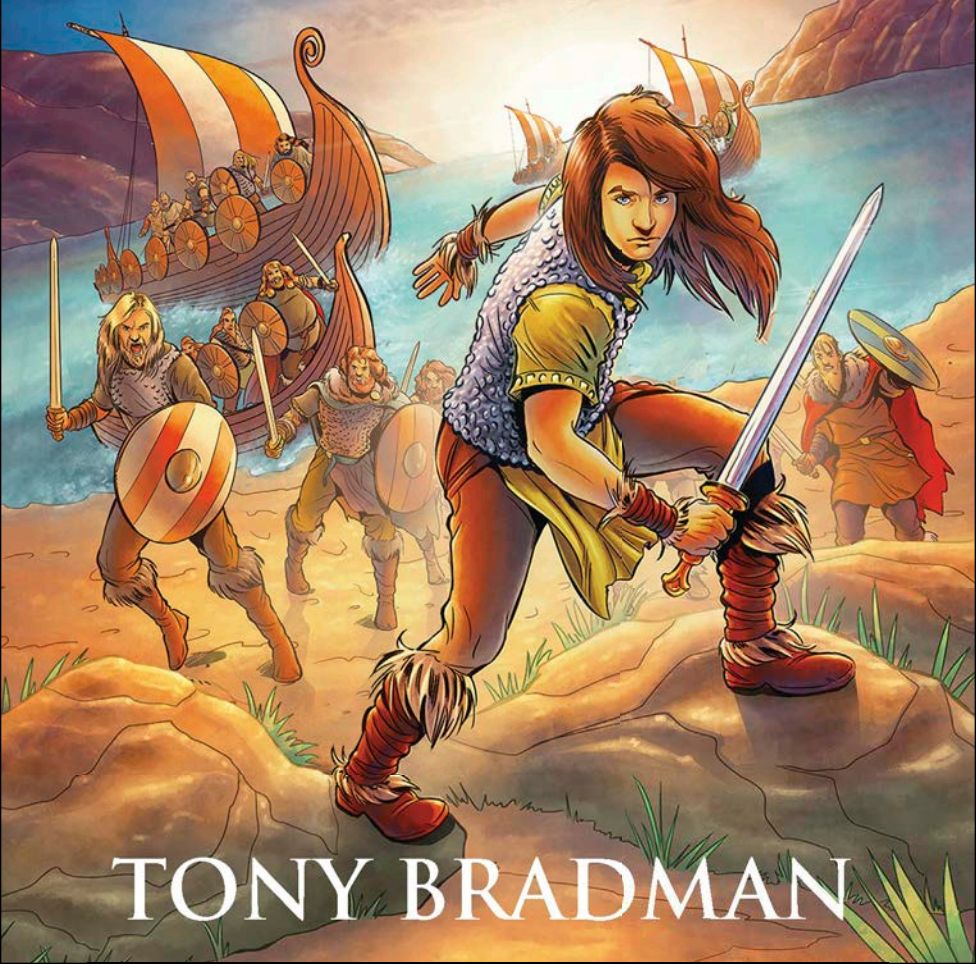


Everything you need to know about THE VIKINGS

VIKING BOY

THE REAL STORY



TONY BRADMAN

VIKING BOY

THE REAL STORY

For Sally

VIKING BOY

THE REAL STORY

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TONY BRADMAN

Illustrated by Thomas Sperling



*Þá mælti Gísli: “Það vissi eg fyrir löngu að eg var vel kvæntur en þó
vissi eg eigi að eg væri svo vel kvæntur sem eg er.”*

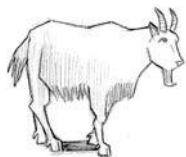
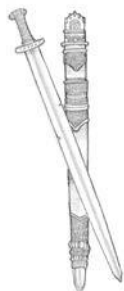
*Then Gísli said: “I have long known that I married well,
but never till now just how well...”*

