

*The Vinland Sagas: A Military Historical Analysis of Exploration, Trade and Conflict in the New World*

Jared Lister

Dr. Armann Jakobsson (Supervisor)

*Medieval Icelandic Studies/Viking and Medieval Norse Studies*

The University of Iceland

Reykjavik, Iceland

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## Why Vinland and Why Is It Important?

The Vinland Sagas, a collection of Icelandic and Greenland ‘Viking’ Sagas, describe the first European discovery and explorations of the North American continent. These Vinland Sagas were, and still are, considered to be a form of evidence of the very first recorded European discovery of North America, well before Christopher Columbus’ discovery of Southern America. The Vinland Sagas, consisting of two individual sagas, tell the story of Viking explorers such as Leifr Eiríksson and Bjarni Herjólfsson who braved the Atlantic Ocean to discover, and settle, Greenland and who are believed to eventually settle America.

In their voyage Eirik and his companions were said to have been able to discover a new land, from rocky tundra’s to an island covered in forest, interact with the indigenous population with trade and communication, and eventually have conflict with the indigenous, and amongst themselves, and be expelled from the area known as Vinland leaving us with only the archaeological L’Anse aux Meadows as the sole proof of their existence.

The Vinland Sagas themselves come from four medieval texts which describe the Viking adventure to the location known as “Vinland,” the texts being *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga* in the texts titled *Hauksbók*, later *Skálholtsbók*, and *Flateyjarbók*; all these texts belong to the Icelandic text *Islendingasögur*.<sup>1</sup> The sagas themselves were written probably sometime in the 13th century with the actual events suspected to take place between 970-1030 AD and even as late as the 14th century.<sup>2</sup> Due to this time difference between compensation and the actual event historians can only guess if the events within the saga are true or not, making it difficult to prove if these theories of Vinland are true or if they are just fantasy.

1. Jónas Kristjánsson, trans. Peter Foote. *Eddas and Sagas. Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavik: *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*), 1997: 204.
2. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York, New York: *Penguin Classics*, 2000): 626

This questions the accuracy of the sagas, as historians continue to discover archaeological evidence it is becoming more difficult to begrudge some truth to the Vinland sagas suspected historiographical realism. That and due to the fact that since the failed expedition no explorer touched the Atlantic Canadian region until Jacques Cartier in 1534,<sup>4</sup> it is hard to either claim the Vinland sagas as a completely trustworthy source or completely inaccurate in its presentation. This makes it difficult for researchers to develop new theories on the Vinland Sagas which were not already created, such as a military analysis of the sagas. However with the information presented, the unique similarity of geographical landmarks, the Native peoples, and the continuing archaeological evidence being discovered, it becomes easier for historians and other researchers alike to attempt to prove the Vinland sagas and develop new theories as to what exactly happened within the saga, ergo what is true and what is not.

William Ian Miller in his book *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* presents a theory on how the sagas should be used as sources: “the sagas for the most part ring true. Their accounts of disputes rarely exceed the parameters by which we judge plausibility; their narratives fit admirably the limits of social possibility as determined by the large sociological and anthropological literature. *All* surviving artifacts, whether art or coprolite, have their tale to tell.”<sup>3</sup> This statement can help historians understand the value of the Vinland sagas, and though they may lack historical accuracy due to their dates of composition, they should still be viewed with an open mind.

Despite being primary sources there are looming questions to these sagas: how reliable are these Icelandic sources and how do they relate to other evidence that the Vikings did in fact

3. William Ian Miller. *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, USA: *The University of Chicago Press*, 1990): 46.

4. John Macgregor. *Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada* (*William Blackwood Publishing*, 1832): 329

discover, encounter, and settle North America? Other looming questions are the location of Vinland and why was there conflict among the settlers and Natives? The Vinland Sagas, considered being the most concrete evidence historians have in the Viking discovery of North America, prove that the discovery of Vinland can no longer be denied as an historical event. Furthermore there is strong physical evidence, found in Newfoundland, that this Vinland was an actual location known to us today.

This thesis will analyze the Vinland Sagas in a historical global contextual analysis to the Native-Viking conflict which occurred in the Saga. Furthermore it will give a general overview of the Vinland Sagas, analyzing *Eiríks and Grænlendinga*, and how it has been interpreted by secondary sources to give a general idea to the accuracy of the Vinland Sagas. This thesis will also present new arguments to suggest that Vinland was in fact the Atlantic region of Canada, not just isolated to Newfoundland and the North. Finally this thesis will analyze the conflict between the Vikings and Natives and explore the greater historical context, and significance, of the conflict; relating this conflict to later European-Native North American relations.

The bigger question in analyzing the Vinland Sagas is: who were the Vikings? The so-called Vikings, Norsemen, or Scandinavians exploded out of Scandinavia with a fierce legacy of pioneering, settlement and violence unlike the world had ever seen up to this point in history. Fridtjof Nansen writes “they were the great pioneers in traversing the ocean. Before them, all navigation had been more or less coast navigation, the ships sailing chiefly along the coasts from place to place, and never venturing very far from the known land.”<sup>5</sup>

There are many definitions of the word ‘Viking’ itself, but as P.H. Sawyer writes “one of the words used by the English, and probably by the Scandinavians themselves, Viking, has

5. Fridtjof Nansen. “The Norsemen in America.” *The Geographical Journal* 38 (1911): 557.

become generally accepted as the appropriate term, not only for the raiders but also for the world from which they came.”<sup>6</sup> Though the term has been used since the 1840s to define those who went to England, in a sense the term ‘Viking,’ as Sawyer believes, means to go out to explore, raid, trade or settle; thereby to call the explorers of Greenland and Vinland ‘Vikings’ is an appropriate term.

The discovery of Vinland came much later in Viking history and could be considered the actual event to the end of the Viking Age. The Norsemen, with their ability to explore uncharted waters and undiscovered countries, explored the vast regions of Western and Southern Europe, discovered the Arctic North, making their way past the White sea, settled England, Scotland, Ireland and discovered and settled Iceland, Greenland, and were the first recorded discoverers of North America.<sup>7</sup> This was by no means a small victory for the ‘barbarians of the north’ with their pagan beliefs and so-called ‘savage ways.’<sup>8</sup> The first recorded Viking raid was located in Lindisfarne, England, in 793 and the progression of raiding, trading, settlement and occupation grew until the end of the ‘Viking Age’ in 1000-1001 AD where they discovered Vinland.<sup>9</sup>

No other people group from this time period have been able to make as strong an impact on the world as the ‘Vikings,’ but what does this have to do with the Vinland Sagas? Simply put without the Viking Age there would be no Vinland Saga. Before the famous archaeological discovery of L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, it was generally accepted that Christopher Columbus was the first person to discover the new world and Vinland was just a story with no proven archaeological basis to back up historical accuracy. However when archaeological

6. P.H. Sawyer. *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100* (New York, New York: Methuen and Company, 1982): 1.

7. Fridtjof Nansen, “The Norsemen in America, 557.

8. Knut Helle Ed. *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Volume I Prehistory to 1520* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 90

9. Knut Helle Ed, *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, 126.

excavations discovered the Vikings did in fact settle Newfoundland this opinion soon changed.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the Viking Age and the experience the Vikings had in discovery, settlement, and raiding the Vikings had the ability to discover and temporarily settle Vinland. Like traditional Viking motivations the Vinland discovery and exploration was one of glory, fame, honor, and to link settlers with this new found world: all key characteristics of Viking culture.<sup>11</sup> In essence then the discovery of Vinland was a necessary act by the Vikings because of their historical nature which was based on glory, honor and maintaining a certain duty to explore.<sup>12</sup>

The case of the discovery of Vinland is very unique in historical analysis, with the Vinland Saga's historical evidence being written over two-hundred years after the events in the saga occurred; this obscures the credibility of the stories told, which is often a regular occurrence in all Icelandic Sagas.<sup>13</sup> This makes it complicated to present strong historical accuracy and support to the sagas; however due to the archaeological discovery mentioned above, the sources written on the Vinland Sagas, and the differing opinions of scholars I will attempt to prove that not only did the Vikings discover Vinland but the conflict, between the Natives and Vikings, shows a greater historical context which has not been fully explored.

The historical context of the conflict represents the entire European-North American relations, based upon discovery, trade, and eventual war which followed the exact same patterns in the Vinland Sagas as it had in the 1700's. Important in proving my theory there will also be a discussion of the Native American peoples, the weapons used, the tactics implemented and

10. H. Ingstad and A. Stine Ingstad. *The Viking Discovery of America* (Newfoundland, Canada: Breakwater Books, 2000): 141.

11. Else Roesdahl. *The Vikings: Second Edition* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998): 276.

12. Fridtjof Nansen, "The Norsemen in America," 558

13. Jane Smiley Ed. *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (London, England: Penguin Classics Deluxe Addition, 2001).

finally the location of exploration, trade and conflict.

The importance of discussing Vinland is great since it links European civilization with Native North American civilization for the first time in history. This was the first time in history that Europeans met, traded and fought against the Native Americans, which ironically sets the tone for the rest of the history between the two cultures. In the greater historical context could the conflict in the Vinland Sagas set up the rest of the European-Native relationship in the 1700's? I believe it can because the European-Native relationship was one of violence but also one of prosperity in trade. Both also occur in the Vinland Sagas.

More importantly what of the actual conflict? What are the implications of the conflict and how did this attribute to the overall failure of the Vinland settlements? Questions such as these will be answered in the thesis, drawing upon a greater historical context. There is however a lack of information, as mentioned above, in discussing the conflict itself. Out of the entire Vinland Sagas the conflict and its description is only contained within a small part of the Vinland story.<sup>14</sup> However this conflict is important because it focuses on three major issues: how did the conflict start, how did the conflict unfold and how did it affect the rest of the Vinland saga?

