



VOYAGE OF THE VIKINGS

GAME MASTER'S MANUAL



WELCOME ABOARD.

The winter has been long.
For months, the fjords of Norway have lain silent beneath ice and snow. Fishing boats have remained tied to their quays, merchants have waited beside empty warehouses, and no longship has dared challenge the North Sea.

But now...

The days grow longer.
The mountain streams begin to flow.
Great sheets of ice break apart and drift out towards the open ocean.
Across the North, markets awaken.
In Norse lands, shipwrights hammer fresh oak into weathered hulls.
Across the forests of Rus', hunters prepare wagons laden with beeswax, honey and sable pelts.
Far to the south, beyond rivers, mountains and seas, the markets of Constantinople wait for another summer of trade.

Voyage calls. It's your turn to steer into the wine dark sea.

EQUIPMENT

Unlike the Vikings, before you lies a chart and each crew has its own logbook.

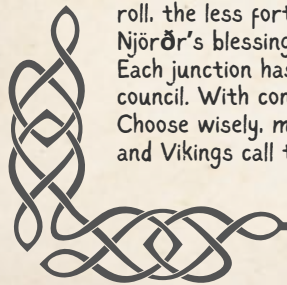
Each ship departs with 20 days' worth of supplies and 20 pieces of Danish silver.

You will begin with ten pieces of cargo that could be sold or restocked across the expedition.

At sea, the wind determines one's fate. Here, a die. The lower you roll, the less fortune is in your favour. But a higher roll gives Njörðr's blessings, and you will be safe for one leg more.

Each junction has its own choices, made by the Thing – the ship's council. With consequences.

Choose wisely, mariners. May Odin guard you along what the Saxons and Vikings call the Whale's Road.



ANCHORS AWEIGH

Kaupang. A name that will later exist only in dig site records.

Sturdy longhouses of timber and stone stretch on. Smoke from smoking herring and smelting iron bubbles out of chimneys. Whale blubber wafts as it lights up the shortening nights, and simmers alongside fish soup and rye bread. Under the blanket of the Northern Lights, the fjord cradles slumbering longships, ready to be roused by the winds once the ice begins to crack.

By the shore is a little market. A place where if you look hard enough you will find glass beads from Byzantium, silver from Damascus – the land of swords and roses – and Frisian gold coins.

Last autumn was bountiful. The sea warriors set out in empty longboats, and returned filling them with enough walrus and whale to last six months. After many banquets, where everyone blacked out drinking and got so fed up eating the smoked leftovers, all that was left were walrus tusks and whalebone. Not much, but still enough to fetch a decent price.

Now comes the wind. Slowly. A gentle breeze at first.

Then a firmer call. One hard enough to crack ice. One soft enough to let sails gently swell. The longboats toss softly.

They are ready. Ready to be relieved of their tight moors. Ready to roam across the raging waves towards the rising sun.

FOG

The fjords eventually start disappearing. Smoked cod and bread punctuate the endless days, yet sunshine trickles away. At first you feel its exhaustion. Sore limbs from the rowing. Nausea from being tossed by waves. Dizziness from a poorer diet. The jokes and dice-rolling grind to a halt.

Until one day. The fjords are gone. And you realise you haven't seen the sun for... longer than you can remember. Clouds smother the sky. Fog. Fog so thick that the tern can't plunge his wings through. Fog that wraps itself around your ship the way mistletoe wraps around a pine. Fog that turns day into night, the sky into another ocean. The wind isn't on your side. It pants the way an old ox would after hauling a crate of lumber.

Your navigator mentions a shadow of dark green stands on the horizon.

The Thing must convene. Will they make a dash for the spot of green to seek refuge? Plunge through like an osprey? Or gently row until the sun breaks through?

Once you make a decision, roll.

MAKE FOR SHORE

1-2: The boat crashes to a halt, its keel grinding against a sandbank. Half asleep, you and your brethren spend the night hauling it back into the sea.
Another day spent on repairs.

3-4: The scent of pine draws you to a sheltered cove.
Rest returns. The ship departs with a sharper crew.

5-6: Smoke? SMOKE!!! It's not a cloud. It's not mist. It's... A FISHING VILLAGE!
You depart with 3 days more of provisions. And... a full belly plus an even fuller heart.

TRUST THE NAVIGATOR

1-2: Seven days wasted.
Water, water everywhere but not a single drop to drink. Fatigue breaks out amongst the crew.

3-4: The fog finally lifts.
Your voyage is far from finished.