(From The Saga of Gísli Sursson)

*Deyr fê
deyja frændr
deyr sjálfr it sama
ek veit einn
at aldri deyr
dómr um dauðan hvern*

*Cattle die
kinsmen die too
death will also
come for you
but I know a thing
that never dies
the fame you gain
in others' eyes*

(From The Hávamál, or The Words of the High One)



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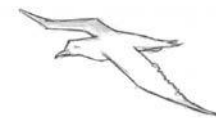
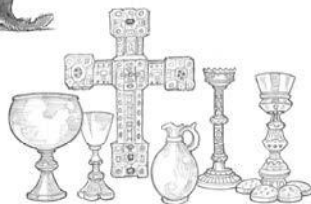
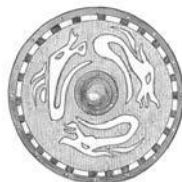
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*Hail, stranger! My name is Gunnar,
and you might have read about my adventures in
the book Viking Boy. In that tale – or saga as we
call such things here in the North – I swore an oath
to avenge my father’s murder, and I went on a long,
hard journey through the world
of the Vikings so I could fulfil it.*

*Now I have returned to take you on a journey of
your own through the same world. In this book
you will find out where and how we Vikings lived,
what beliefs we held and what we did, and you will*

*travel to the new lands we settled. You will meet
my family and friends and many other Viking
people, and even the great god Odin.*

*So find your warmest cloak, pull on a pair of
strong boots, and make sure your sword is loose in
the scabbard. There will be danger ahead, and the
storm of blades in battle. But there will also be
companions in longship and shield-wall, poetry by
the hearth-fire, tough Viking men and women, and
gleaming Viking treasure.*

Are you ready? Then come with me...



ONE

HARD LANDS TO LIVE IN

YOUR JOURNEY begins with some Viking magic.

Imagine you are a shape-shifter, someone who can become another creature – we Vikings believe in such things. Now turn yourself into a great eagle, take to the sky, and fly northwards. After a time, look below you, and what do you see?

A country with mountains sticking up through it like the half-buried bones of a dead giant. Forests of tall trees, shadows thick and dark beneath their branches. Ice glittering in the far north, where the white bears roam. Vast herds of reindeer moving slowly across the snowy wastes, with wolves in packs loping after them. Rocky beaches ruled by walrus and seals, whales spouting in the waves beyond.

These are the Viking lands, and living in them is hard. But tough lands breed tough people, and we have made these places work for us. Fly down, and you will see our farms, animals and crops. Touch the ground, and you are human once more...

Welcome to the steading I have always called my home.

*These are the Viking
lands – living in them is hard*



SCANDINAVIA: THE VIKING HOMELANDS

The Vikings came from the region now called **Scandinavia**, in northern Europe. It's a huge territory, but it was probably empty of people until after the last Ice Age ended 12,000 years ago, when the early Stone-Age hunter-gatherers arrived. The ancestors of the Vikings probably came from the south – they were certainly related to the other Germanic tribes that settled in northern Europe.

Another group came from the east. These were the **Sami** people, who were a big influence on the Vikings.

The Greeks knew very little about Scandinavia, and the Romans never conquered any part of it.

The Vikings burst on the world at the end of the eighth century, when they started attacking other lands. For the next 300 years they raided and traded and fought all over Europe and the Middle East. They gave Russia its name, settled in Iceland and Greenland and were the first Europeans to visit North America.