The importance of the conflict becomes just as important as discussing the actual Vinland Saga. Without conflict there would be no climax to the Vinland Saga and instead the Vikings may have stayed and settled the land permanently, but more importantly they did not leave through violence alone. The geography of Vinland, the weather patterns, climate, and other foreign factors made Vinland exciting and just as dangerous to the explorers.<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that the Vikings did not only leave because of conflict. Many events pushed them out,

14. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders. Eirik the Red's Saga: Chapter 11* (New York, New York: Penguin Classics, 2000): 670-671.

15. For a description of Vinland see chapter two: "V. *How Do We Analyze Vinland? New Discoveries, Interpretations and Old Sources.*"

however the most important push factor came from the conflict between the indigenous who would have been better allies than enemies.

Though Vinland holds many fantasies in modern scholarship it is important to remember that this was an historical event where an old world met a new world, where settlers tried to stake claim in a land they did not fully understand and eventually be driven out by the land's inhabitants: the Native North Americans. Who these Natives were is also another important subject to this thesis, in later chapters, because it determines what we know of them and how we can compare the Vikings' description of them to the explorer's descriptions hundreds of years later.

Though difficult as it may be I will attempt to analyze the Vinland sagas using new interpretations given by descriptions of geography, weapons, people and trade goods within the sagas which will allow for a new idea to emerge of the Vinland sagas and attempt to identify the actual people group, and geographical location, which the Vikings came in contact with. More importantly this theory will open up a new theoretical route when analyzing the, now meticulous, research pertaining to the Vinland sagas and create new angles which will re-ignite research of this part of the world for educational reference.

Using researchers such as Gísli Sigurðsson and his theories on how "[Vinland] was remembered without the aid of the written word, but the accounts were of course influenced by the active rules and needs of the art of storytelling, which would have shaped the form of presentation,"<sup>16</sup> I will evaluate how the Vinland Sagas could possibly reflect the ancient events told in the Vinland story.

16. Gísli Sigurðsson. "Medieval Icelandic Studies." *Oral Tradition* 12, (2003): 208.

I believe that the conflict within the Vinland Sagas was a major event in the history between the two cultures and sets a guideline for the remainder of their relations which lasted well into the modern era. The discovery, trade, conflict and eventual eviction between the Vikings and Native Americans were to be repeated a few hundred years later, but the next time it was the Europeans who were the victors and the Native Americans were the ones who were evicted from their own land.

## How Do We Analyze Vinland? New Discoveries, Interpretations and Old Sources

With a background established on the ‘Northman,’ also known as the Vikings, it is now time to analyze the primary sources of the Icelandic and Greenland Sagas. The Vinland Sagas were written well after the time period of 800-1050 AD, around the time when the Vikings were presumed to have discovered Greenland and North America. The reason why the sagas became known as the *Vinland Sagas* was due to the information they provided which revolved around the Viking discovery of Vinland, America.<sup>17</sup> How the Vinland Sagas begin justifies the complexity and mystery to the actual sagas themselves, looking at the *Saga of Eirík the Red* and the *Greenland Saga*, the sagas will now be analyzed with an English translation, through Einar Haugen’s translation, and the Old Icelandic text of *Grænlandinga Saga* in *Eyrbyggja*, the *Íslenzk fornrit IV*.<sup>18</sup>

The Vinland Sagas begin with Bjarni Herjólfsson, and Icelandic voyager, accidentally discovering the legendary ‘Vinland’: “they [the Vikings] wondered what country this might be, but it was Bjarni's opinion that it could not be Greenland. They asked him, was he going to land, but he said, ‘it is my advice that we only skirt the shore.’ As they did so, they found that the land was not mountainous but covered with small wooded knolls”<sup>19</sup> Bjarni was accidentally sent off course by a storm and sailed for many days lost in a dense fog with no wind; when they finally got their bearings they discovered they strayed too far off course to a land that was in no way a resemblance of Greenland. They did not stay to explore the land, instead they set sail to the south and discovered another land and Bjarni said “that this was no more Greenland than the other one, ‘for in Greenland there are said to be huge glaciers.’ As they approached the shore,

17. Einar Haugen. “Voyages To Vinland The First American Saga Newly Translated And Interpreted.” *Universal Digital Library* (1942): 1-220.

18. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslenzk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja* (Reykjavik: 1935): 244-292

19. Einar Haugen, “Voyages To Vinland The First American Saga Newly Translated And Interpreted,” 8.

they saw that it was a level country and well wooded.”<sup>20</sup>

The Old Iceland translation reads similar:

Vinda nú segl ok sigla þetta dægr, áðr þeir sá land, ok ræddu um með sér, hvat landi þetta mun vera, en Bjarni kvezk hyggja, at þat myndi eigi Grænland. Þeir spyrja, hvárt hann vill sigla at þessu landi eða eigi. Bjarni svarar: ‘Þat er mitt ráð, at sigla í nánd við landit.’ Ok svá gera þeir ok sá þat brátt, at landitvar ófjöllótt ok skógi vaxit, ok smár hæðir á æandinu, ok létu landit á bakborða ok létu skaut horfa á land.<sup>21</sup>

The land which they discovered was said to be not like Greenland and yet another land which was like the previous one, so Bjarni believed it would be better to sail further, presumably south, to find Greenland. They set sail again for another three days and discovered a third land which “had many high mountains topped with glaciers. Again they asked Bjarni if he was going to land, and again he said no, ‘for this country looks pretty worthless to me.’ This time they did not even furl their sails but steered along the coast and found that it was an island;”<sup>22</sup> finally they set sail for another four days and found Greenland.<sup>23</sup>

Once again the Old Iceland translation, of the discovery of Vinland, reads similar to this:

Síðan sigla þeir tvau dægr, áðr þeir sá æand annat. Þeir spyrja, hvárt Bjarni ætlaði þpat enn Grænland. Hann kvazk eigi heldr ætla þetta Grænland en it fyrra. ‘Því at jöklar eru mjök miklir sagðir á Grænlandi.’ En veðr óx í hond, ok bað Bjarni þá svipta ok eigi sigla meira en bæði dygði vel skipi þeira ok reiða. Sigldu nú fjögur dægr. Þá sá þeir land it fjórða. Þá spurðu þeir Bjarna, hvárt hann ætlaði þetta vera Græanæand eða eigi. Bjarni svarar ‘Þetta er líkast því, er mér er sagt frá Grænlandi, ok hér munu vér at landi halda.’ Svá gera þeir ok taka land undir einhverju nesi at kveldi sags, ok var þar báttr á nesinu.<sup>24</sup>

When Bjarni returned to Iceland word spread quickly of this ‘undiscovered land’ and many Viking explorers wished to make a name for themselves by discovering and settling this land; as was the custom of ‘Vikings’ when a new land was discovered many wanted to sail to it.

20. Einar Haugen, 8.

21. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslenzk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Grælendinga Saga*. 246.

22. Einar Haugen, 11.

23. Ibid

24. Matthías Þórðarson, 246-247.

Though, as stated before, we only have this evidence to prove Bjarni was indeed the one to discover the New World, we know that this land he discovered, being rocky and glacial, was probably the Baffin Islands of Canada, located beside Greenland a little bit north of Labrador and Newfoundland.

The next explorer was Leifr Eiríksson, a Viking who lived in Iceland who was the son of the famous Viking Eiríkr Þorvaldsson. The Old Icelandic translation of the discovery reads:

Nú bjuggu þeir skip sitt ok sigldu í haf, þá er þeir váru búnir, ok fundu þá þat land fyrst, er þeir Bjarni fundu síðast. Þar sigla þeir at landi ok koptuðu akkerum ok skutu báti ok fóru á land ok sá þar eigi gras. Jöklar miklir váru allt it efra, en sem ein hella væri allt till jöklanna frá sjónum, ok sýndish þeim þat land vera gæðalaust. Þá mælti Leifr 'eigi er oss nú þat orðit um þetta land sem Bjarna, at vér hafim eigi jomit á landit. Nú mun ek gefa nafn landinu ok kalla Helluland.<sup>25</sup>

In English it translates that Leifr set sail from Iceland with one ship and a handful of explorers; “the first country they found was the one that Bjarni had seen last Here they sailed to shore and dropped anchor, put out a boat and went on land. They saw no grass, the mountain tops were covered with glaciers, and from sea to mountain the country was like one slab of rock. It looked to be a barren, unprofitable country,”<sup>26</sup> Leifr then called this place Helluland meaning “the land of flat rocks.”<sup>27</sup> This place was almost identical to the one discovered by Bjarni the second time which was identified as an island.

In Old Icelandic it states the same as Einar’s translation, that the land was covered with ice and they did not see any grass at all. This land was of no use to them, once they went ashore and explored it themselves, so they decided to continue further south. They then returned to their ship and “found a second country, and again they dropped anchor, put out a boat, and went ashore. This country was level and wooded, with broad white beaches wherever they went, and

25. Matthías Þórðarson, 249

26. Einar Haugen, 17.

27. Ibid

gently sloping shoreline. Leifr said, ‘I shall give this country a name that fits with its natural character and call it Markland [forest land].’<sup>28</sup> They then set sail again and “after two days’ sail they sighted another shore and landed on an island to the north of the mainland.”<sup>29</sup>

In Old Icelandic it reads:

Eptir þetta sigla þeir í haf ok fundu land annat. Sigla enn at landi ok kasta akkerum, skjóta síðan báti ok ganga á landit. Þat land var slétt ok skógi vaxit, ok sandar hvítir víða, þar sem þeir fóru, ok ósæbratt. Þá mælti Leifr ‘af kostum skall þessu landi nafn gefa ok kalla Markland. Fóru síðan ofan aprt til skips sem fjótast.’<sup>30</sup>

After they explored the island “they returned to the ship and sailed through the channel between the island and a cape jutting out to the north of the mainland.”<sup>31</sup> The description of this island remarkably sounds like Newfoundland or Cape Breton, both being islands which are near ‘capes’ that extend from the mainland. The Old Icelandic descriptions reads:

Nú sigla þeir þaðan í haf landnyrðingsveðr ok váru úti tvau dægr, áðr þeir sá land, ok sigldu at landi ok kómu at ey enni, er lá norðr af landinu, ok gengu þar upp ok sásk um í góðu veðri ok fundu þat, at döggr var á grasinu, ok varð þeim þat fyrir, at þeir tóku höndum sínum í döggrina ok brugðu í munn sér ok þóttusk ekki jafnsætt kennt hafa, sem þat var.<sup>32</sup>

This water they passed through between the island and the mainland is identical to the water passage between Cape Breton Island and the peninsula of Nova Scotia. If this is true then the geographical information could prove that the so called Skraelings, native peoples, were the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick indigenous population the Mi’kmaq.

