

The Vikings

The Little Told Story of Scandanavia in the Dark Ages



The Viking (modern day **Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes**) seafaring excursions occurred from about 780 to 1070 AD. They started raiding and pillaging in the north Baltic region of Europe. By the mid 900s (10th century) they had established such a permanent presence across France and England that they were simply paid off (“Danegeld”) to cohabitate in peace.

They conquered most of England, as the Romans had, but they did it in only 15 years! They formed legal systems in England that formed the basis of **British Common Law**, which at one time would later govern the majority of the world.

They eventually adapted the western **monarchy** form of government, **converted to Christianity**, and integrated into France, England, Germany, Italy, Russia, Syria, and out into the Atlantic.

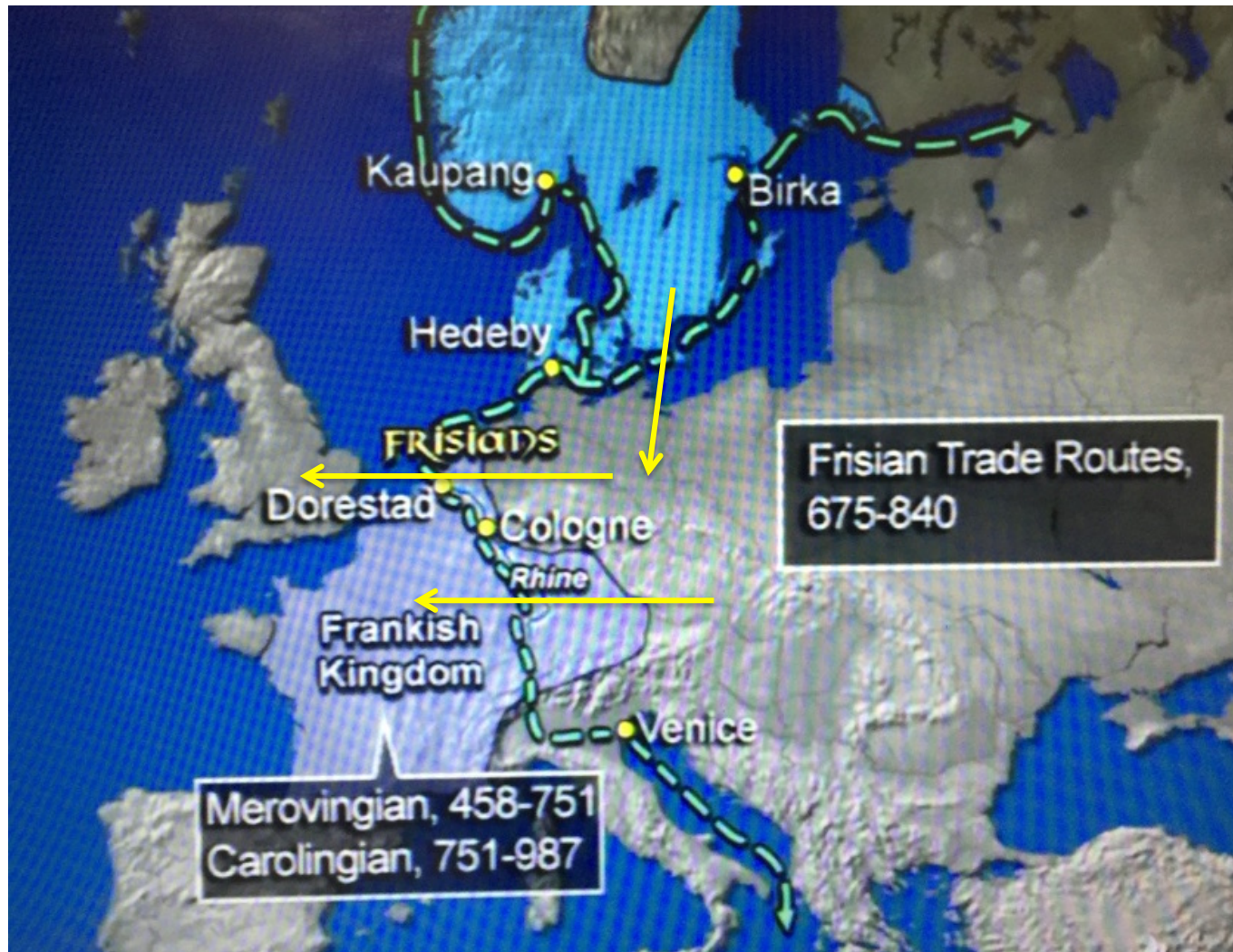
They also brought Christianity back to their home countries, set up monarchies, and forged the countries of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Russia.

