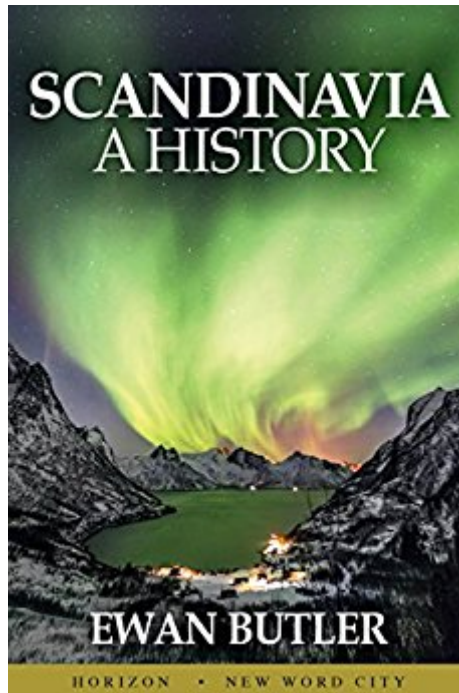




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Scandinavia: A History



Synopsis

Here is the dramatic story of Scandinavia - from its earliest Germanic origins and Viking sea raids to its battles for independence and its involvement in World War II. Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, writes award-winning historian Ewan Butler writes, struggled through unions and separations, with both outsiders and each other, developing their own personalities and languages yet retaining their ancient connections.

Book Information

File Size: 1863 KB

Print Length: 153 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publisher: New Word City, Inc.; 1 edition (April 11, 2016)

Publication Date: April 11, 2016

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01E5M0LNO

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #81,906 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #18 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Scandinavia #33 inÂ Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia #850 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Military

Customer Reviews

This book provided a nice introduction to the history and culture of the Scandinavian countries. I learned many interesting details -- for example, that most of Northern Europe was not inhabited before 10,000 BC because it was covered with ice 6,000 feet deep in some places -- glaciers so heavy that they pushed the level of the land down. The first chapter is mostly about the Vikings. While they fascinate many people, especially after the recent television show, too few appreciate their actual impact on the development of Europe. They not only raided coasts all the way to the Mediterranean and Constantinople, but also settled in places like Sicily and were great traders.

From the Eastern Med, they brought back "gold, silver, carpets, tapestries, perfumes, leatherwork, dried fruits, precious stones, and many other things never before seen in their homeland," the author points out. After they conquered much of eastern England, the Saxon king agreed to let them stay if they converted to Christianity and behaved, which is amusing because he couldn't have done much about the raiders anyway. The author points out that the term "Vikings" had been loosely applied to all these sea raiders, whether Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian, and it derives from the word vik which still means "creek" in all Scandinavian languages. The Vikings were "creekmen." It seems an odd title for sailors who sailed most of the known seas at the time. I was interested in how long the old Norse religion lasted in Scandinavia. English and German missionaries gradually spread Christianity, but in the 1100s there were still many determined followers of Thor and Odin in the remoter parts of Sweden. Also, in the Medieval era there was still much fighting among tribes. The name of the future Swedish capital, Stockholm, derives from a stockade built to protect Swedes from attacks from raiders from Estonia and Karelia, on the eastern Baltic. After the Scandinavian nations as we know them developed in the 1300s, there was much fighting among Sweden, Denmark, and the Hanseatic League (towns of the German Baltic coast). Norway would break off from Sweden, then be reunited. Even though the kingdoms pledged "eternal and unbroken peace" in 1397, it was not to be. The fighting seemed rather endless, and I moved on to the next chapter.

Scandinavia: A History
Written by: Ewan Butler
Narrated by: Matthew Lloyd Davies
Length: 6 hrs and 25 mins
Unabridged Audiobook
Release Date: 02-21-17
Publisher: HighBridge, a Division of Recorded Books
Courtesy Audiobook Jukebox
Ewan Butler's Scandinavia: A History has all the drama, treachery, warfare and larger than life characters as The Game of Thrones. The thrones in Scandinavia involve Sweden, Norway and Finland with interference from Denmark on a regular basis. This was a fascinating book covering an area of the world that while not a superpower has none the less had an impact on the world at large. The book is full of interesting tidbits like the word "Vikings" is derived "from the word vik" which still means "creek" in all Scandinavian languages. The Vikings longships that were so feared were engineered to be able to go into very shallow waters. This enable them to hide in creeks and wait for passing prey or to penetrate far inland in search of riches. "Norsemen" was applied to peoples from all three counties. These raiders left their names and genetics in vast territories like Normandy and Russia. As the Viking age comes to a close, around the end of the first millennium, the Middle Ages of Scandinavia began producing

better characters and drama than Shakespeare dreamed of. Denmark did her best to control all the lands within Scandinavia but was never able to hold on to its short term conquests. Sweden had a King with clear lines of succession. Norway had not rules for succession so each King's death brought about great upheaval. Each nation's trials and coups created a domino effects on its neighbors. The book continues down through history with story after story involving kings, coups, wars with Russia, France, and each other. Russian controlled Finland for over a hundred years. As the twentieth century arrived, Finland, Norway and Sweden each found their own identity through independence. The Scandinavian nations produced great composers, explorers, and diplomats. Matthew Lloyd Davies is a very good narrator. He handles the many words in a vast range of languages without any problems. His voice is clear and all words are enunciated including the non-English ones. I found his voice pleasing to listen to. Butler's Scandinavia: A History is a wonderful way to introduce yourself to an area of the world whose rich history is only surpassed by its sumptuous landscape.

I have read his history as preparation for this summer's trip to the region. The early history is difficult to wade through because there are few gripping stories to tell from the archaeological record. The chapters from the early 1600's to the end of WWII are fascinating. The entire history illustrates the competitive, warlike, and sometimes cruel nature of mankind. Today our civilization tries to suppress this aspect of mankind, however, there are numerous current examples of horrible behavior. The final paragraphs summarize the progress made by the Scandinavian countries to counter these tendencies, quote: "The countries of Scandinavia are humanitarian, with laws for the protection of workers, mothers, children and old people.....As the Swedes say: "Everyone is as good as everyone else."" When I visit this region I will have a much deeper appreciation for their history and culture. Worth the effort.

The history of Scandinavia goes well beyond the often tales of invasion of Great Britain and exploration. It tells you about the power struggles and alliances that each country had with Germany, France, Britain, and Russia. Interesting read.

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