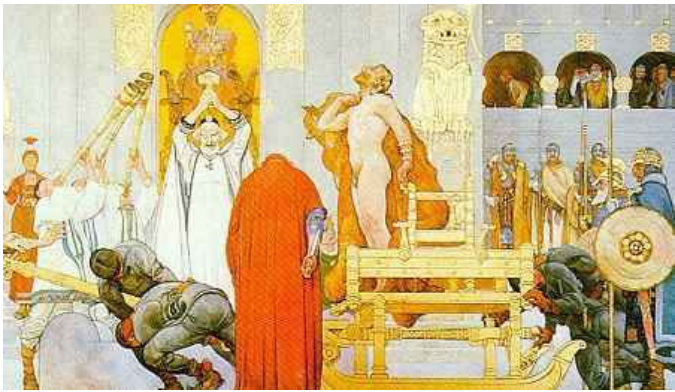




2. Identify cultural beliefs - **How do these beliefs influence dress, culture, and society?** (refer to text for cultural beliefs) (show 5 picture examples on a second page)

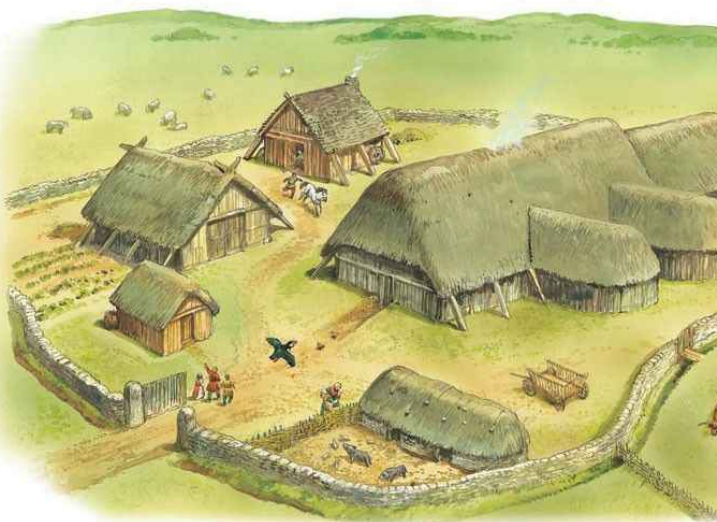
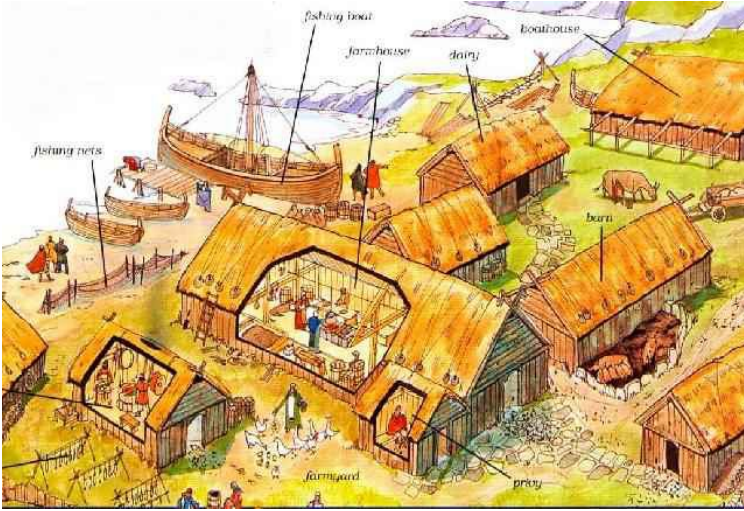
Vikings were daring and courageous individuals who were drawn to the excitement of exploring new territories. They held a strong Norse pagan belief that the Norns determined everyone's destiny, and dying in battle was seen as a noble act. Warriors believed that Odin, the chief god, would welcome them into Valhalla after their death. With such beliefs, it made sense to seize the opportunity and go on raids. After the initial raid, it would have been clear to everyone just how profitable this lifestyle could be.