The next two explorers to sail to Vinland were *Þorvaldr Eiríkssonr*, and Karlsefni, *Þorfinnr Karlsefni Þórðarson*, who became the only Vikings at the time to establish contact

28. Einar Haugen, 18.

29. Ibid

30. Matthías Þórðarson, 250

31. Einar Haugen, 18

32. Matthías Þórðarson, 250

with the Natives of the region. Their trade relations were to be short lived when the Vikings saw three mounds on the opposite shore on the other side of the cape. The Old Icelandic reads:

Gaga síðan til skips ok sjá á sandinum inn frá hofðanum þrjár hæðir ok fóru til þangat ok sjá þar húðkeipa þrjá ok þrjá menn undir hverjum. Þá skiptu þeir liði sínu ok hofðu hendr á þeim qllum, nema einn komask í burt með keip sinn. Þeir drepa hina átta ok ganga síðan aprt á hofðann ok sjásk þar um ok sjá inn í fjorðinnhæðir nokkurar, ok ætluðu þeir þat vera byggði, [the vikings then decided it was time to rest after thier battle and they did so...] <sup>33</sup>

The English translation reads: “when they got closer to them, they saw three skin-covered boats, with three men under each. They split up their force and seized all the men but one, who escaped in his boat. They killed all eight of them, and then returned to the cape. Here they saw a number of mounds in the fjord and guessed that these must be human dwelling places.”<sup>34</sup> After this the Natives returned and a battle ensued between the peoples of Europe and North America, which will be discussed in chapter 3.

Though we do not know what sparked the conflict between the Natives it is apparent that the Vikings struck first though we do not know why. It would seem that Karlsefni, in the Saga Eirík Red, had better luck in establishing some sort of agreement with the natives:

En vára tók geta þeir at líta einn morgin snemma, at fjöldi húðkeipa reri sunnan fyrir nest, svá margir sem kolum væri sáit, ok var þa veifit á hverju skipi trjánum. Þeir brugðu þá skjöldum upp ok tóku kaupstefnu sín á millum, ok vikdi þat fólk helzt kaupa rautt klæði. Þeir vildu ok kaupa sverð ok spjót, en þat þonnuðu þeir Karlsefni ok Snorri. Þeir hofðu ófölván belg fyrir klæðit ok tóku spannarlangt klæði fyrir belg ok bundu um hofuð sér, ok fó svá un stund. <sup>35</sup>

The contact between the Vikings and the Native North Americans came about in a unique way which still holds some researchers to questions since it appeared to happen out of no where.

33. Matthías Þórðarson, 255-256.

34. Einar Haugen, 29.

35. Matthías Þórðarson, Eiríks Saga Rauða, 428

In *Eiríks Saga Rauða [The Red]* is a little different than Einar's translation, so Einar's translation will be given and then my own translation will be written afterwards, to show the difference between Einar's and my own:

before their eyes a vast number of skin boats rowing around the cape from the south. The bay was dotted with them, as if it had been strewn with pieces of charcoal, and on every one the sticks were waving. Karlsevni's men raised their shields, and when the two parties met, they started trading with each other. These people wanted most of all to buy red cloth. They also wanted to buy swords and spears, but that was forbidden by Karlsevni and Snorri. In exchange for the cloth they offered un-tanned furs and grey pelts, and for each fur they got a span's length [about nine inches] of the cloth, which they tied around their heads.”<sup>36</sup>

When took they one morning, they noticed many skin covered boats in the bay, so many that the picture seemed to be charcoal. And they [presumably the Natives] waved their paddles in rotation. They [the Vikings] brought up their shields and took to trade with them. And they traded with them in red cloth. They [the Natives] desired to trade with swords and spears [wanted to have the swords and spears for trade], but this was not allowed by Karlsefni and Snorri. They [Natives] had pelts to trade for the clothing and this clothing was traded for the pelts, and was placed around their heads [the Natives took the red cloth and put it around their heads].<sup>37</sup>

Karlsefni, written by the legendary Saga writer Snorri, was able to have some trade with the Natives though bad luck would end this relationship and cause conflict among the two people groups. The relations ended when a Viking bull startled the Natives so severely that they fled and brought back warriors to fight the Vikings. The Vikings were able to beat the Natives back but after the failed expeditions of the Viking settlement “Karlsevni and his men were now convinced that even though the country was richly endowed by nature, they would always live in dread and turmoil because of the enmity of those who lived there before. So they made ready to break up and return to their own country.”<sup>38</sup>

36. Einar Haugen, 71.

37. In Old Icelandic translations, one needs to remember that the word order is differentiated, AKA re-worded, and sometimes backwards. It is important to note that there are many different translations of this saga for one's pleasure and understanding. This is my own interpretation of what occurred.

38. Einar Haugen, 71.

The sagas describe the first Viking exploration to a land the Vikings named ‘Vinland’ due to their discovery of grapes,<sup>39</sup> while also giving firsthand accounts of the failed relations with the Natives of the region. Now it is time to evaluate the validity of the sagas by comparing the evidence to secondary source material that will either defend or condemn the validity of the sagas.

As written previously the main issue with explaining the validity of the sagas is their year of creation which was long after the event in the saga occurred: “although some of these countries are legendary it must be regarded as certain that the Norsemen reached some of them, which lay on the northern east coast of America; and they thus discovered the continent of North America, besides Greenland, about five hundred years before Cabot (and Columbus).”<sup>40</sup> Despite this concern the sagas offer first hand insight concerning Viking “mentality, ideas, social structure, farm life and everyday customs in Old Norse society, because that society evidently had not changed very much in Iceland,”<sup>41</sup> therefore the sagas need to be taken as a primary source to Viking society.

It is because of its source material that “these [sagas] have remained important sources for ethnologists, folklorists and historical anthropologists studying *histoire de mentalite*.”<sup>42</sup> When researching the validity of the sagas it is important to keep this in mind because when they were written it was not planned for the sagas to be read by scholars hundreds of years later, rather it was to tell a story, a ‘folk-lore,’ of the Scandinavian discovery of North America. The cultural research of this period is vital in relating the Vinland Sagas to actual events in history which occurred when the Icelanders settled Greenland and attempted to settle North America.

39. Einar Haugen, 22-23

40. Fridtjof Nansen, “The Norsemen in America,” 560.

41. Lars Lönnroth. “Chapter 23: The Icelandic Sagas.” In *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (England: Oxford, Routledge, 2004): 309.

42. Lars Lönnroth, “Chapter 23: The Icelandic Sagas,” 310.

In the sagas there were a few key descriptions, of the land and the indigenous population, which could help readers find the area in which the Vikings discovered and attempted to settle. What is even more impressive is how researchers can pinpoint locations based upon current environmental facts, an example being the salmon mentioned in the saga. In the sagas there was a mentioning of the Norsemen discovering large salmon which were larger and healthier than any salmon ever seen by the Scandinavian peoples.<sup>43</sup>

The salmon excerpt from the Old Icelandic reads “hvárki skorti þar lax í ánni né í vatnu, ok stœrra lax en þeir hefði fyrr sét [not short the salmon in the lake and the river, and this particular salmon that they had was the biggest before seen].”<sup>44</sup> This large salmon of the “Grænlendinga saga may seem fabulous, but the information is authentic [for] in the area from Labrador to Connecticut there is a variety of salmon that is larger than Icelandic and Greenlandic salmon.”<sup>45</sup> Though it is hard to be as sure as Magnus Stefansson, this does in fact narrow the geographical location of the Viking discovery, tremendously, to the areas of the Maritime region of Canada.

Furthermore “the big salmon and the unlimited grasslands can be found in Newfoundland and to the south; [however if we look to the finding of the grapes] then Vinland has to be placed much further south, in Connecticut, Massachusetts, or perhaps southern Maine.”<sup>46</sup> An idea that is supported by Laurence M. Larson who “believes that the Norsemen knew the American coast as far south as the Cape Cod region.”<sup>47</sup> This would justify the different descriptions between the

43. Einar Haugen, 21.

44. Matthías Þórðarson, *Grænlendinga Saga*, 251

45. Magnus Stefansson. “Vinland or Vinland?” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23 (1998): 142

46. Magnus Stefansson, “Vinland or Vinland?” 144.

47. Laurence M. Larson. “The Voyages to Vinland the Good.” *Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study* 2 (1915): 115

area that Leifr discovered and the land that Karlsefni discovered.

The lands which Leifr discovered were described as “Helluland, Markland, and Vinland [which] were certain islands southwest of Greenland, Nova Scotia, and the Cape Cod region [Massachusetts] respectively; while the story of Karlsefni’s voyage gives the same names to the northeast coast of Labrador, some point halfway down the east coast of Labrador, and the upper part of Newfoundland.”<sup>48</sup> What is collectively known, then, is that based upon modern findings and research the Vikings discovered and explored a vast area of North America beginning in the uppermost regions of Labrador and ending at the Southernmost region of Nova Scotia.

Furthermore the area in which there was settlement there was a description of having no frost in the winter and the way in which the sun rose and set was different to that of Iceland and Greenland. It was said “there was no frost there in the winters and the grass withered but little. The days and nights there were of more nearly equal length than in Greenland or Iceland.”<sup>49</sup> One scholar took this to “mean that the sun rose at nine o’clock in the morning and set at three in the afternoon; a day of six hours indicates latitude 58 26' (northern Labrador).”<sup>50</sup> Again this justifies that the Vikings, at least, were able to settle around the Maritime region, especially around Labrador where the L’Anse aux Meadows were discovered.

