

FOLLOWING THE RAVEN BANNER:
AN INCLUSIVE, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY LOOK AT THE SCANDINAVIAN
MERCENARY IN THE VIKING AGE

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

HAYDEN SHAW

DR. DOUGLAS SEEFELDT – CO-CHAIR

DR. FREDERICK SUPPE – CO-CHAIR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNICE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2017

Process Paper

The building of my CRPR698 website was a long process that took me the better part of the last two years. While I have only begun to construct the project in the last school year, I have known about my topic for quite some time, and therefore used my first-year classes to begin my research. This paper is intended to provide a guide through the construction of my thesis project, starting with early research and concluding with the final touches made in the last few days. In this short essay, I will discuss what research methods I used, how I applied this information, how the website and maps were designed and summarize important details about the editing and creation process.

As with almost all works of history, the research was the first and most time-consuming part of my project. In truth, the research never really stopped. Right until the final deadline I continued to look at new primary and secondary sources that helped refine and sharpen my arguments further. As mentioned above, however, the research for this project began well before this year. If I were to place a beginning, it would have to be in the fall semester of 2015 in Dr. Douglas Seefeldt's class on the Digital Humanities. In this class I needed to build a website, and I developed one on Harald III Sigurdsson, also known as Harald inn Hardradi, a famous Norwegian mercenary from the Middle Ages. While studying Harald and creating my website for the class, I noticed a few of the unique characteristics of Viking mercenaries which I have explored in greater detail since. For instance, I saw how Harald used the wealth and prestige he had gained as a mercenary to further his own personal goals and eventually make himself a king.

After this discovery, I organized all my following projects so they always had something to do with Scandinavian mercenaries. These various classes introduced me to the vast majority of primary sources used in my thesis. In Dr. Suppe's Medieval History course I read about the

famous English mercenary John Hawkwood and wrote a historiography on him. From this study, I learned that mercenaries were often required to do much more than fight and in return for their efforts, their employers rewarded them with more than just coins. Also, while studying Hawkwood, I took a look at the current historiographic discussion of the Medieval mercenary and through authors like DeVries, Contamine, and Mallett found that the scholarship was severely lacking.

The interest sparked in me by the epic of Harald inn Hardradi's life was what first got me interested in studying mercenaries, but what got me passionate about the subject was the lack of coverage these warriors had received in the historical record. Using the methods and bibliographies of DeVries, Contamine, and Mallett, I began a much more extensive look into the Viking mercenary and discovered that there was little to be found in secondary sources. What few scholars mentioned these sellswords, did so in passing and with no serious investigation. From here I conducted primary source research of my own, accumulating English translations of medieval Byzantine, Frankish, and Anglo-Saxon texts and delving into them. What I found was that the Scandinavian mercenary, despite his lack of presence in secondary sources, was somewhat prevalent in Medieval history.

By using works like the *Annals of St. Bertin*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and Nithard's *Histories*, I found out that from Ireland to Egypt there was almost no battleground that had not felt the footfall of a Nordic mercenary. It was at this stage that the finer details of this project formed in my mind and I archived each and every instance of a Scandinavian mercenary I could find. At first, I was not sure what I could do with the data, and thus this process began as little more than writing down the primary source quotation accompanied by the bibliographic information. However, as time passed, and my list grew and

grew, I realized that I could take all of these points, upload them into an ArcGIS map, and create an interesting visual tool to help tell the story I wanted. Thanks to my work as a graduate assistant for Dr. Seefeldt in Ball State's Digital Scholarship Lab, I was already familiar with this software and understood that it could give me a distinct advantage academically over more traditional forms of media. As David Bodenhammer once said, "*However structured, these layers would operate as do other layers within a GIS, view individually or collectively as a whole or within groups, but all tied to time and space that provide perspectives on the places that interest us. It is an open, visual, and experiential space, immersing users in a virtual world in which uncertainty, ambiguity, and contingency are ever present but all are capable of being braided into a narrative that reveals the ways in which space and time influences and is influenced by social interaction,*" (Bodenhammer, Corrigan and Trevor 2015, 22). I found the same to be true with Viking mercenaries. By separating the different mercenary cases into separate spatial groupings new patterns and interconnections appeared. These geographic areas ended up being the Early-Medieval British Isles (England, Scotland, Ireland, the Orkneys, etc.), The Kingdom of the Franks, plus the combo of Byzantium and Eastern Europe.