5-6: A Gull on the horizon.
Then a few more. Now a flock. And under them...
LAND AHOY!

STRIKE THE SAIL

1-2: Seven days wasted.
Water, water everywhere but not a single drop to drink. Fatigue breaks out amongst the crew.

3-4: Slow but safe. Keep going.

5-6: An afternoon more. You feel it. Light. Gently hitting your eyes. The grey shroud has lifted. The sun's rays gently wash over you, and over a sapphire sea.

TYNEMOUTH

Northern fields stretch onto the swans' road. On the rocks lay a settlement, watching over the waves; a closer look reveals stone crosses, sentinels in the dusk. Inside a dark hall the host throngs around the fire.

A monk struts in robe clad, he pauses as your eyes fall on him as he begins to speak....

"YE FAITHFUL WALKERS OF THE WHALE'S PATH, MAY YOU WAVE-
CROSSERS BE BLESSED BY GOD'S ALMIGHTY HANDS. OVER SMASHING
SURF AS YOU SWEAT IN COLD, THROUGH ANXIOUS WATCH, PERCHED IN
THE BOW. WHEN THE ONLY SOUND IS THE ROARING SEA, THE
FREEZING WAVES. THE SONG OF THE SWAN, THE MEWING OF GULLS
INSTEAD OF MEAD..."

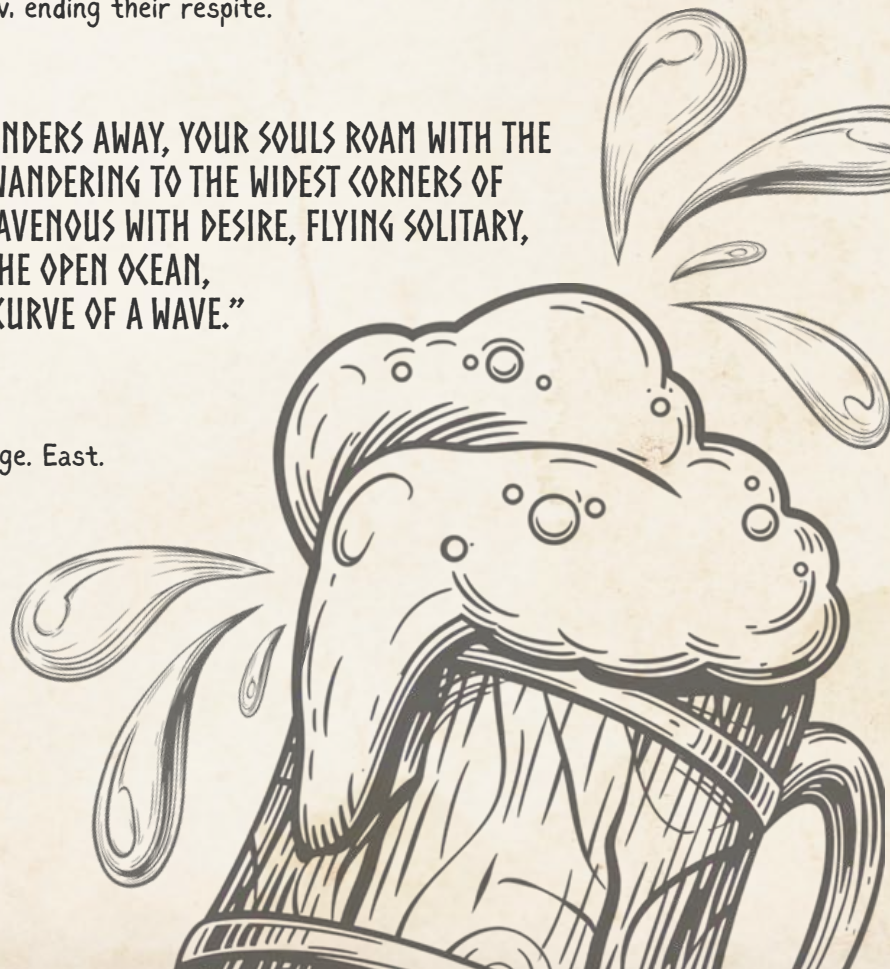
A voice follows:

"BUT THERE ISN'T A MAN ON EARTH SO PROUD, SO BORN TO
GREATNESS, SO BOLD WITH HIS YOUTH. GROWN SO GRAVE, OR SO
GRACED BY GOD, THAT HE FEELS NO FEAR AS THE SAILS UNFURL,
WONDERING WHAT FATE HAS WILLED AND WILL DO."

