

The Vikings in Europe.

In the 6th century the indigenous people from the Scandinavian peninsula started raiding the shores of Northern Europe and the British Isles. At first they had a 'hit and run' policy. That is, they attacked coastal areas and they looted as much as they could carry with them and then they sailed back to their homeland. Their vessels were called longboats.



Gradually, however, they started establishing permanent settlements first in Northern Europe and then on the British Isles. Some intrepid Vikings sailed as far as the Mediterranean and established a very successful kingdom in Sicily. The Vikings that settled in Denmark were called Danes. The Vikings that settled in Northern France were called Normans (the people from the North).



The Vikings were fiercesome warriors. They succeeded in defeating many better organized armies in Europe and imposed themselves on the land.



What is incredibly noteworthy about these people is their adaptability. Despite imposing themselves with violence over the pre-existing populations they quickly adopted to the norms and customs of their new home and abandoned any sense of distinct national identity.

This is the reason why the Vikings that settled in different areas do not feel any affinity with their former compatriots that may have settled in other areas. The Normans, for instance, adopted the French language in less than three generations time and they eagerly converted to Christianity. They became so fervent Christians that they were among the pioneering leaders of the crusades.

The Vikings in Britain.



After over a century of hit and run raids they managed to establish themselves in the Northern half of today's England and they called their land 'Daneslaw'.

The Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great defeated them (end of 9th century) and among the terms of the peace truce that they signed was that they had to adopt Christianity.

When in 1066 the Normans invaded and conquered Britain the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings were already in a process of merging into one national unity.