It was the direct descendant of the Vikings (from Normandy) who led the capture of Jerusalem during the First Crusade.

The Romans dominated Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and England. They never could conquer the Germanic people to the north. The Germanic people sacked Rome three times between 435 and 489 CE.

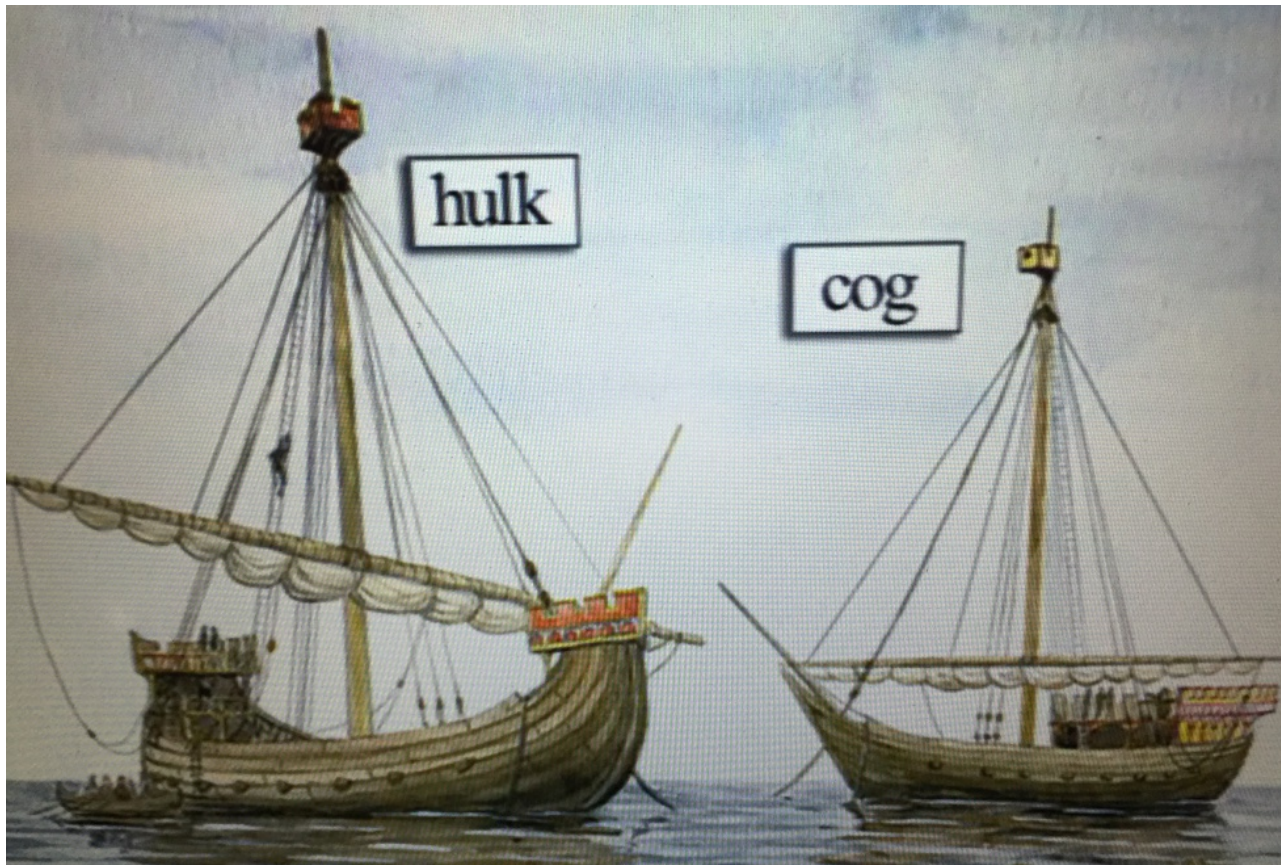


After the Fall of Rome, a mass migration of Germanic people occurred to the west (to France and England). The Frisians were at the center of a great trade route between the northern Germans (“Nordsman”) and bulk of Germanic peoples now in western Europe.



