

ENGL 1015/COML 1015
Sagas and Skalds: Old Norse in Translation
MW 1:45-3:15 pm
Prof. Caz Batten
Course Prospectus



Content

Stabbings, betrayals, public duels, sibling murder, troll-fights, wily dragons, gods who defy gender binaries, and bloody love triangles: there's never a dull a moment in Old Norse literature. In this course, we'll explore a dramatic and influential corpus of poetry and prose from Viking and medieval Scandinavia, within its cultural context and ours. We will read mythological texts, heroic verse, Icelandic sagas, courtly praise poetry, and runic inscriptions, with the goal of developing a deeper understanding of one of the most significant vernacular literary traditions in medieval Europe.

We'll work to challenge our own misconceptions about who the 'Vikings' were, how they lived, and what they believed, and learn more about the ways medieval Scandinavia interacted with the wider world and dealt with difference both within and outside their own communities. We'll work on gaining the confidence and ability to close read these texts, propose and defend original ideas about them, and engage critically with pop cultural interpretations of the medieval world.

No previous experience with premodern literature is required, and all texts will be read in modern English translations.

Structure

Our most frequent class format will be seminar-style discussions and small group work, with short, helpful lectures mixed in. There will be presentation days at the end of the semester.



Assignments

Wherever possible our weekly readings will be uploaded as PDFs on Canvas or links to ebooks and online editions, including secondary sources. You will write a midterm paper and a longer final paper, with two 'short writes' of around 600 words responding to the reading in between. We'll also conclude the semester with in-class presentations, as noted above, on pop culture interpretations of Norse material.