

The Vikings Eastward Expansion

It was mostly the **Swedish Vikings** who travelled **eastward**. Traders began to explore the rivers of (what is now) **Russia**.

They sailed on the river **Volga** which is the longest and widest river in Europe. It begins north of what is now Moscow and flows south to the Caspian Sea.

In the eighth century, Vikings sailed down the Volga making their way south to meet the great **trade routes of central Asia**. Some crossed the Caspian Sea and travelled to **Baghdad**.

Some travelled down the **Dnieper** to reach the Black Sea to reach **Constantinople** (now Istanbul). Historians have named these Eastern explorers the '**Volga Vikings**'.

Staraya Ladoga

Important trading town for the Vikings.

It was a meeting point for many different traders - here people would talk of the exotic goods in rich bazaars of Baghdad and Constantinople



Down the River
Volkhov to Lake
Ilmen →
Then to the River
Dneiper →
Hauled goods and
ships over land
Traders were armed
and watchful in case
of robbers → 1,200
miles to the Black
Sea 1,600 to
Constantinople
89 days journey
Caspian Sea to
Baghdad = 2,500
miles

Scandinavia lacked precious metals such as gold and silver. But it did have desirable goods which could not be found elsewhere. The products that the Viking traders took south had to be high in value, small in bulk and able to withstand long journeys. The Vikings traded:

- Swords
- Walrus ivory
- Honey
- Falcons
- Furs
- Slaves
- Amber

Novgorod and Kiev

The Rus towns of Novgorod and Kiev became particularly important to the Vikings - they allowed them to control the river routes from the north to south.

By 860 the Vikings had built a major fortified centre at Novgorod - meaning 'New Fortress'. This was ruled by Riurik. In around 882, Riurik's heir Oleg became ruler of Kiev. Oleg joined together the existing villages on the Dnieper to create the important trading town. Some historians believe that Kiev became the foundation of Russia which was ruled by Oleg's heirs for over 700 years.

Vladimir, who ruled Kiev from 978 to 1015 brought about a crucial change in 988. He became a Christian and cemented his alliance with the Byzantium Empire by marrying the Emperor's sister. The Orthodox Christian Church took hold in Rus territory and brought many new (Christian) changes :

- Greek alphabet
- Law
- Political style
- Education
- Music
- Literature

However, the language of the Church was Slav. Vladimir's son Yaroslav the Wise, ruled the Rus state of Kiev from 1019-1045 increasing its power and wealth.

Volga Vikings and the Arab World

The Viking raids across Europe brought them into contact with other cultures, including Muslim Arabs. Although there are no known Viking settlements in the Arab lands, both cultures interacted with each other through their exploration of Europe. Contact between Vikings and Arabs occurred mainly in the area of what would become Russia.

Artefacts found across Scandinavia, and especially in Sweden, point to an extensive long-distance trade exchange between the two very different cultures. In their quest for silver and silk, the Vikings discovered and accessed valuable trade routes to Constantinople that led to an extensive trade exchange with the Arab world.

Seizing upon the opportunity to enrich themselves, the Vikings came into contact with Arabic wealth and treasures through their raids, and soon realised the potential of a peaceful trade exchange

Baghdad was very attractive to the Vikings. It was a circular city - with a great mosque at its centre as well as the caliph's palace. There were military buildings and beautiful gardens. Four roads led from the centre through the main gates of the city and out into the suburbs.

Baghdad had a population of over a million.

- Craftsmen
- Merchants
- Workshops
- Bazaars
- Houses
- Mosques
- Hospitals

Baghdad must have marvelled at the sights of the city - mostly interested in the goods.

Strong connection with wider Muslim world which stretched from central Asia to southern Spain.

Also connected the long distance routes to China and Asia.

The Vikings were keen to trade with Baghdad's merchants as they knew that luxury goods from the wider Muslim world could fetch high prices in Scandinavia.

Not always peaceful relations:

912 - Viking fleet crossed the Caspian Sea and raided Baku.

943 - Vikings captured and held the city of Berda for several months.

Volga Vikings and the Byzantine Empire

To the Vikings in the east, the city of Constantinople was simply known as 'Miklagard' - the Great City. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, had move the capital here in 330CE. It was still recognisably a Roman city (as you have just seen on the image). Constantinople was protected by 12 miles of high walls and huge towers. A long aqueduct supplied the city's half a million inhabitants with clean water. Constantinople was a Christian city with many fine churches and other buildings. But what attracted the Viking traders most, where the city's bazaars and exotic goods....

839- Vikings first visit Constantinople

860 - First attack with 200 ships - negotiated a trade treaty

Continued to raid and trade in the 10th century.

907 - Oleg launched an attack on Constantinople - but was driven off

911 - Trade treaty

940s - Igor began to attack Constantinople - defeated by 'Greek Fire' where Viking ships were burned

945 - Another trade treaty = only 50 ships allowed in at a time/limited amount of silk

Rus had to fight for the Byzantines

950s - Vikings dominated trade

Varangian Guard

Mid 9th century - Scandinavia warriors known as the Varangians joined the armies of the Byzantine Emperor.

Late 10th century - formed elite bodyguard