This would hold true to the statement that “L’Anse aux Meadows lies in a subarctic area where neither wild wheat nor vines grow,”<sup>51</sup> which would relate to the place that Bjarni discovered which was rocky and inhabitable. At L’Anse aux Meadows there are three housing complexes, all in which have a large hall and a small hut; while a fourth complex, holding a

48. Laurence M. Larson, “The Voyages to Vinland the Good,” 116.

49. William Stetson Merrill. “The Vinland Problem Through Four Centuries.” *Catholic University Press of America* 21 (1935): 26

50. Ibid

51. Magnus Stefansson, 139.

charcoal fire-pit, is located closest to the sea.<sup>52</sup> This may relate to the Viking told in Þórvaldr Eiríkssonr discovery of North America, where they built houses close to the bay where their ships were beached until high tide. Birgitta also uses this passage to justify the claim that the Vinland voyage was not so much for settlement but rather colonization for the natural resources Vinland had to offer.<sup>53</sup>

These buildings in L'Anse aux Meadows were no doubt of Scandinavian origin, like the houses in Iceland and Greenland, where “the initial buildings were 'booths', sod walls roofed over with tent cloth, only when the expedition decided to spend the winter that they built 'big houses' [and] no buildings were constructed for livestock, but the animals grazed out of doors all winter.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore the houses hold the characteristic of being made for “male work crews, hired for a particular voyage for a share in the profits.”<sup>55</sup> This rationalizes the claim that L'Anse aux Meadows was one of the discovered locations described in the Vinland Sagas and “from L'Anse aux Meadows, the Norse made voyages to areas further south,”<sup>56</sup> which is where the so-called ‘land of plenty’ would be located as described in the story.

This Vinland problem flows into all academic aspects when analyzing the Vinland discovery; it is not a new area of confusion in the academic world when studying the Vinland sagas. As stated above it often leaves researchers questioning the authenticity of the sagas which in turn takes away from another question that challenges the authenticity of the sagas: “how far minute details of the voyages could have been accurately transmitted by oral tradition from one

52. Birgitta Wallace. “Chapter forty-four: The Discovery of Vinland.” In *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (England: Oxford, *Routledge*, 2004): 606.

53. Ibid

54. Birgitta Wallace, “Chapter forty-four: The Discovery of Vinland,” 606.

55. Ibid

56. Birgitta Wallace, 607.

generation to another. The rhumb of the wind before which, as a rule, the Norsemen sailed, the number of days sailing between points, the sequence of minor incidents, and the like may well have become altered in the telling.”<sup>57</sup> A valid argument and a recurring factor with oral sources.

A contested argument for the authenticity of the saga’s information is that “each saga has items which are duplicated in the other and also information which is omitted from the other. The disparity between the two translations is apparent in a comparison of the former.”<sup>58</sup> This is a view that is accepted among some historians because the “approach to the disagreements between the two sagas is to accept them as equally authentic and not to assign priority to either as a total unit but to select the parts of each which appear to be accurate.”<sup>59</sup> This would explain some validity between the sagas, because both sagas similarly describe the same events in the same chronological order. However it is still a hotly contested view because both sagas could have been written by the same author, therefore linking them together.

Perhaps the authentication of the Vinland Sagas is not the right method of approach, instead maybe the authentication of *some* evidence the literary sources provide, comparing it to the archaeological evidence, is the answer. The connection between the literary sources’ description of L’Anse Aux Meadows, calling it *Straumfjöðr* (Fjord of Currents), as Birgitta Wallace writes “is a base in northern Vinland from which expeditions leave in the summer to explore in all directions, returning to spend the winter.”<sup>60</sup> Due to its resemblance to L’Anse Aux Meadows, how it was used as a base of operations to launch summer expeditions and exploration ventures, only to stay there in the winter and, maybe, harvest what was taken from the land. At

57. William Stetson Merrill. “The Vinland Problem Through Four Centuries.” *Catholic University Press of America* 21 (1935): 23.

58. Douglas R. McManis. “The Traditions of Vinland.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 50 (1969): 799.

59. Douglas R. McManis, “The Traditions of Vinland,” 801

60. Birgitta Wallace. “Chapter forty-four: The Discovery of Vinland,” 605

L'Anse Aux Meadows it would seem that the area was used for just that purpose; having contained halls, furnace halls and other working huts.<sup>61</sup>

Other scholars argue that there are two different types of evidence that comes from the Vinland Sagas which help researchers prove its authenticity: “written materials, and relics left by the Norse in North America.”<sup>62</sup> The first category includes the Vinland Sagas that have relevant data to justify the voyages actually happening, and the second category are the areas which have significant remaining artifacts that justify Viking settlement. One major difficulty is determining what information within the saga is factual and what is not. The sagas, as mentioned, were written well after the actual event took place<sup>63</sup> and this causes conflict amongst historians who either argue for, or against, the accuracy of the saga and therefore the authenticity of Viking expedition to the Americas. Unfortunately the only actual evidence we have of the Viking expedition comes from L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland but researchers have determined this to be an outpost of sorts, based on physical artifacts found there.<sup>64</sup>

In evidence that justify the former an example would be discussing the actual term ‘Vinland:’ where “it is commonly held that ‘vin’ refers to the grapes found by the Norse and that Vinland should be translated as Vineland or Wineland , a group of scholars have claimed that ‘yin’ meant pasture or meadow.”<sup>65</sup> This opens up debate for new locations that are more relevant to the geographical locations described in the sagas that do not revolve around grapes or

61. Birgitta Wallace, 609. The Map of Vinland and L'Anse Aux Meadows being located to the north in Labrador.

62. Douglas R. McManis, 798.

63. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York, New York: Penguin Classics, 2000): 626.

64. Helge Ingstad. *The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse Aux Meadows, Newfoundland* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books LTD., 2000): 141.

65. Douglas R. McManis, 803

fruit but instead of wheat and grain which are more common around the upper Maritime region of Canada.

The current archaeological findings of Viking settlement, especially at L'Anse aux Meadows, "provide conclusive evidence that Norse sailors from Greenland journeyed along the coastline of North America at least as far south as Newfoundland, and quite possibly further."<sup>66</sup> The Vinland map outlines the regions that were discovered by using the Sagas' detailed information of how long it took the Vikings to sail from each location until they came back to Greenland. The Vinland Map itself provides researchers with an artistic view of the location of Vinland. Though the location is not entirely accurate to the geography of North America, the map details the location of Vinland in a similar location to the Atlantic Canadian region. This similarity to the geographical location "has opened a new round of argumentation. If the map is ultimately proved authentic, it will establish that Vinland did not disappear from North European geography."<sup>67</sup>

The Vinland Sagas was an event in Viking history surrounded by mystery and lack of authenticity which started by chance with Bjarni, suspected not actually proven, to accidentally navigate his way past Greenland into several uncharted territories before making his way back to Greenland. This even sparked interest among explorers such as Leifr Eiríksson and his father Eiríkr Rauða Þorvaldsson (the Red) to go and explore this new found country and, though the event was short lived, it marked the first contact between the European and North American worlds. Despite receiving the name 'Vinland' from its settlers it is apparent that the land offered

66. Hoidal K. Oddvar. "Norsemen and the North American Forests." *Journal of Forest History* 24 (1980): 203. See map of Vinland in Appendix A before the bibliography for a detailed rendition of the Vinland Sagas.

67. Douglas R. McManis, 814

much more than just grapes, it offered food, and trade in goods with the locals.

Though the settlers had some success in exploring the land, settling the land was a different matter. Staying only a few short seasons the settlers were able to run out of food, be at risk from the climate and were able to make war amongst the indigenous who lived there. This turned out to be the final event which drove the settlers, Vikings, out of Vinland and sent them back to Greenland. Ironically allowing the Vikings to discover America but finding “it impossible to stay, and the sagas end with the heroes defeated, barred from Paradise by the boundaries they have constructed.”<sup>68</sup>

68. E.A. Williamsen. “Boundaries of Difference in the Vinland Sagas.” *Scandinavian Studies* 77, (2005): 476.

c.f. Sverrir Jakobsson. “Vinland and Wishful Thinking: Medieval and Modern Fantasies.” *Canadian Journal of History* 47 (2012): 493-514. Argues that the idea of North America was an idea which was not ready to be grown as of this date within the Vinland Sagas. Sverrir Jakobsson wishes to separate what *may* have happened in Vinland compared to what *did not* happen but was generally accepted as believed to happen.

### **Why We Fight: The First Confrontation in the New World.**

Now that an analysis of the primary sources of the Icelandic and Greenland Sagas, and a complete overview of the Vinland Sagas themselves this chapter will analyze the initial interaction between the Vikings and Natives, the short-lived trade relationship, the conflict, and determining the identity of the Native peoples that the Vikings came in contact with who so closely resembled the Natives described by Jacques Cartier over 600 years later based upon the analysis of trade material, boats, location and weapons used by the Skrælings (Natives). It is important to note that, unfortunately, there are no primary source material from the time period in which the Vinland Sagas occurred, all we have at our disposal is the Vinland Sagas and secondary source material. However there is still much work to be done on this subject and using whatever we have at our disposal, primary or secondary, will help us determine the authenticity behind the conflict of the Vinland Sagas.

After the initial discovery of Vinland and the exploration of at least three different landscapes the Icelanders decided to send two more explorers, Þórvaldr Eiríkssonr, Leif's cousin, and Karlsefni, who became the only Vikings at the time to establish contact with the Natives of the region. They presumably sailed the same route as Leifr from Helluland, Markland and eventually Vinland; they were equally awed with the land as the first explorers had been and this is when they came across the first group of Natives.