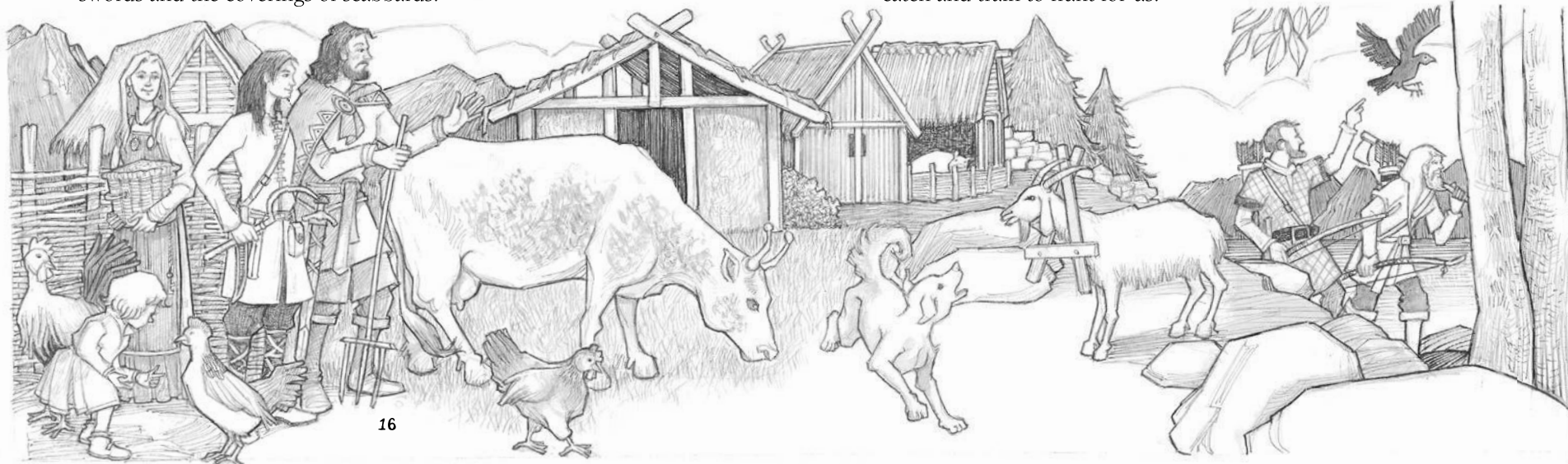


LIKE MOST Vikings, my family are farmers – everybody has to make a living from the land somehow. But there isn't much good land between the mountains and the sea, so we can only grow a few crops – oats, barley, rye. My family's land isn't too bad, so most years we grow plenty of vegetables – cabbages, peas and onions, and garlic and herbs to add flavour to our food. We have an orchard of apple and pear trees, but we also collect wild cherries and berries and nuts from the forest.

Sheep, goats and cattle give us meat, and we drink their milk and make butter and cheese from it. Pigs provide us with meat too, and we breed chickens for eggs and meat. We turn the wool from our sheep into clothes. We keep bees for their honey, and we brew strong mead from it to drink at our feasts, along with the ale that warriors love. Cattle-hides are good for shoe leather and belts, the reins and harnesses for our horses, the hand-grips of our swords and the coverings of scabbards.

We have always been hunters as well. Our lands are harsh, but they are full of wild animals we can hunt with the spear and the bow. Bears, boars, elk and different kinds of deer roam the woods, and there are many birds, especially ducks and other water-fowl. We eat their meat, and use their skins and feathers and fur to add to our clothes, and to keep us warm in bed through the long, cold nights of northern winters. We hunt wolves too sometimes, for their pelts and to protect our beasts. But our grey brothers and sisters always return. You can hear them howling at the moon.

Some of us also keep cats – they are very useful for making sure that no mice or rats get into our food-stores. Dogs are important to us too, both for hunting and for helping us with our flocks and herds – a well-trained, loyal dog is valued highly. We have many dogs on our steading, some of them the descendants of wolves... And we love birds of prey, the hawks and falcons we catch and train to hunt for us.