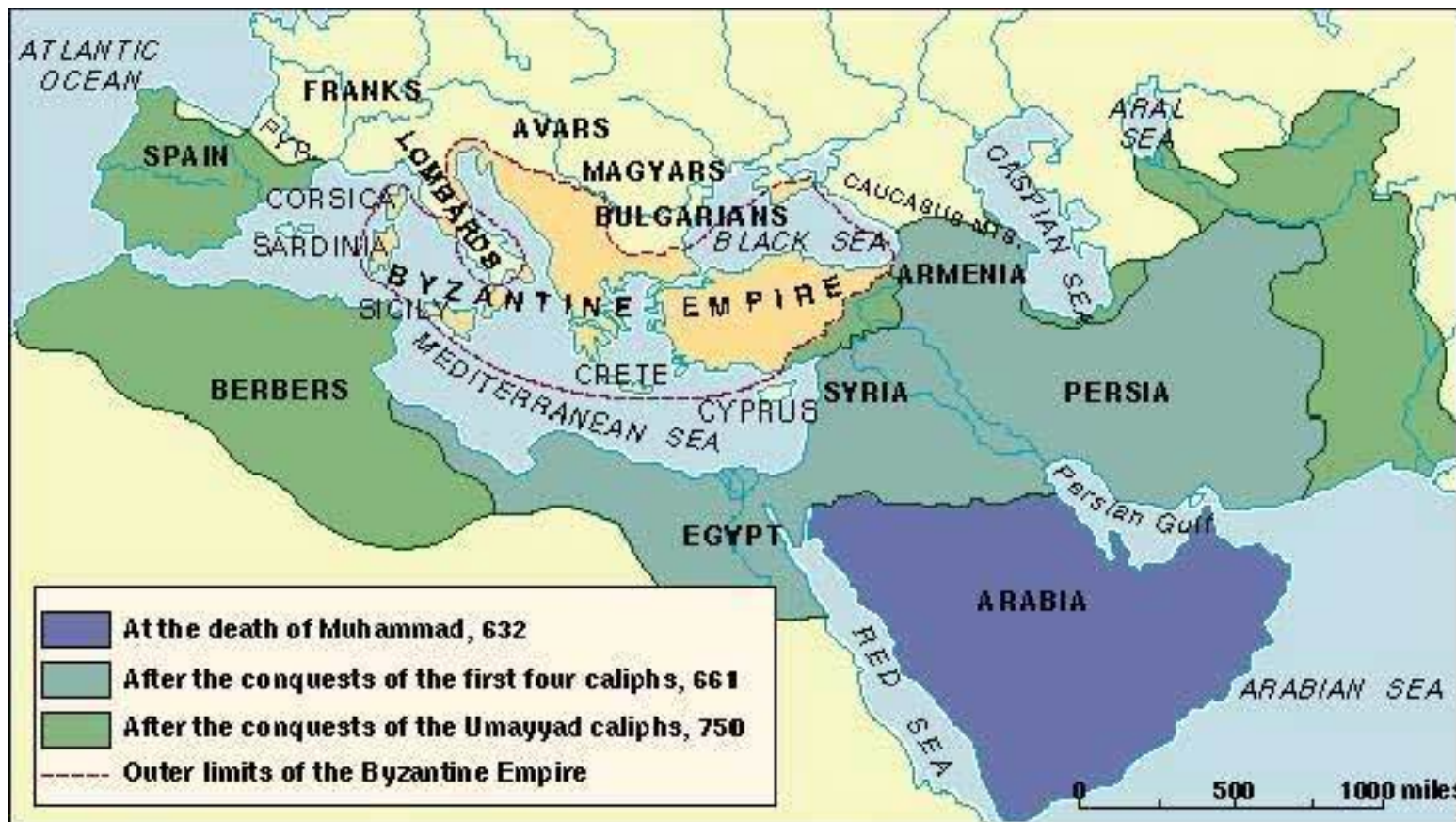
High Tech in the 400s-700s

The **ships of the day** were the hulk and the cog. These ships were good for hugging the coasts and penetrating into deep river systems. They had no keel, nor the strength to navigate the open oceans.