Tynemouth. Longer days of timber and mead; meat and sail abound on the beaches.
From far and wide together comes the crew, ending their respite.

"AND YET YOUR HEART WANDERS AWAY, YOUR SOULS ROAM WITH THE
SEA, THE WHALES' HOME, WANDERING TO THE WIDEST CORNERS OF
THE WORLD, RETURNING RAVENOUS WITH DESIRE, FLYING SOLITARY,
SCREAMING, EXCITING TO THE OPEN OCEAN,
BREAKING OATHS ON THE CURVE OF A WAVE."

Mead ends the poem. Yet it begins the voyage. East.
To the widest corners of the world.



FOREST OF RIVERS

The coastline dissolves into veins of rivers.

Days pass beneath green ceilings. Sunlight filters through towering pines and silver birch, turning the water below into ribbons of green and gold. The wind no longer fills your sail. The current carries you instead.

The forest seems endless.

Between quiet reedbeds, life appears without warning. A narrow canoe slips silently from the rushes. A hunter glides past, his craft laden with ducks, beaver and otter pelts. He raises a hand but says nothing. A little further downstream, an old fisherman stands knee-deep in the shallows, casting his net with practised ease.

The rivers belong to people who have always known them. Then...the trees part.

Great timber gates stand over the river, their logs darkened by years of rain and smoke. Beyond them, stocky wooden houses crowd together along muddy lanes. Planked walkways lift your boots above the worst of the mire, though not always successfully.

Everything here is brown. Brown walls and roofs. Brown of the mud where vegetables and grain grew. Brown of the timber paths and barrels and carts. Brown of fallen leaves rotting at your feet. Never the open blue sky or green turf and grass of home. Nor the dry ocean air.

Even the wind smells watery. Not even a crackling fire drives the water away – for the logs themselves have adorned green lichen.

The riverbank fills with hunters and fishermen, farmers from the villages and merchants arriving from lands you've never seen. Bundles of fur change hands beside blocks of beeswax and jars of honey. Balance scales settle disputes more often than swords.

A trader pops up by the pier.

Khleb? He asks. You shake your head. Shchi? He tries. Points to your whalebone and points to himself. He then points to a wooden house. A squat dwelling.

You turn to your crew. Do you accept the merchant's invitation? Or do you press on while daylight remains?

OPTION I: FOLLOW THE MERCHANT

The squat timber house is warmer than it looks.

Inside, a great iron pot bubbles gently over the fire. Thick bowls of shchi arrive, rich with cabbage, onions and slow-cooked meat. Warm khleb is torn by hand. You feel the familiar sourness of rye bread. A mug of cool, dark kvas washes away weeks of salted fish and smoked cod.

For a little while... The voyage feels very far away.

The innkeeper smiles warmly as he weighs your silver. "Khvala ti."

Only later, as dusk settles over the river, does another Norse trader quietly pull you aside. He chuckles. "First time in Ladoga?" He points at the tavern. "Those scales have always been a little... generous."

Your crew exchange uneasy looks. Perhaps the meal cost a little more than it should have.

LOSE 2 SILVER. GAIN 3 PROVISIONS.

OPTION II: CAMP BY THE REEDS

You thank the merchant, but continue a little further downstream.

Your crew trade smoked cod for a brace of ducks and a kettle of fresh fish stew from a passing fisherman.

The meal is simple. Fresh fish. Wild herbs. A little bread. Clean river water.

No crowded tavern. No clever merchants. Only the quiet murmur of the river and the whisper of the birch leaves overhead.

The stars return one by one. Tomorrow, the journey continues.

LOSE 1 PROVISION. SPEND NO SILVER.

THE GREAT MARKET OF NOVGOROD

The river clogs up beneath a looming fortress, its wood-panelled walls still a shiny brown. Boats. Boats in, boats out. More than the eyes could see, more than the fingers could count. On the river and shore, bundles of fur change hands. Wax. Honey. Amber. Walrus ivory. Wooden cottages line the banks extending to the fortress walls.

It all has a buyer and a price.

A merchant's barge slips past. He eyes your hold, chuckling.

"You're taking all twenty tusks to Kyiv?" He shakes his head. "Madness. Sell them here."

Another joins the conversation. "The rivers only grow narrower."

"Every pound you carry now... you'll carry over land next week."

The room falls quiet.

THE THING OF THE CREW

The crew gathers. How much cargo shall we sell?

OPTION 1

Sell Nothing

- Higher profits if Constantinople pays more.
- But every bundle must be dragged across the portages.