THE VIKING COUNTRIES

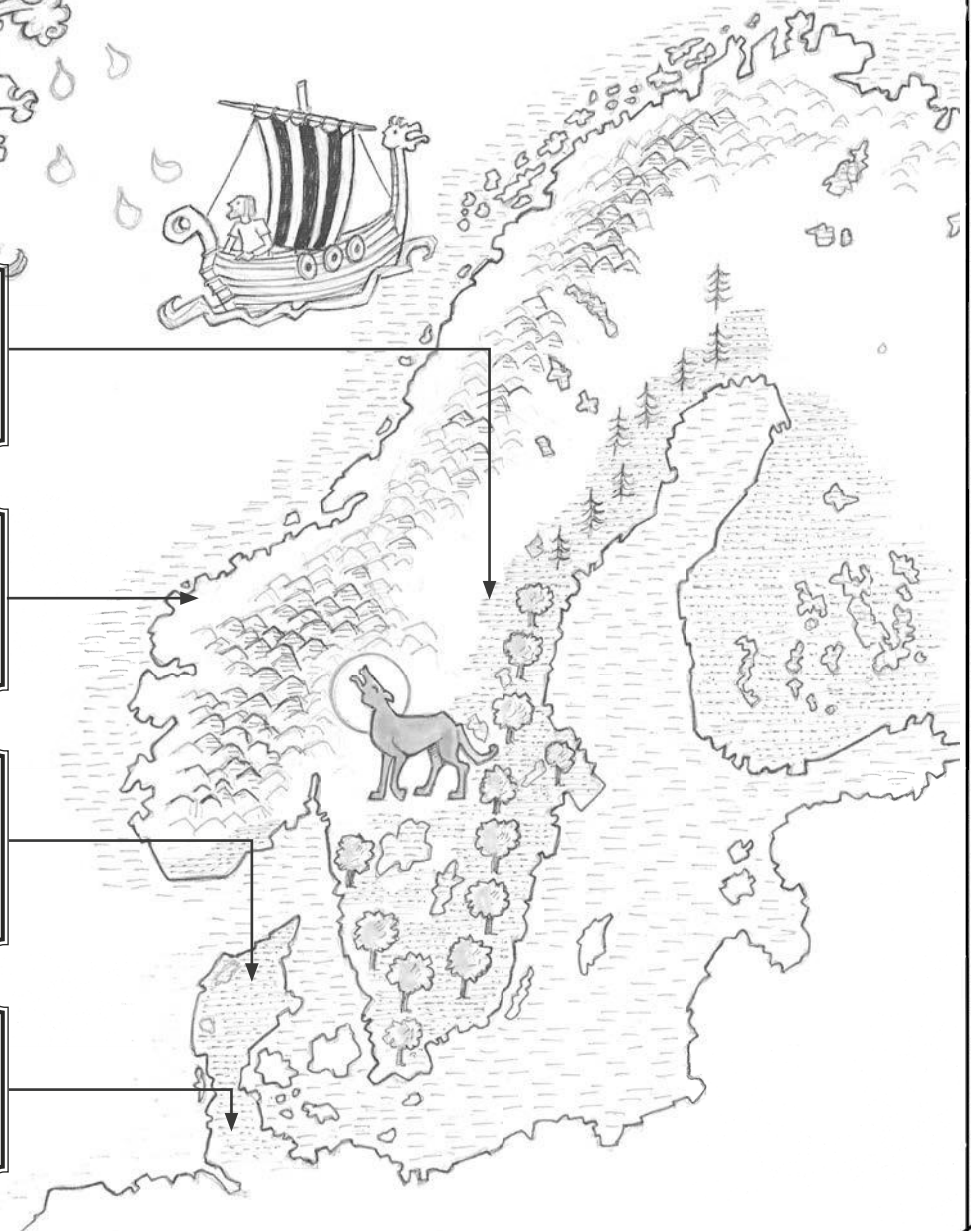
During the Viking Age, Scandinavia started developing into three countries.

SWEDEN is in the east. At the time of the Vikings it was mostly covered in forests, with many lakes, created by glaciers retreating at the end of the Ice Age and scraping holes in the ground. The country ("Sverige" in modern Swedish) is named after the **Svear**, a powerful tribe that lived there.