Charlemagne the first emperor in the West in over 300 years brought him into conflict with the Eastern Roman Empire and used force to convert pagans to Christianity (*Wikipedia*), but the Vikings mostly transitioned to Christianity without violence. During the early Viking Age, traders noticed they were losing business because many of their trading partners were Christians. Christian traders often favored other Christians, which meant that pagans and Muslims were at a disadvantage. To navigate this, a Viking trader might wear a cross when dealing with Christians but switch back to his Thor's hammer when he returned home. If he were not baptized, he could practice both religions, which was a widespread practice in Scandinavia for several centuries. Initially, the Viking Norse were not interested in Christianity. They were devoted to their gods and satisfied with their beliefs. From the 700s to the 800s, Christian priests and monks from England and the Frankish Empire began to spread their faith in Viking territories (*When Christianity*). However, the conversion process took a long time. Even when a Danish or Swedish king converted and declared his people Christian, many still clung to their pagan traditions and old gods. By the end of the Viking Age, though, most Vikings had embraced Christianity, getting baptized and buried according to the Christian faith.



3. Identify cultural characteristics – **How do these characteristics influence dress, culture, and society?** (refer to text for cultural characteristics) (show 5 examples on the next page)

In Chapter 4, we explored the relationship between social cultural systems and clothing, focusing on religion, ideology, and attire. The Vikings were like nomads, their characteristics were mostly tribal and sociocultural, moving around without a fixed home, hunting and gathering food. Others settled down, tending to small gardens, or raising domesticated animals like cattle, sheep, or horses. Their social structure was egalitarian, meaning everyone had equal standing, and people were organized into family groups based on marriage and blood relations. One aspect of Viking imperial social culture is that it helped them grow and spread to different regions, especially along the coasts of Europe. The book explains that a case refers to a community of people who promote a certain type of work and only marry within their group, which is part of how the Vikings were able to expand into new areas. Social status varied according to age, skills, gender, and one's role within the family group, which influenced the responsibilities and privileges they experienced. This suggests that Vikings did not let children join in on hunting trips until they reached a certain age. In their small villages, when important decisions needed to be made, all adults took part in discussions and decision-making, which is known as an acephalous political system. The Vikings valued bravery, strength, and combat skills, making warfare a key part of their identity. Success in battle brought honor and favor from the gods, which was crucial for their economic survival and pursuit of glory. Women in Viking society had rights too; they could own property, inherit land, initiate divorce, and engage in both religious and economic activities.



4. Identify cultural issues - What are the issues? **How do these cultural issues influence dress, culture, and society?** (show 5 picture examples on the next page)

The Vikings encountered a range of cultural challenges, such as social inequality, religious disputes, and external pressures. These factors not only characterized the Viking Age but also significantly influenced their legacy, which continues to intrigue historians and enthusiasts. Their society was divided into three primary classes: jarls, Karls, and thralls. Thralls, who were born into slavery, had limited personal freedoms and rights, making it uncommon for people to change classes, which created tensions in their communities. Viking women had more rights compared to many others of their time, like owning property and initiating divorce, but they still faced restrictions in politics and warfare. Moreover, female thralls often suffered severe exploitation, frequently working as domestic servants or concubines. Slavery was also a crucial part of Viking raids and trade throughout Europe and the Middle East. Enslaved people occasionally revolted, which threatened the security and order of Viking settlements. As Christianity began to spread throughout Europe, it came into direct conflict with pagan beliefs, leading to disputes over different practices and ideologies (*Viking History*). This often resulted in forced conversions and the destruction of sacred sites, igniting resistance among traditionalists, and causing rifts within communities. The rise of Christianity frequently minimized pagan traditions, while Viking raids and settlements encouraged various cultural and religious practices, such as human sacrifices and cremations, which were strongly opposed by Christians. The Vikings' dependence on raiding for wealth created a violent culture that clashed with the developing norms of Europe, causing immense suffering for the communities they attacked. Feuds and vendettas were prevalent in Viking society, leading to ongoing cycles of violence and instability that strained relationships. It seemed like they were never truly satisfied. When Vikings settled in new territories, they often embraced local customs, languages, and even religions like Christianity, resulting in what some regions called hybrid cultures like America.