Though they started a trade relationship with the Natives, it was to be short lived:

Ganga síðan til skips ok sjá á sandinum inn frá hofðanum þrjár hæðir ok fóru til þangat

ok sjá þar húðkeipa þrjá ok þrjá menn undir hverjum.<sup>69</sup> Þá skiptu þeir liði sínu ok höfðu hendr á þeim öllum, nema einn komsk í burt með keip sinn. Þeir drepa hina átta ok ganga síðan aprt á höfðann ok sjásk þar um ok sjá inn í fjörðinn hæðir nokkurar, ok ætluðu þeir þat vera byggðir.<sup>70</sup>

In the English translation it reads very similar to the Old Icelandic version:

then they caught sight of three little mounds on the sand farther in on the cape. When they got closer to them, they saw three skin-covered boats, with three men under each. They split up their force and seized all the men but one, who escaped in his boat. They killed all eight of them, and then returned to the cape. Here they saw a number of mounds in the fjord and guessed that these must be human dwelling places.<sup>71</sup>

After the ‘Vikings’ managed to kill the Natives they became so tired they fell asleep. A short time later the Natives returned and a short skirmish ensued:

Þá kom kall yfir þá, svá at þeir vöknúðu allir; svá segir kallit: ‘Vaki þú, Þorvaldr, ok allt föruneysi þitt, ef þú vill líf þitt hafa, ok far þú á skip þitt ok allit menn þínir, ok farið frá landi sem skjótast.’ Þá fór innaneptir firðinum ótal húðkeipa, ok lögðu at þeim. Þorvaldr mœlti þá ‘vér skulum færa út á borð vígfleka ok verjask sem bezt, en vega lítt í mót.’ Svá gera þeir, en Skrælingar skutu á þá um stund, en flýja síðan í burt sem ákafast, hverr sem mátti.<sup>72</sup>

The English translation reads:

then a voice was heard calling ‘wake up Thorvald, and all your companions,’ the voice warned, ‘if you wish to save your lives. Get to the ship with all your men and leave this land as quickly as you can.’ A vast number of hide-covered boats came down the fjord, heading towards them. Thorvald then spoke: ‘we will set up breastworks along the sides of the ship and defend ourselves as well as possible, but fight back as little as we can.’ They did this and after the natives shot at them for a while, they fled as rapidly as they could.<sup>73</sup>

After the skirmish Þorvaldr was seriously wounded by an arrow and was buried in Vinland at an unknown location simply known as ‘Krossanes’ which means “Cross Point.”<sup>74</sup> The

69. In this *Íslenzk Fornrit* edition there is a footnote mentioning of Jacques Cartier and how he discovered similar native habitations in the St. Lawrence River of Canada.

70. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslenzk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Græendinga Saga*. 256

71. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York, New York: Penguin Classics, 2000): 642

72. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslenzk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Græendinga Saga*. 256

73. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 643.

74. Ibid.

explorers, after burying Þórvaldr, then returned to Greenland to inform the population of their events. Which sparked the interest of another Viking Karlsefni. Karlsefni, accompanied by a man named Snorri, made it to Greenland and was able to have some trade with the Natives, though bad luck would end this relationship and cause conflict among the two people groups.

The relations ended when a Viking bull startled the Natives so severely that they fled and brought back warriors to fight the Vikings. What followed is considered to be the first confrontation between the Europeans and the North American natives in history, which sets the foundations of the relationship between the Europeans and North Americans for the rest of history.

The battle itself is what holds researchers to a stalemate and leaves researchers left with questions about Native technology but also the different stories told within both sagas themselves. In the Saga of Eirik the Red the Natives and the Vikings seemed to have an agreement between themselves and began trading with one another: Though we do not know what sparked the conflict between the Natives it is apparent that the Natives struck first though we do not know why the Natives would want to combat the settlers over a raging bull. It would seem that Karlsefni had better luck in establishing some sort of agreement with the natives:

En er vára tók geta þeir at líta einn morgin snemma, at fjöldi húðkeipa reri sunnan fyrir nesit, svá margir sem kolum væri sáit, ok var þá veift á hverju skipi trjánum. Þeir brugðu þá skjöldum upp ok tóku kaupstefnu sín á millum, ok vildi þat fólk helzt kaupa rautt klæði. Þeir vildu ok kaupa sverð ok spjót, en þat þönnuðu þeir Karlsefni ok Snorri. Þeir höfðu ófölván belg fyrir klæðit ok tóku spannarlangt klæði fyrir belg ok bundu um höfuð sér, ok fór svá um stund.<sup>75</sup>

The English translation reads:

75. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða* (Reykjavik: 1935): 428

before their eyes a vast number of skin boats rowing around the cape from the south. The bay was dotted with them, as if it had been strewn with pieces of charcoal, and on every one the sticks were waving. Karlsevni's men raised their shields, and when the two parties met, they started trading with each other. These people wanted most of all to buy red cloth. They also wanted to buy swords and spears, but that was forbidden by Karlsevni and Snorri. In exchange for the cloth they offered un-tanned furs and grey pelts, and for each fur they got a span's length [about nine inches] of the cloth, which they tied around their heads.<sup>76</sup>

It is of an interesting note that the natives were forbidden from purchasing weapons from the Vikings, this was most likely due to the fact that to the Vikings their weapons held some form of spiritual worth. Examples would be from other sagas such as *Laxdæla saga* where the weapons had names;<sup>77</sup> though the weapons in the *Vinland Sagas* had no names they probably still held extreme value. Another, perhaps more appealing, note is the fact that the Natives were more interested in red cloth than any other material; in Native North American history many different Native people groups, either in battle or special events, wore red cloth to symbolize their status, intentions or spiritual beliefs. One native group who were known to do this were the Cherokee peoples.<sup>78</sup>

After Karlsefni's bull frightens the Skrælings away, three weeks later the Natives come back with their paddles waving counter-clockwise and screaming loudly, which was assumed by the settlers as a summons to battle. This is a prelude to the battle, similar to the one in the *Saga of the Greenlanders* between Þórvaldr's men and the Skrælings, the Old Norse text reads as follows:

En er sjá stund var liðin sjá þeir sunnan fara mikinn fjöldá skipa Skrælinga, svá sem straumur stœði; var þá veift trjánnum öllum rangsælis, ok ýla allir Skrælingar hátt upp. Þá tóku þeir rauða skjöldu ok báru í mót; gengu þeir þá saman ok þorðusk. Varð þar skothríð hörð. Þeir hófðu ok valslongur, Skrælingar. Þat sjá Karlsefni ok Snorri at þeir færðu upp á stöngum, Skrælingarnir, knött mikinn, því nær til at jafna sem sauðarvömb

76. Jane Smiley, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 670.

77. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Laxdæla Saga* (Reykjavik: (1985)): 153.

78. Mark Lardas. *Native American Mounted Rifleman 1861-65* (Oxford, England: *Osprey Publishing*, (2006): 14.

ok helzt blán at lit ok fló upp á land yfir liðit ok lét illiliga við þar er niðr kom. Við þetta sló ótta miklum yfir Karlsefni ok á lið hans, svá at þá fýsti einskis annars en halda undan ok upp með ánni, því at þeim þótti lið Skrælinga drífa at sér öllum megin, ok létta eigi fyrr en þeir koma til hamra nokkurra; veittu þeir þar viðtöku harða.<sup>79</sup>

The English translation reads:

After that they saw a large group of native boats approach from the south, as thick as a steady stream. They were waving poles counter-sunwise [clockwise] now [unlike the first time when they waved in a clockwise motion to symbolize trade] and all of them were shrieking loudly. The men took up their red shields and went towards them. They met and began fighting. A hard barrage rained down and the natives also had catapults. Karlsefni and Snorri then saw the natives lift up on poles a large round object, about the size of a sheep's gut and black in color, which came flying up on the land and made a threatening noise when it landed. It struck great fear into Karlsefni and his men, who decided their best course was to flee upriver, since the native party seemed to be attacking from all sides, until they reached a cliff wall where they could put up a good fight.<sup>80</sup>

There are a few key points in the texts, which have been italicized, that are of an interesting note: the counter-sunwise, clockwise, motion which the natives wave their paddles, the shrieking loudly before battle, and the red shields which the Vikings pick up for battle. The battle tactics of the Native American peoples, after contact with Cartier, resemble similar styles in which the invoking of their enemy by shrieking a battle cry would strike fear into the hearts of their enemies.<sup>81</sup> The waving of the paddles from a clockwise motion, when they were trading with the settlers, to a counter-clockwise motion is an obvious motion towards combat and the Vikings picking up their red shields for combat, instead of the white shields for trade,<sup>82</sup> all symbolize the preparation for combat. Drawing back to the 'red cloth' the natives purchased in trading it would seem this whole passage was an allusion to battle with the color red.

79. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*. 429.

80. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 670.

81. Steven Oatis, "To Eat up a Village of White Men!: Anglo-Indian Designs on Mobile and Pensacola, 1705–1715," *Gulf South Historical Review* 14 (1998): 104–119.

82. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 669.

The Skrælings seem to be more ferocious in Eirik the Red's Saga than they were in the Saga of the Greenlanders, simply because of the weapons used in battle. In the Greenland saga the Natives only used bow and arrows<sup>83</sup> but in Eirik the Red's saga they used something more terrifying to the Vikings: "[they] saw the Skrælings lift up on poles a large round object, about the size of a sheep's gut and black in colour, which came flying up on the land and made a threatening noise when it landed. It struck great fear into Karlsefni and his men."<sup>84</sup>

In Old Icelandic the weapon and how it affected the Vikings is described as "þat sjá Karlsefni ok Snorri at þeir færðu upp á stöngum, Skrælingarnir, knött mikinn, því nær til at jafna sem sauðarvömb ok helzt blán at lit ok fló upp á land yfir liðit ok lét illiliga við þar er niðr kom."<sup>85</sup> In Old Icelandic the weapon is described as resembling a sheep stomach and is grey in color which made a massive 'ill affecting noise' as it fell to the ground around the Vikings.