NORWAY is in the west facing the Atlantic. Its spine is a chain of mountains. It has a long coastline, full of amazing inlets from the sea, called **fjords**. The country was named Norway ("Norge" in modern Norwegian) for a simple reason: sailing along its coast was an excellent "way" for ships to get to the "north".

DENMARK is made up of the peninsula of Jutland and a large number of islands. Most of the land is flat, but in the Viking Age it was still hard to farm there. The country's name ("Danmark" in modern Danish) probably comes from two ancient words – "Dani" was the tribe that settled there and "mark" meant "border".

SOUTH OF DENMARK lived two peoples related to the Vikings, the Angles and Saxons. Their language was like Norse, the Viking tongue, and they worshipped the same gods. They became the **Anglo-Saxons**, who settled in Britain after the Roman Empire collapsed.



MAKE NO MISTAKE, our winters are *very* long and *very* cold. They are dark too, the days turning shorter until at midwinter there is almost no light, especially in the far north. Storms and blizzards bring thick snow to cover the land, and the lakes and rivers freeze. We have to stay inside for days at a time, only leaving shelter to make sure our beasts are safe and warm in their byres. Like most of us, I find that very hard, so it's good to get outside when I can. Long ago we learned from the Sami how to use wooden skis to get around, and we carve skates from the bones of animals to strap onto our shoes. I love the wild feeling of sliding down a slope on skis, the cold wind in my face, or skating on the glittering ice of a pond that has frozen solid.

Spring comes at last, the days getting longer and warmer. I always feel happier as the snow and ice melts – it's as if the world wakes up from a deep sleep. Then summer arrives, bringing heat and light, and things begin to grow – I love the feeling of that golden time. Darkness is banished, the days go on for ever, and we live outside as much as we can. We harvest our crops as the summer turns to autumn, the days become shorter, and soon cruel winter sweeps back with its darkness and cold.

There are many fish in the sea and lakes and streams that we catch with hook and line, or with nets. I think I might go fishing myself today... In the far north people hunt seals, walruses and whales, for their oil and blubber and bones as much as for their meat. The Sami people get most of what they need from their

reindeer herds, although they often trade with us. They make many beautiful things from wood, animal bone and reindeer antlers – my father had a fine Sami knife with a carved handle that he always kept hanging on his belt.

The Sami are our brothers and sisters in the land, and we owe much to them.

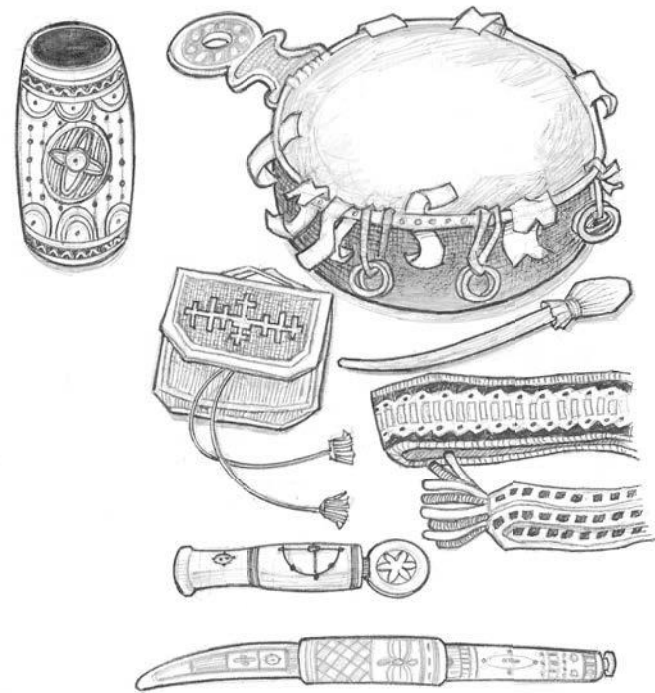


THE SAMI PEOPLE

There are still many communities of Sami people living in northern Scandinavia and the far north of Russia to this day. Their origins were in the east, probably in the Ural Mountains area of Russia, and they were related to other peoples that

eventually settled in Finland, Estonia and Hungary. The Sami, Estonians and Hungarians speak related languages, all of them quite different to the tongue of the Vikings.