In addition to these geopolitical maps, I also created an environmental themed map which examines nature's influence on the Scandinavian mercenary. The research for this map was mostly carried out during an independent study in which I learned about global environmental history and how the ecosystem played a very significant role in human history. Unlike the other portions of the map, this segment is based almost entirely off secondary research and instead of following around Scandinavian mercenary bands, examines things like glaciers, seas, and sunlight. Due to these more abstract concepts, this map does not operate on the longitude-latitude

location format that these others do. Instead of points, this map has free form shapes which are meant to display more complex ideas that cannot be summarized in a single point.

Returning then to the other maps, once these were established and all the long-lat coordinates found, I created separate ArcGIS databases for each which detailed the mercenaries name, employer, date, location, alongside any relevant primary or secondary source information. Next to the research process, this part of the project took up the majority of my time. In order to get the most out of my ArcGIS layers I had to develop a familiarity with how the databases are constructed. This process was delicate and time consuming. Once the databases were completed, however, I uploaded them and created ArcGIS map layers out of each. With these layers I could separate the points out thematically and provide each with their own distinctive color to help tell them apart. Finally, with these four layers (Environmental, EMBI, Frankish, Byzantine and E. Europe) I created four unique ArcGIS Storymaps. In these Storymaps, I wrote a narrative that helped to explain and explore the various themes and theories that each map contained. The Environmental Influences map, for instance, includes graphs of average temperatures, statistical charts that detail the average snowfall and sunlight in particular areas, alongside more traditional images of geography and animal life. This process did not take long since I had already prepared most of the narrative while I was creating the maps.

After the maps were created I made a website which would house them. To make sure that this site was as useful as possible the first thing I constructed was an introduction page. This entry point explains what the project is about and how one could get the most out of it. I also created a more detailed introduction essay which discusses the historiography and inspiration behind this project. This larger piece is linked to in the bibliography and is available to read or download with Google Docs. After this, I created a gateway into the various maps that provides a

short introduction and a few hints about how to use these tools correctly. The rest of the website is rather straight-forward with the exception of the bibliography. Instead of a standard bib in which sources are listed in alphabetical order I have instead provided the standard information alongside a short explanation of how the source is used in the project. These sources are then cross referenced by corresponding links when possible in the rest of the project. Therefore, whenever someone wants to know more about a particular author, all they have to do is click the citation and the author's page will open from the bib. The last part of this project was editing and fine tuning. This mostly entailed going back through the text I had written and checking it for the usual mistakes. However, during this time I also added a lot of media and shaped up the presentation of the website.

The last thing to be completed was the bibliographic information for the media used throughout the project which did not take much time thanks to careful notetaking. Altogether, the bulk of my time was spent in research and database management. The creation of the website, maps, and the addition of media took up the lion's share of the remaining time with fine tuning and polishing filling in the rest. There were of course several meetings with my advising council and the input that they added to this project was invaluable, but detailed notes about how much time these events took are not recorded and therefore cannot be accurately added into the total. Once the digital thesis is fully completed, it intends to depict the Scandinavian mercenary in an entirely new light. These northern warriors filled a wide variety of roles. They helped to support kings, guard merchants, and topple empires, all to surpass cultural, economic, and environmental limitations. From the glory filled saga of Harald inn Hardradi to the polemic treatment of Harald the Dane by Frankish analysts, the Scandinavian mercenary has left behind a detailed trail of impact in European history, one that is only now being fully appreciated and mapped.