OPTION 2

Sell Half

- Bank a guaranteed profit.
- Reduce the weight.
- Leave room for new cargo.

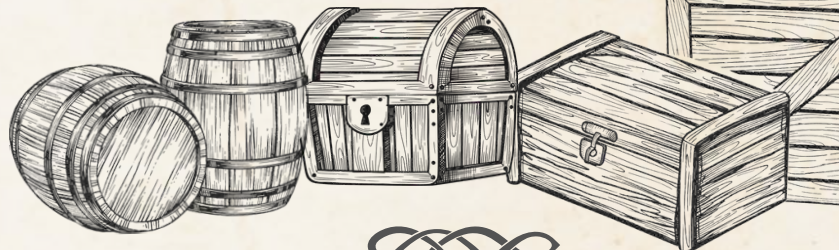
OPTION 3

Sell Most of the Cargo

- The hold becomes light.
- Your crew moves quickly.

YOU MAY BUY

beeswax | honey | furs | birch bark | iron tools
to sell further south.



GAME MECHANIC

Each cargo sold earns 1 Silver.
For every 5 cargo still aboard at Gnezdovo you lose one additional day during the portage.



THE NORSE QUARTER

The sun takes forever to say goodbye to a summer sky. Instead of the starry glitter that follows winter, it leaves orange evenings among the birch groves, market streets and mosquitos. By another inn built from logs, a bearded merchant hears your crew speaking Old Norse.

He smiles. "Kaupang?" You nod. He laughs. "Come."

The inside is familiar. Long tables under a timber roof. A fireplace by the wall, with a stew simmering inside. Chatter. You take a seat. Familiar walrus horns filled with – what do they call it? Kvas? – rotate between guests, but stories always beat the drink's aroma to the next person.

Some men left Norway twenty winters ago. Many never returned.

A little girl runs across the room. She speaks to her grandfather in the tongue of Rus'. He answers in Norse. Neither notices anything unusual.

The rivers, they keep people.

A pat on the back. The old merchant guides you to a corner and quietly clears the table. Three objects lie before him. A rolled strip of birch bark. A small leather purse. A tightly wrapped parcel.

He looks around the room. "Friends in Kyiv. Would you carry these?"

THE THING OF THE CREW

CARRY THE PARCELS

The old merchant smiles. "Khvala ti."
Record Birch Letter, Silver Purse and Parcel
on your Ship's Log.
You have made friends.
Friends remember kindness.

REFUSE

The merchant nods politely.
No argument.
No anger.
Only disappointment.

The road south grows a little lonelier.

Just as you prepare to leave, the innkeeper appears carrying a magnificent smoked sturgeon. The smell alone silences the room.

One sailor whispers. "By Odin..."

The innkeeper grins. "Caught yesterday." A pause. "...or perhaps the day before."

THE THING OF THE CREW

EAT THE STURGEON

The feast is unforgettable. The morning is too. Half your crew wake clutching their stomachs.
The old merchant laughs so hard he nearly spills his kvas.
"Congratulations."
"You're proper river merchants now."

LOSE ONE DAY

EAT SOUP AND BREAD

Warm shchi. Fresh khleb. Cool kvas.
Simple. Safe.
Your crew leave at first light.



GNEZDOVO WHERE SHIPS WALK

The river grows shallow.

Then... It ends.

Every bundle is unloaded. Every barrel. Every walrus tusk.

The mast comes down. Thick ropes wrap around the hull. Fresh logs are laid across the earth.

Your ship begins to walk. Every crew works. No captain is spared. The forest echoes with shouted commands. Timber groans. Ropes strain. Hands blister.

By nightfall nobody speaks. Even the fire burns quietly.

The quartermaster opens the ledger. Count the walrus tusks still aboard.

◆—5 TUSKS

The portage is hard, but finished before sunset.

LOSE 1 DAY.

6-10 TUSKS

The work continues beneath torchlight.

LOSE 2 DAYS.

11-15 TUSKS

The crew sleep beside the trail before finishing the crossing.

LOSE 3 DAYS.

16-20 TUSKS

The forest seems endless. Your backs ache. Your shoulders burn. Tomorrow cannot come quickly enough.

LOSE 4 DAYS AND 1 PROVISION.

KYIV QUEEN OF THE DNIEPER

The green blanket of trees starts to melt at its fringes. Its rim is golden. Waves of grain. At first in pockets. Then to an open horizon.

Blue again is the sky. A wide dome above a golden sea.