It's thought the Sami were far more widespread in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. The two peoples traded with each other, and married each other too. The Sami were partly nomadic, which meant they followed their reindeer herds. The Vikings learned a lot from them. There is evidence the Sami were good sailors as well as herders, and they may have taught the Vikings their boat-building skills.



Sami artefacts

The Sami believed everything in the world had a “spirit” – people, animals and birds, even trees and rocks. They also believed in magic and a supernatural world beyond ours. They had priests called **shamans**, who spoke to the spirits and performed rituals with chanting and drumming. The Vikings absorbed some of this into the way they thought about the world – especially the magic.

LIKE MOST VIKING farms, our steading has lots of buildings – byres and pens for animals, and barns for storage. But of course the most important is our longhouse.

A poor family's longhouse might be small, and a wealthy family's might be big. Of course, I think *our* longhouse is the best, far better than the longhouses of the richer farmers who live in other valleys near by. Our steading has always been the home of my family, of my father's father and his father before him, and others going back to the old times long before remembering. The people of my blood built this place and worked hard to make it good – and some of them died to protect it.



Our longhouse – my family's home

THE LONGHOUSE

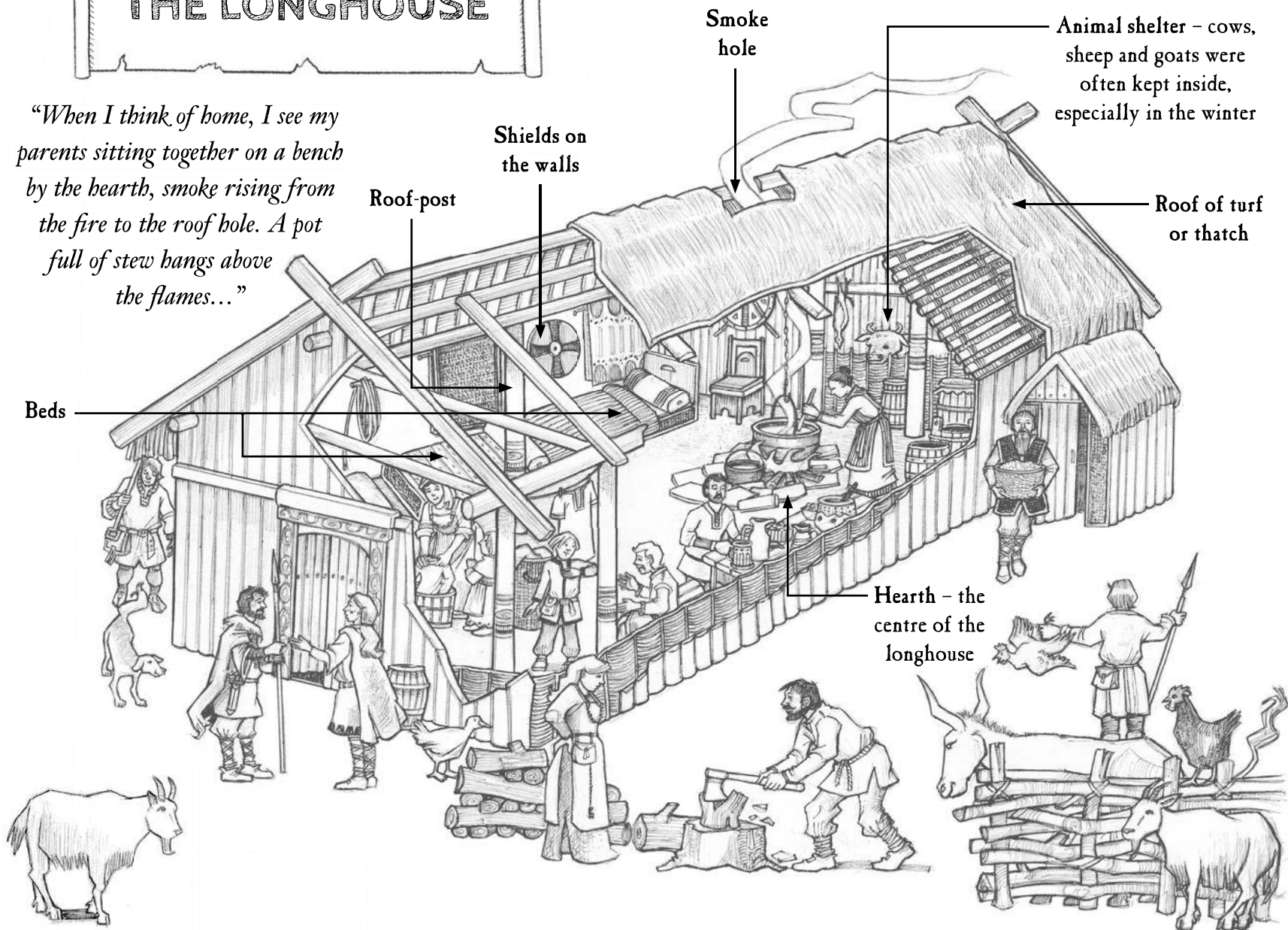
Longhouses were similar across the whole Viking world. Some were built of logs, but turf or stone were also used if there was no wood. The roofs might be thatched, but often they were made of turf and covered with a layer of birch-tree bark. They sometimes had small windows, but it was usually smoky and dark inside, the only light coming from the hearth-fire and small lamps that burned fish-liver oil.