Meanwhile, the Roman Empire survived on as the **Byzantine Empire** with its capital in Constantinople (now Istanbul).

The power vacuum in Africa, Spain, and the Middle East allowed for the vast expansion of the Islamic/Muslim Caliphs. Even China becomes 50% Muslim.



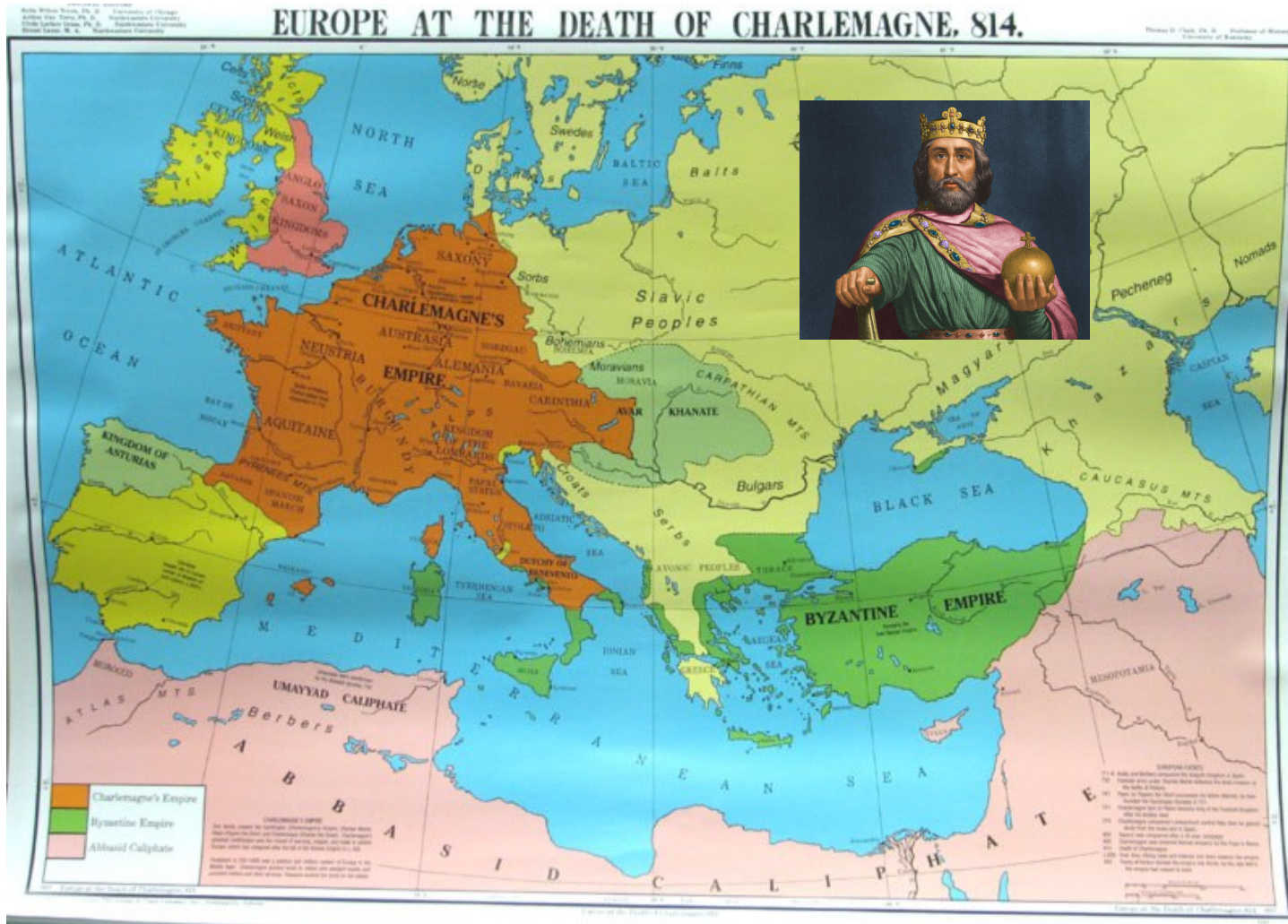
By 800 CE, The Arabic world had an empire larger than the Roman Empire. Their lands literally connected the eastern and western worlds. They had no need for ocean going transportation- the desert was their sea.