The river becomes a highway. Grain barges drift beside merchant vessels. Church bells ring across the water.

Then a city rises. Between layers of walls and moats, lanes and streets emerge. Houses. Packed layer to layer.

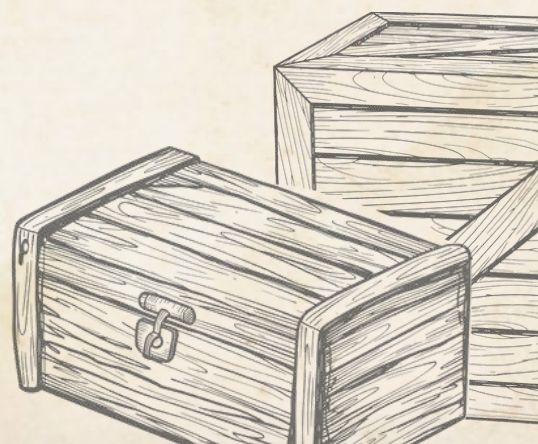
Dense alleys line the riverbanks. Warehouses stretching into the river.

Honey. Wax. Wine.

Every language of the rivers seems to meet here.

Above the customs quay flies the banner of the Rurik Trident

A customs officer studies your cargo. Then notices the birch letter.



His face softens. "Halfdan." He smiles. "That stubborn old fool still writes."

Your cargo passes quickly through inspection. No endless questions. No extra fees. Some friendships are worth more than silver.

Across the square, a money changer weighs your silver beside heavy Hryvnias.

"Local silver buys local trust."

The address leads to a modest timber house.

An elderly man opens the door. You hand him the birch letter. He doesn't read it. Instead... He quietly places another birch letter into your hands. "Leif died before the first snow."

Silence.

"He knew his brother would write. He asked me for one last favour." The old man closes his eyes. "When Halfdan's letter comes...please write back. He will not bear the truth from strangers."

He places the reply gently into your hands. Outside, Kyiv continues as though nothing has happened. The markets are full. The river keeps flowing. People rush on into the next journey of their lives.

The quartermaster closes the ledger one last time. "Captain. The cargo will fetch a good price here."

He looks south.

Towards the rapids.

Towards the Black Sea.

Towards Constantinople.

"...or perhaps... our story continues."



THE FINAL THING

CONTINUE TO CONSTANTINOPLE

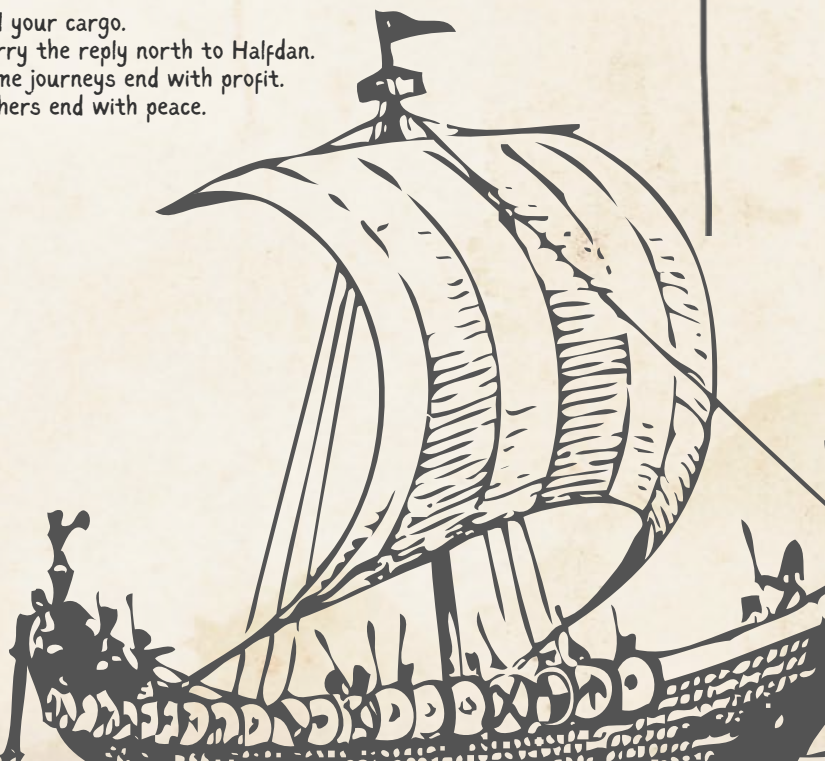
Sell only what you must.
Keep the reply safe.
Beyond Kyiv lie the rapids.
Beyond the rapids...
The greatest city in the world.
The river is still flowing.
And so are you.