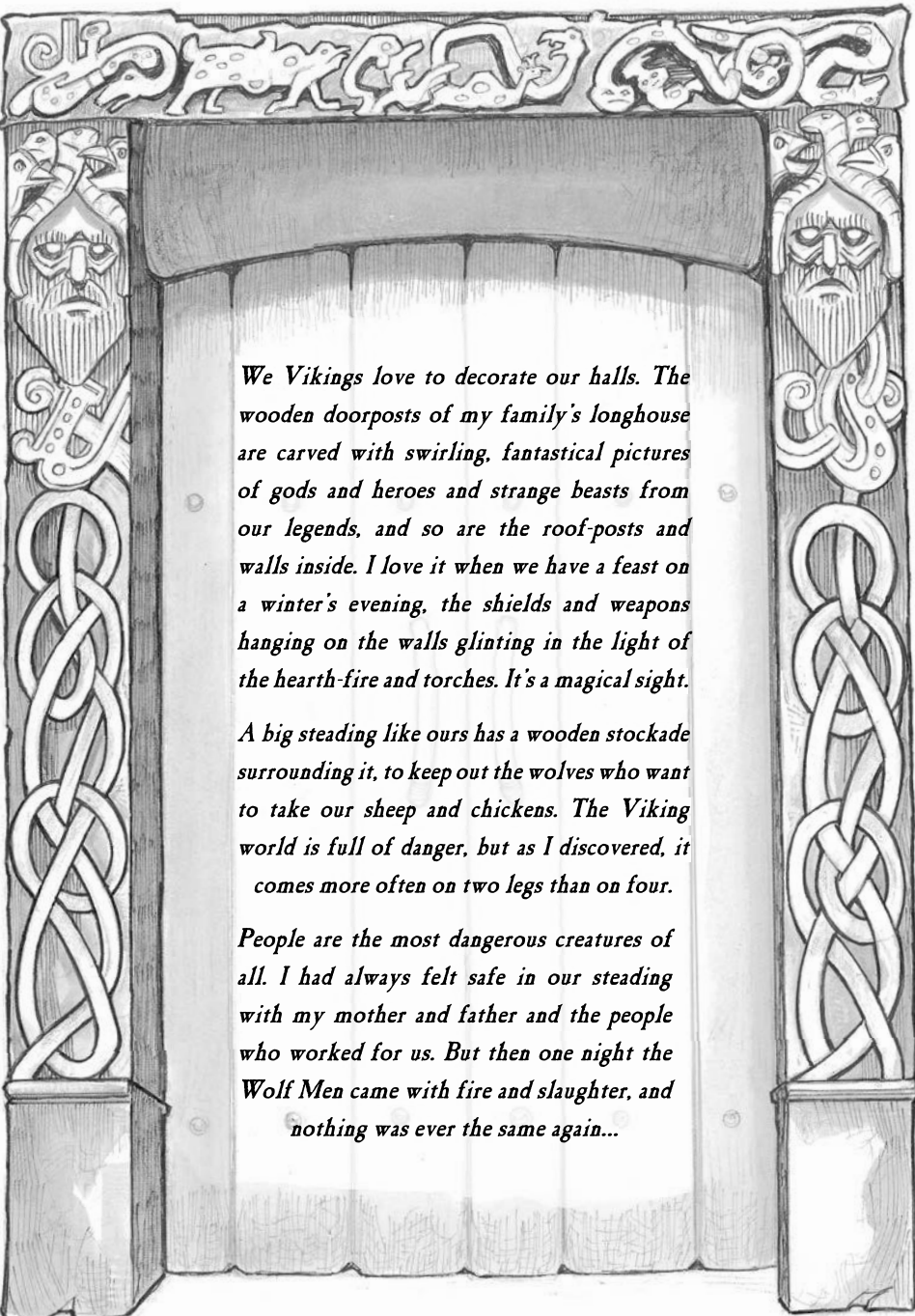
The inside was one large room, divided into several spaces. The hearth was in the middle of the hall, and the fire was kept going all the time – it provided heat for warmth and cooking, as well as light. There was a small hole in the roof where the smoke could escape. The floor was usually just earth trodden flat by everybody's feet.