What was this black object that was projected to the Vikings and what was this threatening noise that caused fighters such as the Vikings to become afraid? At the time European military technology was not greatly superior to that of the Native Americans. Given that they were in a new environment and landscape to them, they often were at a considerable military disadvantage which evened the military field. This was of course a completely different situation in 1492 when Europe was the so-called home of advanced technology, in the world, since both the Inca and Aztec, of South America, fell to Cortez and his forces numbering only

83. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 643. Describing the battle where the Natives shot at the Viking's boat and then fled where Þórvaldr Eirikssonr was injured with an arrow under his armpit where there was little or no padding.

84. Jane Smiley et al, 670.

85. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*. 429.

in the mid-hundreds at most.<sup>86</sup> We do not know exactly what was described in the battle, but what we do know is that the Natives used something which could be considered an explosive projectile. More importantly it is not how but where did the Natives establish such a weapon?

As Gwyn Jones writes “the outbreak of hostilities between Skrælings and Norsemen was decisive for the Vineland venture, the Norsemen had no marked superiority of weapons, their lines of communication were thin and overlong, and there was an insufficient reservoir of manpower back in Greenland.”<sup>87</sup> It is no surprise that the settlers, Vikings, were outnumbered and outmatched by the Natives of the region. It is also no surprise that the Vikings were outmatched with weaponry, even though the Native weapons were made of stone and wood, where the Natives had a catapult of sorts which was able to project large rocks at the Vikings and cause many casualties. What we can conclude about this weapon then is that it was some form of catapult—“that was worked by several men”<sup>88</sup>—which was customary for East Woodland Native North Americans, especially the Algonquian peoples, to use.<sup>89</sup>

More importantly what happened after the battle was equally surprising. Freydis, a woman in the saga who was pregnant, followed the men into the forest after they fled from the projectile weapon that caused great fear but the Skrælings caught up and surrounded her. The Old Icelandic and English texts describe what occurred:

Freydís kom út ok sá er þeir heldu undan. Hon kallaði því renni þér undan slíkum auvirðismönnum, svá gildir menn, er mér þætti líkligt at þér mættið drepa þá svá sem

86. James Lockhart. *Spanish Peru 1532-1560: A Social History* (London, England: *The University of Wisconsin Press*, 1994): 142.

87. Gwyn Jones. *A History of the Vikings* (New York, New York: *Oxford University Press*, 1968): 303.

88. T.D. Kendrick. *A History of the Vikings* (New York, New York: *Dover Publications*, 2004): 384

89. *Ibid*

búfé, ok ef ek hefða vápn þætti mér sem ek munda betr berjask en einhverr yðvar. Þeir gáfu ongvan gaum hvat sem hon sagði. Freydís vildi fylgia þeim, ok varð hon heldr sein, þvíat hon var eigi heil. Gekk hon þá eptir .eim í skóginn, en Skrælingar sækja at henni. Hon fann fyrir sér mann dauðan, Þorbrand Snorrason, ok stóð hellusteinn í höfði honum. Sverðit lá hjá honum, ok hon tók þat upp ok býzk at verja sik með. Þá koma Skrælingar at henni. Hon tekr brjóstit upp ór serkinum ok slettir á sverðit. Þeir fælask við ok hlaupa undan ok á skið sín ok heldu á brottu.<sup>90</sup>

In the English text the text described the battle in a similar fashion:

Freydis came out of the camp while they were fleeing. She called “why do you flee such miserable opponents, men like you who look to me to be capable of killing them off like sheep? Had I a weapon I’m sure I would fight better than any of you.” They paid no attention to what she said. Freydis wanted to go with them, but moved somewhat slowly, as she was with child. She followed them into the forest, but the natives reached her. She came across a slain man, Thorbrand Snorrason, who had been struck in the head by a slab of stone [presumably the customary Algonquian ballista described in the first passage]. His sword lay beside him, and this she snatched up and prepared to defend herself with it as the Natives approached her. Freeing one of her breasts from her shift, she smacked the sword with it. This frightened the natives, who turned and ran back to their boats and rowed away.<sup>91</sup>

This event can tell us two things, that the Natives used projectile weapons, which killed at least Þorbrand, which were historically identified as being used by Eastern Woodland Natives<sup>92</sup> and that these Natives were not accustomed to a woman warrior, let alone one who was crazed. Also what is interesting is that Þorbrand was not mentioned as being struck with the stone but that the stone was near him: “hon fann fyrir sér mann dauðan, Þorbrand Snorrason, ok stóð hellusteinn í höfði honum [literally: and stood (laid) the stone in had him].”<sup>93</sup> So it was implied by English translators that he was struck with the stone which could change the meaning of the translation but in the current circumstance it would not greatly affect the passage for this purpose.

90. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*. 429-430.

91. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 670-671.

92. Colin F. Taylor. *Native American Weapons* (London, England: *University of Oklahoma Press*, (2001): 18

93. Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*, 430.

Another way we can look at this passage is identifying the stone, which supposedly struck Þorbrand, as a stone war club. The Natives of the East Woodland region of North America had a common trait when going to battle: the stone head war club: “used in Eastern North America identifies four main types which, prior to the forced movement of several tribes west under the pressure of white settlers, were used mainly east of the Mississippi River.”<sup>94</sup> Though this cannot determine an exact Native people group, it can further determine the authenticity of the Vinland saga description of the battle since it was common for Eastern Woodland Natives to use the stone headed war club, much like the famed ‘Algonquian Ballista.’<sup>95</sup>

The saga continues to state that many of the Skrælings were slain, though only two of Karlsefni’s men perished, the text also states that the multitude of Skrælings had been an illusion which is often used by researchers to deny that the Natives had any such weapon the Vikings described in the battle, since the saga itself tells us that the number of Natives was over exaggerated which in turn tells us that the battle itself must be as well.

The Old Icelandic description of the events after the battle reads:

Tveir menn fellu af Karlsefni, en fjölda af Skrælingum, en þó urðu þeir ofrliði bornir. Fara þeir nú til búða sinna ok íhua hvat fjölmenni þat var, er at þeim sótti af landinu. Sýnisk þeim nú at þat eina mun liðit hafa verit er á skipunum kom, en annat liðit mun hafa verit þversúningar.<sup>96</sup>

The English translation of the events after the battle reads:

Two of Karlsefni’s men were killed and many of the natives were slain, yet Karlsefni and his men were outnumbered. They returned to the booths wondering who these numerous

94. Colin F. Taylor, *Native American Weapons*, 18.

95. T.D. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings*, 384.

96. Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*, 430

people were who had attacked them on land. But it now looked to them as if the company in the boats had been the sole attackers, and any other attackers had only been an illusion.<sup>97</sup>

Though it is true that it was stated the Natives must have been an allusion, it is neither formable nor reliable to base an assumption that the entire battle was fictionalized. It is more reliable to assume that though the Native's description may have been exaggerated there is no way in proving the alternative: the Natives had superior numbers to the Vikings. It would be more reliable to believe this because the Vikings were in the Native's territory and the description of the Natives who came to trade was a high amount as well.

What is more interesting that the 'illusion' theory is what the Natives supposedly did with an axe that was left behind in the battle by a fallen Viking: "the Natives also found one of the dead men, whose axe lay beside him. One of them picked up the axe and chopped at a tree, and then each took his turn at it. They thought this thing which cut so well was a real treasure. One of them struck a stone and the axe broke. He thought a thing which could not withstand stone to be of little worth, and tossed it away."<sup>98</sup>

In Old Icelandic the text reads:

Peir Skrælingar fundu ok mann dauðan ok lá ǫx hjá honum. Einn þeira tók upp ǫxina ok hǫggr með tré ok þá hvern at ǫðrum, ok þótti þeim vera gersimi ok bíta vel. Einn þeira hjó í stein, ok brotnaði ǫxin. Þótti honum þá ǫngu nýt, er eigi stóð við grjótinu, ok kastaði niðr.<sup>99</sup>

What makes this passage such an interesting piece is that the Natives believed the axe, made of metal, was worthless compared to a stone. This was more than likely due to the fact that the Natives never came in contact with something more powerful than stone until the 17<sup>th</sup>

97. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 671.

98. Ibid

99. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*. 430.

century when the European settlers brought their metal weapons to trade.<sup>100</sup> When the axe broke upon the stone they believed it to be less than stone and left it on the ground. Since Karlsefni and Snorri forbade the Vikings to trade weapons with the Natives it is no surprise that the Natives had unaccustomed knowledge about the axe they left behind.<sup>101</sup>

With the descriptions of the landscape, the Skrælings, and the weapons used in the battle it is now time to analyze who these Skrælings were which will determine to us where they lived and in turn tell us how far the Vikings were able to explore into North America. The location of the conflict is key in finding the people the Skrælings represented and this can be found in the Vinland Saga where Karlsefni and Þórvaldr discovered land and began to trade with the Skrælings before their conflict began.