RETURN HOME

Sell your cargo.
Carry the reply north to Halfdan.
Some journeys end with profit.
Others end with peace.



THE END



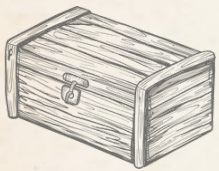


THE THING OF THE CREW

VARANGIAN JOURNEY
FROM TRONDENHEIM TO CONSTANTINOPLE

SHIP

CREW NAMES



CARGO

Goods to trade



SILVER

Your wealth



PROVISIONS

Food & water
for the crew



MAINTENANCE

Ship & gear in good
condition



FOREIGN COINS

Other currencies &
money

SHIPS JOURNAL

Record events, deals, and discoveries



PORTS VISITED



TRONDHEIM



NOVGOROD



KYIV



DNIEPER RAPIDS



CONSTANTINOPLE

BIRCH LETTER

Leave a message for those who
find this log

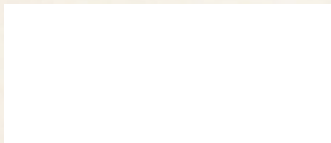




COUNTING TOKENS

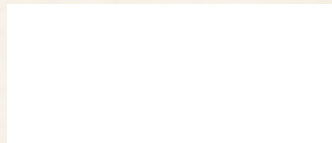
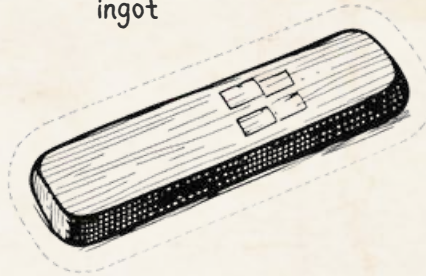
CUT OUT THE TOKENS OR USE THE SPACE BELOW TO COUNT

PROVISIONS BARREL

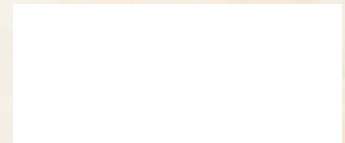


HRYVNIA

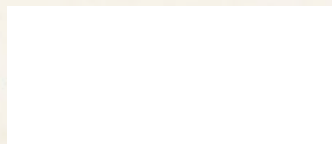
Kievan steel
ingot



WALRUS TUSK



DANISH SILVER

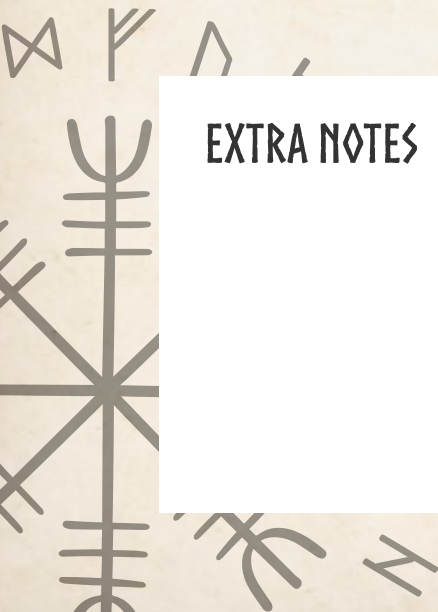


DOWNLOAD
MORE
COUNTERS



EXTRA NOTES

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THE ROUTE FROM THE VARYAGIANS TO THE GREEKS



190 0 190 380 km



**DEPART
NORWAY
(KAUPANG)**

**A MERCHANT'S
WISDOM**

Rivers are your road.
Wind is your ally.
Silver is your tongue.
Honor is your shield.



THE ROUTE

Kaupang (Norway)
↓
Baltic Sea
↓
Lake Ladoga (Ladoga)
↓
Volkhov River
↓
Novgorod
↓
Gnezdovo (Portage Crossing)
↓
Dnieper River
↓
Smolensk
↓
Ljubech
↓
Kyiv
↓
Dnieper Rapids (Oleshye)
↓
Black Sea
↓
Constantinople (Tsargrad)

--- Route of
the Varangians
to the Greeks

● Major Stop

★ Final Destination
(Beyond the Horizon)

CONSTANTINOPLE
(TSARGRAD)



Council for
British Archaeology



Young
Archaeologists'
Club

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**SHOUT
OUT
LOUD**