Viking Poetry

Course description:
As a primary source for the study of the Viking Age, the poetry composed by the Vikings themselves is unparalleled in terms of both extent and interest. This module will examine a wide range of poetry composed in Old Norse between about 900 and 1050: texts studied will include poems about Norse mythology and heroic legend, praise-poetry for Viking Age kings, Christian poetry and wisdom poetry, and even love poetry and insult poetry. Considerable attention will be paid to the later, written preservation of this essentially oral poetry in manuscripts, sagas, and poetic treatises. Each seminar will address a different theme or topic, but will also be structured around the close and detailed engagement with two or three particular poems (copies of which will be supplied). All texts studied will be available in translation as well as the original, and the module can be taken by students with no prior knowledge of Old Norse.

Learning outcomes:
By the end of the module students will be expected to demonstrate:
- an understanding of the main features of Old Norse poetry
- an awareness of the cultural contexts of Old Norse poetry
- skills in the close reading of Old Norse poetry

Seminar programme:
1: Poetic Theory and Poetic Form
2: Poetry in an Oral Culture
3: Poetry and Paganism
4: Poetry and the Conversion
5: Wisdom Poetry
6: Legendary Poetry
7: Law and Poetry
8: Love Poetry

Preliminary reading:
Anthony Faulkes (trans.), Snorri Sturluson: Edda (Everyman, 1987)
Carolyne Larrington (trans.), The Poetic Edda (Oxford World’s Classics, 1996)
Diana Whaley (ed.), Sagas of Warrior-Poets (Penguin Classics, 2002)