Assuming that Karlsefni and Þórvaldr returned to the exact location Leifr left from in the first voyage, it can be determined that the area is located around the Atlantic Canadian region of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, or Newfoundland. In chapter one it was written that Leifr discovered an island, covered in forests, which he named Markland,<sup>102</sup> after they explored the island they then “returned to the ship and sailed through the channel between the island and a cape jutting out to the north of the mainland.”<sup>103</sup> This channel between the island and cape astonishingly sounds like the location of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Geographically the island traditionally has

100. Colin F. Taylor, *Native American Weapons*, 9.

101. Jane Smiley et al, 670.

102. Jane Smiley et al, *The Sagas of the Icelanders: The Sagas of the Greenlanders*, 639.

103. Einar Haugen. “Voyages To Vinland The First American Saga Newly Translated And Interpreted.” *Universal Digital Library* (1942): 18.

a channel of water which separates itself from the mainland peninsula of Nova Scotia in which the channel shoots out to the Atlantic Ocean, known as the Strait of Canso.<sup>104</sup>

It also sounds surprisingly like the island of St. John's Newfoundland which is separated by a channel of water, called the Gulf of St. Lawrence,<sup>105</sup> leading out to the Atlantic Ocean, again another place which Leifr discovered that resembles the geography: "siðan fóru þeir til skips síns ok sigldu í sund þat, er lá milli eyjarinnar ok ness þess, er norðr gekk af landinu; stefndu í vestrættfyrrir nesit. Þar var frunnsævi mikit at fjöru sjávar, ok stóðþá uppi skip þeira;ok var þá langt til sjávar at sjá frá skipinu."<sup>106</sup>

The English description reads:

afterwards they returned to their ship and sailed into the sound which lay between the island and the headland that stretched out northwards from the land. They rounded the headland and steered westward. Here there were extensive shallows at low tide and their ship was soon stranded.<sup>107</sup>

If one or both of these statements are true then the Native peoples, Skrælings, would be either the extinct Newfoundland Native race Beothuk<sup>108</sup> or the existing Nova Scotian Native peoples the Mi'kmaq.<sup>109</sup> If the Skrælings were the Mi'kmaq then we may have other historical evidence which would justify their meeting, trading and eventual conflict with the Viking explorers.

104. William B. Hamilton. *Place Names of Atlantic Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, (1997): 302. Also see map provided in Appendix B for a geographical diagram of the strait and its location.
105. William B. Hamilton, *Place Names of Atlantic Canada*, 258-259.
106. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslenzk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Groenlendinga Saga*. 251.
107. Jane Smiley et al, *The Saga of the Greenlanders*, 639.
108. Miller J. Sweet. Sweet Promises: a reader on Indian-white relations in Canada (Toronto; Ontario: University of Toronto Press, (1991): 68-89.
109. William C. Sturtevant. *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington DC, USA: Smithsonian Institution, (1978): 1-924.

Unfortunately the Beothuk race of Newfoundland and Labrador are now officially an extinct Native race of Canada, however what we do know of the Beothuk is that they tried to avoid European contact as much as possible and when they did come into contact with Europeans it almost always ended in combat.<sup>110</sup> This known fact could prove that the Vikings came into contact with at least the Beothuk peoples, since their main method of interaction with foreign Europeans was combative situations, much like the combat that occurred in the saga when Þórvaldr was killed by an arrow under the armpit by one of the Native warriors.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike the war-like Beothuk peoples, historically the Mi'kmaq, Iroquois, Maliseet and Algonquian people had prosperous trade agreements with Europeans which continued from the 1700s onward, but they also had conflict against them. This can be best described in King Philip's War when the Mi'kmaq Alliance fought against the British and her Native allies in taking over the Nova Scotia peninsula from the French.<sup>112</sup> Though it may be a stretch to say, this could be a beneficial defense for proving the theory that the Mi'kmaq were the ones who were most likely to have both trade relations and military conflict with the first explorers of Europe.

Something of equal value is the description Jacques Cartier gives in his adventures to the New World of the Native Canadian peoples—the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Iroquois and the Algonquians—and how this description identically resembles the same description given by the Viking explorers: “Cartier mentions another tribe who, he said, ‘have no other dwellings than

110. Miller J. Sweet, *Sweet Promises*, 68-89.

111. Jane Smiley et al, 643.

112. Eric B. Schultz. *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict* (Vermont, USA: Countryman Press, (2000): 1-432.

under their boats, which they turn over.’<sup>113</sup> In the saga it is written that the Vikings sailed up to a location: “ganga síðan til skips ok sjá á sandinum inn frá höfðanum þrjár hæðir ok fóru til þangat ok sjá þar húðkeipa þrjá ok þrjá menn undir hverjum. Þá skiptu þeir liði sínu ok höfðu hendr á þeim öllum, nema einn komsk í burt með keip sinn.”<sup>114</sup>

In English it reads:

then they caught sight of three little mounds on the sand farther in on the cape. When they got closer to them, they saw three skin-covered boats, with three men under each. They split up their force and seized all the men but one, who escaped in his boat.<sup>115</sup>

This description from the saga is an identical statement to the description given by Jacques Cartier of the Native Canadian peoples he discovered while sailing somewhere along the St. Lawrence river which runs from the Atlantic Ocean to Montreal Québec.<sup>116</sup> This is probably the most compelling evidence thus far on discovering the identity of the Native peoples, Skrälings, the Viking explorers fought against.

Starting from the secondary exploration Þórvaldr, Bjarni, Karlsefni and Snorri attempted to explore more of the area known as Vinland as their previous explorer had such success in doing, while attempting to discover more about the Native inhabitants there. Though at first they had great success it was short-lived; their attempt to discover the land and its inhabitants was foiled from the start. The killing of the Natives sleeping in their boats and the death of Þórvaldr ended their hopes of peace with one Native people, and the initial trade agreement followed by a conflict sparked over the ferocity of an enraged bull created conflict with another Native group

- 113. Charles Marshall Smith. *Northmen of Adventure: A Survey of the Exploits of Dominant Northmen from the Earliest Times to the Norman Conquest* (Indiana, USA: Longmans, Green and Company (1932): 361.
- 114. Matthías Þórðarson. *Íslensk Fornrit IV: Eyrbyggja: Grænlendinga Saga*. 256.
- 115. Jane Smiley et al, 642.
- 116. Arthur C. Benke; Colbert E. Cushing. *Rivers of North America* (London, England: Elsevier Academic Press, (2005): 989-990

The battle that occurred offered new approaches to theories of who these Native peoples were. The weapons used, such as the description of the weapon which resembled the Algonquian Ballistae, the stone clubs, the shrieking war cry and the waving of the paddles clockwise for trade and counter clockwise for war conclude that the Native people the Vikings initially traded but then fought were definitely East Woodland Native North Americans. These peoples are known as the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Algonquian and Iroquois who possess the characteristics of the tactics employed in battle, the location of the battle itself and the similar trade, clothing and boat characteristics of their cultures in the 1700's.<sup>117</sup>

Continuous research in the field—such as Patricia Sutherland's recent archaeological discovery in the area known as Markland (Baffin Island)<sup>118</sup>—gives new evidence to prove the above theory that the Natives peoples the Vikings came into contact with hold almost identical resemble to the Natives Jacques Cartier found in the 1700s who have been heatedly debated as being either Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Algonquian or Iroquois.<sup>119</sup>

117. Charles Marshall Smith. *Northmen of Adventure: A Survey of the Exploits of Dominant Northmen from the Earliest Times to the Norman Conquest*, 361.  
A.) Also Dr. Gísli Sigurðsson. "The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition A Discourse on Method." *Oral Literature* 2, (2004). Is a good source when dealing with the culture and practise in the oral tradition of the Viking, Scandinavian, peoples and their voyage to Vinland.
118. Heather Pringle. "Evidence of Viking Outpost Found in Canada." *National Geographic*. October 19, 2012. Accessed March 16, 2015.  
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/10/121019-viking-outpost-second-new-canada-science-sutherland/> .
119. James F. Pendergast. "The Confusing Identities Attributed to Stadacona and Hochelaga." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32 (2010): 149.

### **Historical Significance: Analyzing the Confrontation on a Global Scale.**

The contacts between the Native American Skrälings and the European Vikings brought about a historical significance which these two people groups could not have fathomed at the time. The initial, first contact, between the Vikings and Natives brought together two continental people groups who, before this date, presumably never came in contact before. The contact wiped out any isolation the Native Canadians had with the European continent. Unlike their Greenland neighbours, who had continuous contact since Greenland was settled in the 980s,<sup>120</sup> the North American Natives for the first time saw a completely different race, technology, trade goods and manners than their own.

This chapter will be an analysis of the historical significance of the initial contact between the European Vikings and Native Canadian Skrälings focusing on *what*, *why* and *how* the Vikings and Natives came into contact with each other. More importantly is *how* this contact was a blueprint for the model of European-North American contact for, at least, the next nine-hundred years. Since European-North American relations mostly began and ended in trade and warfare, it is not a stretch to say that the Vinland Sagas—beginning in discovery, trade and ending in conflict—was the founding relationship blueprint for the rest of European-North American relation history.

Though the initial contact did not have primary records of what happened *after* the Vikings left the Atlantic Canadian region of Vinland, it did leave records of what happened *during* the Viking expedition of Vinland. The settlement of L' Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland and the exploration south, the creation of launching posts of Straumfjörðr and

120. Jonathan Grove. "The Place of Greenland in Medieval Icelandic Saga Narrative." *Norse Greenland: Selected Papers of the Hvalsey Conference*, (2008): 30-51.

Hop,<sup>121</sup> the trade and conflict with the Skrælings all changed the very fabric of North American-European relations. This information can be used to determine how exactly the Viking contact affected Native Canadian-North American culture, from the harvesting of natural resources at places like L'Anse aux Meadows, to trade and conflict in Vinland.

Before analyzing how the exploration, trade and conflict of Vinland works as a blueprint for North American-European relations, it is important to start with the analysis of what, why and how the Vikings and Natives came into contact with each other. There are four main reasons why the Vikings apparently came to the New World and came into contact with a culture they apparently never heard of before: environment, migrations, technology and commerce. These four factors, one could say inevitably, drove the Vikings to come into contact with the North American Skrælings.

The first and most important factor which drove the Vikings to North American contact was the environment. According to scholars Fitzhugh and Ward: “as the environmental conditions more or less "invited" the encounters between Europe and North America due to these prevailing climatological conditions, the question of conflict would naturally occur;”<sup>3</sup> meaning that the environmental changes brought an inevitable meeting of two cultures which supposedly never came into contact before.

121. Birgitta Wallace. “Chapter forty-four: The Discovery of Vinland,” In *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price (England, Oxford: Routledge, (2004): 605
122. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington DC, USA: Smithsonian Books, 2000): 11.

