



DRAGONS OF THE NORTH: THE WORLD OF VIKING LONGSHIPS

DR. JOHN R. HALE
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 237 UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Viking ships are among the most remarkable artifacts in the entire realm of archaeological discovery, dominating European history for the three centuries between 800 and 1100 AD. As warships they terrorized coasts from Scotland to the Mediterranean; as trading craft they ventured down the rivers of Russia to Byzantium, and as vessels of exploration and colonization they crossed the open Atlantic to Ireland, Iceland, Greenland and ultimately America. Yet all these amazing achievements were accomplished by open, undecked ships with a few oars and a single square sail.

The 19th century witnessed dramatic finds of royal Viking ships in Norwegian burial mounds along Oslo fjord. More recently, underwater archaeologists have recovered virtually intact Viking ships from harbors in Denmark. The most ambitious project in the field of experimental archaeology has involved the reconstruction and sea trials of many Viking ship types. John Hale has traced the ancestry of Viking ships all the way back to sewn-plank canoes of the Scandinavian Bronze Age, and shows the links between these remarkable ships and the watercraft of the Pacific and central Africa.