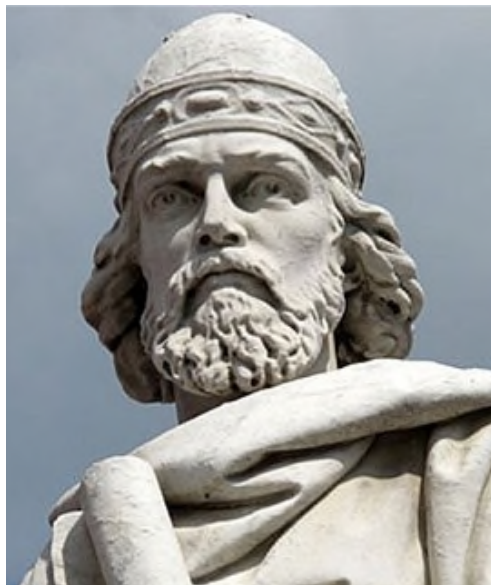
By 800 CE, western Europe was organized into a monarchy, **The Carolingian Empire**, which was subservient to the **Holy Roman Church**. Eastern Europe was a source of slaves (the “Slavs”) traded to the Arabs to support their vast Empire.



King Charlemagne had consolidated western Europe, and the Anglo-Saxons had populated England, but had not united England into a single empire yet. It would take the Viking raids for England to eventually unite.



By 800 CE, England had four main rival kingdoms. The city of York was the capital of Northumbria. Note the access to York via river systems. In Wessex, the only kingdom not conquered by the Vikings, the capital was Winchester. This is where King Alfred the Great held his ground and began the unification of England.



King Alfred the Great
The First English King after defeating the Vikings and uniting all of England

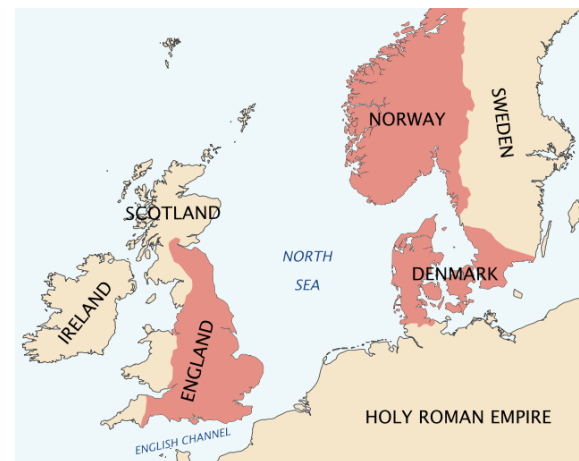


The Danelaw Region of England Kingdom of Guthrum



King Alfred The Great halted the southern advance of the Danes and then fought back until a stalemate was reached in about 900 AD.

Three generations later the Danes took over all of England and ruled a kingdom across England AND Scandinavia (King Cnut The Great).



After Charlemagne's death in 814, his three sons divided his kingdom.

These divisions became modern day France, Germany, and eventually Switzerland.



In what is now Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, the north Germanic people (Nordsman), were grouped into **small autonomous localized kingdoms**. The competition and population pressure for fertile land was fierce. Via the trade routes, word of fertile lands and undefended rich monasteries reached them.

Also, as part of their religious beliefs, conquering, bravery, and glory in battle raised them to the higher “Great Halls” of their afterlife. They set out for the lands of Europe and England.



Vikings had light armor, and were experts with the axe and spear.



They created shield walls to suck in the enemy and then would mop them up.

All males were trained in warrior skills from childhood. They were all disciplined and hardened from the harsh cold climate, and were made strong and fit by their rowing in armies led by “sea kings”. The militia of the English on the other hand were a small professional elite- English armies were predominantly simple untrained farmers and blacksmiths. They got their armor handed to them with ease. Thus the origin of trained standing armies- thanks Vikings.)