There are three Viking social classes: the jarl, the bondi, and the þræll.

Viking society

Early Viking kings ruled fairly small regions. For many years there was no powerful central government. For most communities, it was the local chieftain, or jarl, who was in charge. Free citizens were called karls. Slaves were called thralls.

Royal power

In the 900s and 1000s, the Viking homelands were ruled by powerful Christian kings. King Knut the Great (c.995–1035) ruled Denmark, Norway, and England. Under the king were three tiers of society.

Karls
The karls were the largest social class. They were ordinary people and could be rich or poor. They worked as farmers, merchants, shipbuilders, smiths, or woodcarvers. They also joined longship crews and went raiding.

Thralls
Thralls were slaves bought by traders or captured in raids. It was possible for someone to move up or down through Viking society. Some thralls were karls who had got into debt. Sometimes a thrall could save up money to buy his or her freedom.

Jarls
Jarls were the wealthiest class of people. They owned large areas of land and many ships. They wore fine clothes and had the best armour. They could call up karls to join raiding bands or armies.

The law of the land

A public gathering called a Thing was held in each region. It had a leader called the Lawspeaker and only men who were jarls or karls could attend. The Thing passed new laws and judged crimes. For example, it made thieves pay back money they had stolen. It ordered criminals to leave the country as exiles, or made them outlaws with no rights. Arguments could be settled by armed combat.

! WOW!
Iceland has the world's oldest parliament, the Althingi. It began as a Viking assembly in 930.

5. How has this culture influenced Western dress and appearance in the past and present? (show 5 picture examples on the next page)

Contemporary fashion trends today were influenced by Viking fashion trends such as incorporating leather fur wool into their collection's tunics long coats and boots with Viking style lacing or embellishments often appear in Nordic or medieval-themed fashion lines. Norse-inspired jewelry such as Thor's hammer pendant and braided metal work are still in effect today. Movies and TV shows like *The Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* were inspired by this mainstream fashion leather tunics for line coats and braided hairstyles are what men or women wear today men braided hair and braided beards are still an aesthetic and have become popular trends streetwear such as mythological symbols and Viking themes are graphic town T-shirts and hoodies and caps. Many historic reenactors believe that the costumes seen in TV shows like *Vikings* or *The Last Kingdom* are often very inaccurate and even disrespectful to their understanding of actual Viking attire. On the other hand, for filmmakers, video game creators, and other storytellers, while having an authentic feel is beneficial, it is not the top priority (*Appearance*). A new trend is popping up in the Viking reenactor Facebook groups where people are claiming, "Vikings would never have worn a dead animal as a cloak!"



Article One



Vikings from Norway were known for their exploration and settlement in areas such as Iceland, Greenland, and North America. Norway was a key player in Viking endeavors, supplying traders, warriors, and explorers who traveled throughout Europe and further. This article discusses what defines a Viking, highlighting their skills in trade and travel, their impressive hygiene practices, the design of their helmets influenced by Norse mythology, and their unique burial customs involving boats. It also emphasizes that not all Vikings were aggressive and mentions their passion for skiing.

Vikings were a group of adventurous warriors known for their seafaring skills. They embarked on journeys to explore and settle in various parts of Europe. Through these travels, they became experts at navigating the oceans, using the seas to their advantage. They recognized the importance of trading goods like furs, amber, and iron, and in exchange, they sought after valuable items such as spices, silks, and precious metals. When historians discovered Viking sites, they found tools like tweezers, razors, and combs made from animal bones, indicating that Vikings took pride in their appearance and maintained

clean, well-groomed looks. The classic image of Vikings often features bearded men charging into battle with horned helmets, but while many Viking helmets did have horns, some were hornless.