There were benches along the walls for people to sit on, or to sleep on at night. In large halls there were often small side-rooms for tasks such as spinning and weaving, and so the lord and his family could have some privacy. There was not much furniture – a bed for the lord and his wife, chests to store valuable items. Big tables for feasts were kept stacked, and brought out when needed.

THE LONGHOUSE

"When I think of home, I see my parents sitting together on a bench by the hearth, smoke rising from the fire to the roof hole. A pot full of stew hangs above the flames..."





We Vikings love to decorate our halls. The wooden doorposts of my family's longhouse are carved with swirling, fantastical pictures of gods and heroes and strange beasts from our legends, and so are the roof-posts and walls inside. I love it when we have a feast on a winter's evening, the shields and weapons hanging on the walls glinting in the light of the hearth-fire and torches. It's a magical sight.

A big steading like ours has a wooden stockade surrounding it, to keep out the wolves who want to take our sheep and chickens. The Viking world is full of danger, but as I discovered, it comes more often on two legs than on four.

People are the most dangerous creatures of all. I had always felt safe in our steading with my mother and father and the people who worked for us. But then one night the Wolf Men came with fire and slaughter, and nothing was ever the same again...

People in other lands beyond the sea call us the Norse, or the Danes, if they know where we come from, or sometimes Men of the North, or Northmen. But they also call us Vikings, a name many of us are proud to bear. Some say it once meant little more than “men from the bays of Norway”, and it's true that the word for “bay” in our Norse tongue is “vik”. There is even a part of southern Norway called Viken. But whatever it meant to begin with, it wasn't long before it took on a very different meaning.

“Viking” came to mean “pirate”, or “raider from the sea”.

Viking is a name that strikes fear into our enemies, and makes them scan the horizon for the sails of our longships.

They are wise to be afraid, for we Vikings are not to be trifled with.