High Technology Steps In..

Vikings developed a ship called the **knarr**. It had a mast, a keel, and oars. It had a very shallow draft that could get up rivers easily and it could navigate the open seas.



Vikings could enter a town quietly and quickly and command total surprise followed by fierce fighting.

Vikings could navigate the country at three times the speed of marching troops.

Raids and Settlements of the Norwegians, Danes, and Swedish (800-1000). Political Map is 900 CE. Note modern France, Germany, Switzerland, and Spain divisions are in place, where Spain is Arabic. Note “white” Russians are Swedish.



Simplified version of predominant Viking pathways via the seas... note the infiltration of Russia and Constantinople. Vikings dominated the trade routes through all of Europe.



The Northern Trade Route dominated by the Vikings.



By the 1200s, the "Vikings" took the politics of monarchies home and established three kingdoms, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The development of these separate kingdoms is an amazing story in itself. They all adopted Christianity.

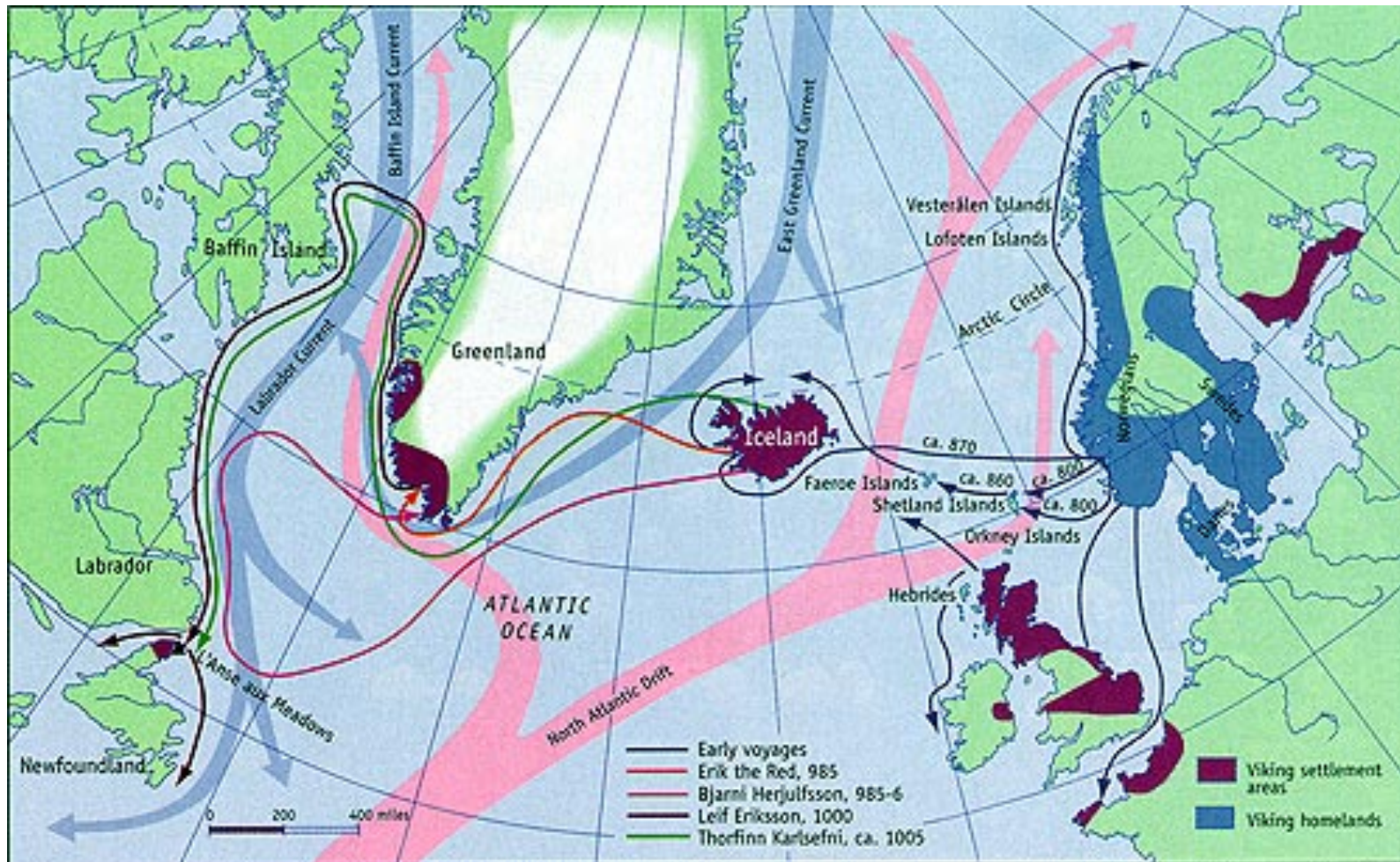


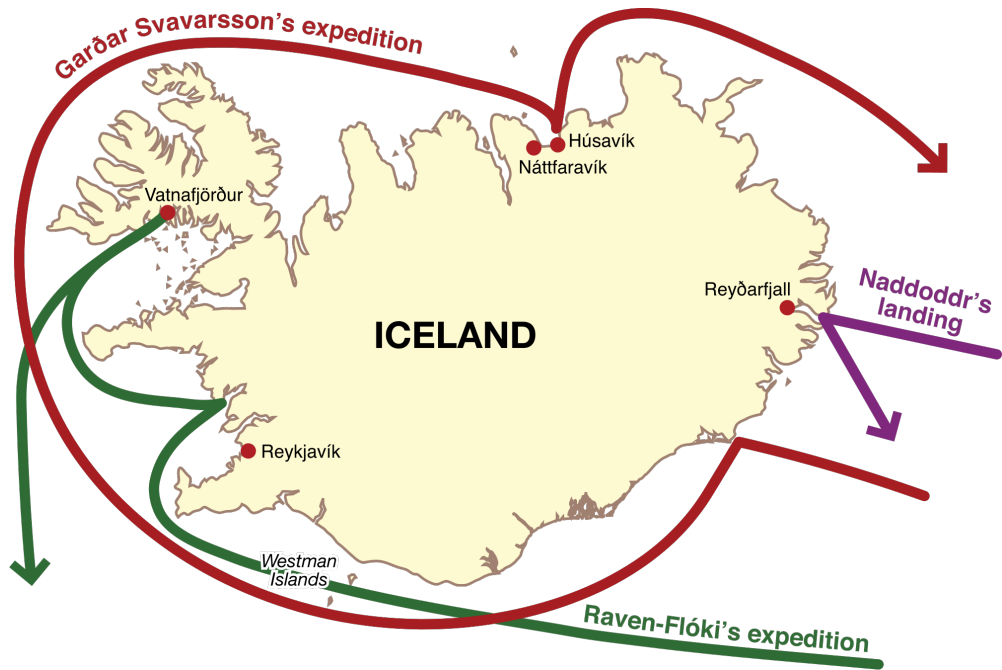
To infinity and beyond...



Breaking New Frontiers

Had this not come to an end, Canada and North America would probably be speaking some form of language between Scandinavian and German, like is done in Iceland.







In 986, Bjarni Herjolfsson tried to find his father, who had migrated from Iceland to Greenland. Bjarni overshot Greenland, and, realizing he had arrived at an uncharted land, turned around to go back to Greenland without ever having stepped foot on the new land.



In 1001, Leif Ericsson purchased Bjarni's ship, collected 35 men, and set out to find the land Bjarni had discovered. Ericsson's crew wintered there and returned to Greenland by summer's end.