Norse mythology inspired the belief that warriors who fought valiantly in battle were rewarded with a special spot in Valhalla, where they could enjoy an afterlife filled with feasting and honor. According to the Norse religion, Vikings thought that brave warriors would enter this glorious realm after dying honorably, ensuring a safe journey. They believed that boats served as the ideal vessels to carry their fallen comrades into the afterlife. However, the media often depicts Vikings as excessively violent, which does not reflect the whole truth. Many Vikings were more peaceful, engaging in activities like trading and crafting, and most of them were just farmers.

Article Two

WORLD HISTORY
ENCYCLOPEDIA®

Search...

MEMBERSHIP

[ENCYCLOPEDIA](#)[EDUCATION](#)[MEDIA](#)[CONTRIBUTE](#)[SHOP](#)[ABOUT](#)[LOGIN](#)

Viking Hygiene, Clothing, & Jewelry

Viking clothing was created to keep them warm in the chilly mornings and to support their active way of life. Men typically wore tunics and trousers made from linen and wool, along with leggings. Their garments were crafted from wool, linen, and animal hides, with wealthier individuals sporting thicker, more luxurious fabrics. Accessories like combs were made from materials such as antler, bone, ivory, and wood, while the upper class often wore jewelry made of silver. For outerwear, a cooling tunic was worn over undergarments and usually belted at the waist, with brooches used to fasten them for extra warmth. Footwear was made from leather, designed from a single piece to make it suitable for long walks. As for headwear, caps were typically made of wool or leather, and the idea that Vikings wore horned helmets is just a myth.

Women's clothing typically consisted of long linen underdresses as the base layer, topped with a woolen apron-style overdress that was securely fastened at the shoulders. For added warmth, they wore woolen cloaks and shawls, which were often decorative. Their shoes were made of leather, like those worn by men. Married women usually covered their hair with scarves or caps, while younger women often left their hair uncovered to enhance their beauty. Jewelry was made from common metals and included

items like necklaces with beads, pendants, and bracelets, often crafted from twisted metal. Springs, made from various metals, were commonly used as currency. Although earrings were occasionally found, they were not common among women. Viking jewelry featured intricate patterns, including knotwork and animal motifs. Both Viking clothing and jewelry were practical while also reflecting an individual's role and status in society, and they continue to influence modern fashion and accessories.

MLA Citation

“Appearance and Dress.” *Follow the Vikings*, www.followthevikings.com/discover/daily-life/appearance-and-dress.

“Landscape of Viking Scandinavia.” *NH Kerr*, 16 Nov. 2017, nhkerr.com/landscape-Viking-scandinavia/.

Mark, Joshua. “Viking Hygiene, Clothing, & Jewelry.” *World History Encyclopedia*, 27 Sept. 2021, www.worldhistory.org/article/1840/viking-hygiene-clothing--jewelry/.

Pruitt, Sarah. “6 Things We Owe to the Vikings.” *HISTORY*, 4 Sept. 2018, www.history.com/news/6-things-we-owe-to-the-vikings.

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. “Viking | History, Exploration, Facts, & Maps.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Adam Augustyn, 24 Aug. 2018, www.britannica.com/topic/Viking-people.

“Viking History & Traditions | Hurtigruten US.” *Www.hurtigruten.com*, www.hurtigruten.com/en-us/inspiration/culture/viking-history-traditions.

“When Christianity Met Paganism, Norway 994-999 A.D. (Ólafr Tryggvasonr).” *BLADE HONER*, 10 Aug. 2021, bladehoner.wordpress.com/2021/08/10/when-christianity-met-paganism-norway-994-999-a-d-olafr-tryggvasonr/. Accessed 4 Dec. 2024.

Wikipedia Contributors. “Charlemagne.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Feb. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne.