




# New Research Grant: The World in the Viking Age: A Centre of Excellence at Uppsala University

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In June 2023, the Swedish Research Council established 15 national Centres of Excellence, each funded for an initial five years with a possible five-year extension as they become self-reliant. Our team at Uppsala University was fortunate to be awarded one of these generous grants to set up a Centre for *The World in the Viking Age* (WIVA) as a collaborative, interdisciplinary meeting place for the study and wider communication of a defining episode in global history.

For centuries, the so-called Viking Age (c. 750–1050 CE) has been subject to political misappropriation and projected, monochrome stereotype – making it all the more urgent to emphasise that the people of the time were individuals as varied and complicated, in every way, as ourselves. This spotlight on diversity, in all senses of the term, lies at the heart of the WIVA Centre: our objective is to recover a Viking Age that does not care what we think of it, a pluralistic past as it was (hard though that can be to access), not as anyone would wish it to have been.

The ideas behind the WIVA initiative have their origins in the 10-year research project on *The Viking Phenomenon*, from the same funders, which began in 2016 and is still ongoing. The notion of a Norse diaspora has now become commonplace in studies of the period, but also requires decon-

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struction. Moving past the illusory, Eurocentric notions of a ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ Viking Age, it is possible to perceive the finer grain of Scandinavian cultural encounters. We aim to explore the full span of the extended, Afro-Eurasian world of the Norse, looking primarily south and east along the Silk Roads, tracing their activities in networks of early globalisation that connected the Baltic to the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, Asia, and the China Seas – places where the Scandinavians were as often in a minority, but also at a disadvantage. Integral to this is recognising, and addressing, the unintentional parochialism of Viking studies and the geographical marginalisation of scholarly research opportunity, at odds with the vast reality of the diaspora.

The core team at start-up in January 2024 includes the Director and Co-directors (the authors of this note), and our Coordinator, Ms. Rahaf Abu Shaer. We are supported by a 12-person International Advisory Board, drawn from eight countries and nine disciplines. In practical terms, the Centre will be recruiting 20 International Visiting Researchers (IVRs), who will each spend three months in Uppsala. There is no hierarchy among the IVRs: after the award of a doctorate, these posts are open to researchers at any stage of their careers. Flexibility is built into the Centre’s design, not least in terms of expected outcomes. Some IVRs may produce a paper; some may be working on a book; others may give a seminar or two, or some public lectures; still others may simply talk and think: the point being that longer-term contacts and productive exchanges of ideas are the priority for us in this context. The decision to create so many IVR positions was motivated by what we see as a crucial need to bring in scholars *from* (for example) west, central and east Asia, or from north and east Africa, to discover what new insights and perspectives they can contribute to a Scandinavian research environment.

By the time this note is published, alongside the start of IVR recruitment we will also have issued open calls for applications to fill the first of five full-time Early Career Researcher (ECR) positions, in the form of two-year postdocs. A new interdisciplinary, two-year MA degree programme will also be launched in due course, again addressing the same theme of the world in the Viking Age; the ECRs will contribute to its teaching. All these activities will be supplemented by seminars, workshops, informal contact events, and public outreach.

Finally, WIVA is an invitation, not a fixed entity. The Centre is not a research project, but rather a home and a hub for them, as well as a base for teaching. We need to populate WIVA with projects, programmes, and people, and we hope that others will wish to join us on this exciting journey.

Learn more at: <https://www.uu.se/en/centre/centre-for-the-world-in-the-viking-age-wiva>