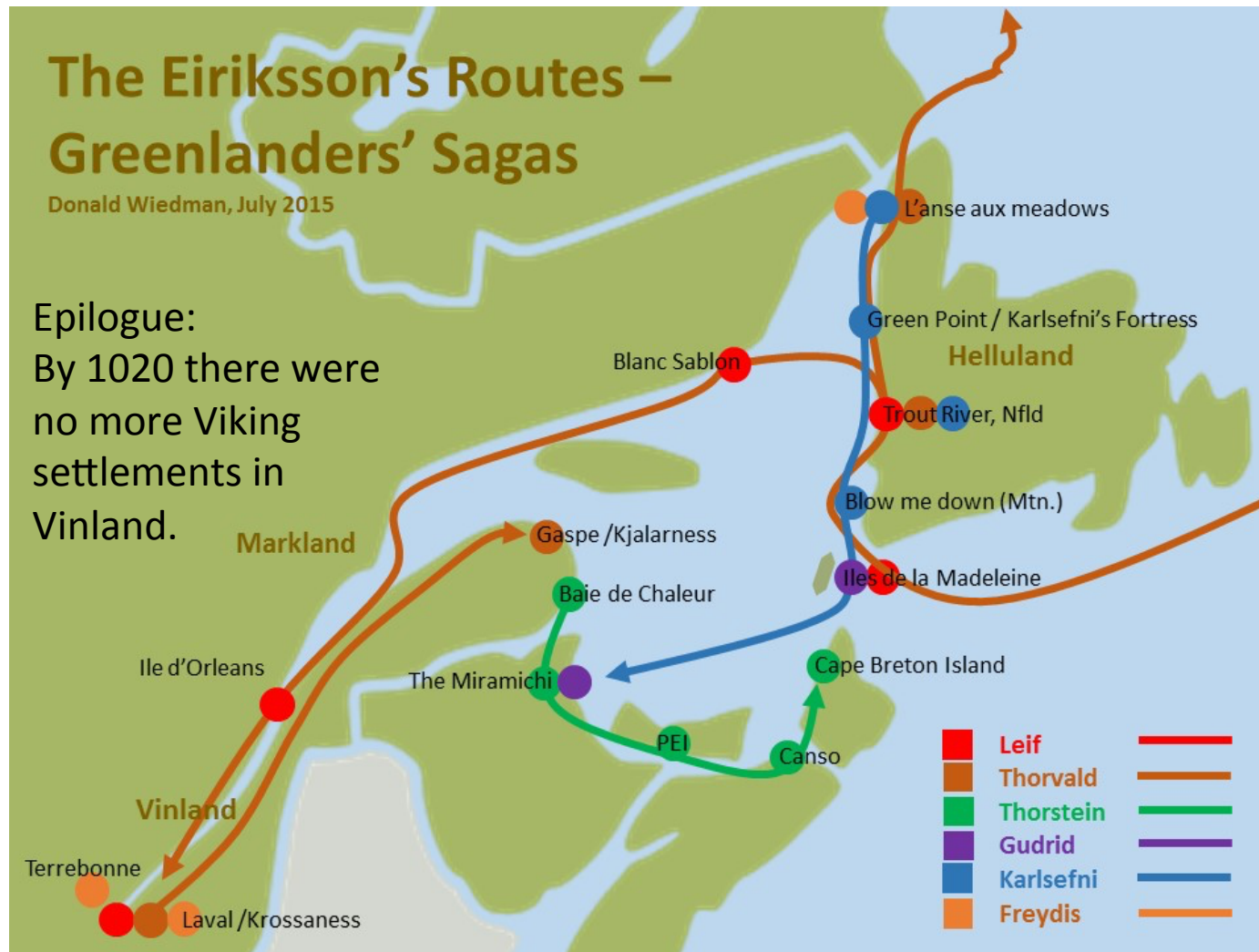
Shortly thereafter, Leif's brother Thorvald took a crew of 30 to Vinland and settled Leif's encampment. The first summer they explored the coast, but during their second summer encountered hostile natives who drove them back to Greenland.



A first attempt at colonizing Vinland was then led by Thorfin Karlsefni, one of Leif's in-laws, who gathered over 250 men on three ships. They traded with the natives (Skraelings), but eventually were driven out and back to Greenland.



Leif's (crazy) sister, Freydis, who had previously slapped her breasts with a sword to stop the Skraeling attacks, organized a final expedition, but found Leif's house occupied; she had all occupying men and women of that party killed. The next spring, upon the return to Greenland her crimes were revealed and Leif put a curse on all of her offspring.



By 1200 trade routes included the east-west route called the **Silk Road**. Note the Muslims controlled all routes through Persia, Arabia, and Egypt. No European could trade directly with the East, until...