The climate change, causing a mini-Ice Age,<sup>123</sup> which caused the Vikings to immigrate to new lands created an inviting role for the Vikings coming to North America due to the division of North American Native groups, causing a lull in harmony and strength in which the Vikings could take advantage of: “in A.D. 1000, a time of diverse social and political landscapes for the peoples living on the western shores of the North Atlantic, [between] members of several different ethnic groups—the Dorset people of the eastern Canadian Arctic and northern Greenland.”<sup>124</sup>

These peoples who were conflicting with each other were the same peoples who the Vikings came into contact with in Vinland: the ancestors of the Labrador Innu, the Newfoundland Beothuk, and the Maliseet and Micmac of the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence and Nova Scotia—had divided this territory into a multicultural region of discrete homelands where their ancestors lived for many generations. After A.D. 1200, another people, the Thule—ancestors of the Inuit—would also arrive on the scene.”<sup>125</sup>

This conflict between the Native North Americans weakened their strength to defend themselves against the Viking explorers and perhaps forced them to turn to the Vikings for trade and relationships: “the Dorset’s had displaced Maritime Archaic peoples, the latter who had been there since 6,000 B.C. It is also possible they interacted with the Algonquin peoples who generally lived south of the Saint Lawrence River.”<sup>126</sup> This displacement of Native North American people from their original homes in Vinland, As mentioned above, created a unique

123. T.H. McGovern & Sophia Perdikaris. “What Went Wrong with the Norse Voyages: The Silent Saga.” *Natural history Magazine* (2000): 8.

124. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, 193.

125. Ibid

126. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, 194.

opportunity for the Vikings to explore, and attempt to settle and trade with the Native North Americans which may not have occurred if the indigenous were united with each other.

This climate change drove the Vikings to migrate to Greenland and then eventually North America probably a lot sooner than Europeans originally intended. Of course the Vikings never meant to discover Vinland, North America: “they [the Vikings] wondered what country this might be, but it was Bjarni's opinion that it could not be Greenland. They asked him, was he going to land, but he said, ‘it is my advice that we only skirt the shore.’ As they did so, they found that the land was not mountainous but covered with small wooded knolls”<sup>127</sup> Despite the accidental discovery, the migrations from Europe caused the Vikings to happen upon Vinland much sooner than they would have if no climate change occurred.

Though some see the meeting of the two cultures as purely accidental, some scholars see the meeting as an inevitable historic occasion: “Thanks to recent advances in archaeology, history and natural sciences, the Norse discoveries in the North Atlantic can now be seen as the first step in the process by which human populations became reconnected into a single global system. After two million years of cultural diversification and cultural dispersal, humanity has finally come full circle.”<sup>128</sup> Scholars such as Fitzhugh and Ward are analyzing the meeting of these two cultures as an inevitable migration period, in which migrations inevitably occur every few hundred to thousand years.<sup>129</sup>

The third factor in the European-North American contact is technology. Though European technology was ‘more advanced’ by way of material used for weaponry, it does not

127. Einar Haugen. “Voyages To Vinland The First American Saga Newly Translated And Interpreted.” *Universal Digital Library* (1942): 8.
128. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, 12.
129. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, 11.

necessarily suggest that the Vikings were superior to the Native North Americans they came into contact with. If European technology was so superior to the Native's then why did they technically lose the conflict, otherwise being saved by Freydis? Fitzhugh and Ward suggest that the Viking explorers actually failed to adapt their technology to support them in the new location they discovered against the Natives who were more accustomed to the land they lived on.<sup>130</sup> This would be an obvious standpoint since the Vikings were not accustomed to the new land, as those who lived there, and therefore their weapons, which were based for European battle,<sup>131</sup> were outmatched by those 'inferior' weapons based for North American battle grounds.<sup>132</sup>

Since these two cultures' weapons were designed based off of completely different circumstances it is no surprise that the Vikings lost the conflict. This is because they were fighting in an area against a people who had weapons based for fighting in North America and not Europe, while the Vikings had weapons based for fighting in the open grounds of Europe, not the heavily forested landscape of North America.

Despite the technological differences in weapons there were also differences in fighting war bands which would have determined the outcome of battle. According to Fitzhugh and Ward the people groups who the Vikings came into contact with, one of the two, were at least a Thule war band who came from Greenland. This Thule war band, as said above who would have displaced the Dorset peoples were "armed with lances and with bows powered by a cable of twisted sinew, as well as with warlike traditions developed in the large competing communities of coastal Alaska, such a band of warriors would have been a formidable enemy. They could

130. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, 255.

131. Kelly DeVries and Robert D. Smith. *Medieval Weapons: And Illustrated history of their Impact* (California, USA: ACB-CLIO, (2007): 83.

132. Colin F. Taylor. *Native American Weapons* (London, England: University of Oklahoma Press, (2001): 9.

have easily displaced the small and poorly armed communities of Dorset people from prime hunting localities, forcing them to retreat to more marginal areas.”<sup>133</sup> Unlike the Thule war band who, according to Fitzhugh and Ward, were a formidable fighting force the Viking explorers were not solely an exploration force meant for combat, which would have given the Native war band an advantage on the battlefield.

The fourth and final factor which caused the Vikings to come into contact with the Natives of North America was commerce. Commerce is actively defined as “the exchange of buying or selling goods, commodities, property, or services esp. on a large scale and involving transportation from place to place,”<sup>134</sup> this definition of Commerce also actively defines the purpose of the initial voyage to Vinland after it was accidentally discovered by Bjarni. The Vikings explored the region and both cultures began trading with each other—from the Natives for their furs, pelts and wooden objects; from the Vikings their cloth and other European material—for profitable gains.<sup>135</sup>

Obviously it was profitable for the Vikings, initially, to trade with the Natives since they explored the region and came into contact, however it was not so profitable to attempt to settle and trade with them permanently. Scholar Johnathan Clements writes: “to the people of the eleventh century, Vinland was merely one more place where they could find furs and wood, but simply too dangerous and remote to justify increased attention. To a trader, even if the Vikings found someone with whom they could trade, they would only be buying more of the same things

133. William F. Fitzhugh, Elisabeth Ward, 243.

134. Merriam Webster INC. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law* (USA: Merriam Webster INC, (1996): 86.

135. Jane Smiley, *The Sagas of the Icelanders*, 670 & Einar Ól Sveinsson. *Íslensk Fornrit: Eyrbyggja: Eiríks Saga Rauða*. 428

they could acquire elsewhere.”<sup>136</sup> Johnathan Clements concludes that Vinland was doomed from the start. Since the purpose was settlement, or perhaps to harvest its natural resources and deport them back to Greenland and maybe Iceland, it still is viewed as an attempt to colonize without success,

Despite their initial success in trading, the conflict could be seen as an inevitable clash between two cultures who, though were driven by different factors out of their control, were not yet ready to meet. As Johnathan Clements rightfully concluded Vinland was too dangerous to settle, too far to harvest and therefore not worth their time both economically and culturally.<sup>137</sup> Though the first contact had initial success, it ended in conflict and a forced expulsion of the Viking explorers and settlers from the New World.

This initial contact can be analyzed as a cultural ‘blueprint’ for the relationship between Europeans and North American indigenous peoples. Throughout North American-European history initial contact between the two groups formed a unique alliance, more based on curiosity and wealth, which quickly escalated into conflict. Different wars throughout North American-European relations history shows that conflict between the two cultures became inevitable; though some peoples had alliances, such as the Mi’kmaq and French,<sup>138</sup> others became inevitably involved in the European-North American struggle for control of the entire continent.<sup>139</sup>

136. Johnathan Clements. *The Vikings: The Last Pagans or the First Modern Europeans* (London, England: Constable and Robinson LTD., 2005): 158.

137. Ibid.

138. Eric B. Schultz. *King Philip’s War: The History and Legacy of America’s Forgotten Conflict* (Vermont, USA: Countryman Press, (2000): 1-432.

139. Armstrong Starkey. *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (London, UK: UCL Press Limited, (1998): 57.

The relationship between the European-North American peoples was doomed from the start in the Vinland Sagas, and one could say it was doomed throughout history based on what happened in the Vinland Sagas. The European-North American relationship history never held on to prosperous peace for all involved, instead it favored one people group over another, mainly the Europeans over the North American Native peoples. The European-North American first contact can be viewed as a blueprint for the rest of North American-European history in which the former was taken advantage of over the latter.

The Vikings came to the New World based upon four main factors: Climate Change, Migrations, Technology and Commerce. With these four factors we can analyze the rest of European-North American relationship history, because this history was mainly based upon those four factors in which Europe prospered and North Americans suffered. Though the Vikings came to a New World to explore, trade, and settle it was not to be; the relationships between the two people groups were doomed from the start, which ended in a conflict that echoed throughout the rest of European-North American history.

Though the roots of the conflict did not run deep at the time, in the way it affected both cultures, as was stated by Fitzhugh and Ward previously “the Norse discoveries in the North Atlantic can now be seen as the first step in the process by which human populations became reconnected into a single global system. After two million years of cultural diversification and cultural dispersal, humanity has finally come full circle.”<sup>140</sup> Due to the accidental discovery and exploration of the Vikings to Vinland, there was no way for these two continents to hide from each other any longer and thus the interaction created a new era of discovery which resembled the events in the Vinland Sagas very closely as never before.

140. Fitzhugh and Ward, 12.

## Conclusion

The Vinland Sagas are believed to be the first ‘documentation’ in history to describe the European discovery and explorations of the North American continent. Two Icelandic sagas from *Grænlandinga Saga* and *Eiríks Saga Rauða* in *Eyrbyggja Saga*, coming from four medieval writings which describe the Viking adventure to the location known as “Vinland,” the writings being *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga* in the work titled *Hauksbók*, later *Skálholtsbók*, and *Flateyjarbók*; all belonging to the Icelandic text *Islendingasögur*.<sup>141</sup>

These texts describe the very first recorded European discovery of North America, well before Christopher Columbus’ discovery of Southern America. The Vinland Sagas, consisting of these two individual sagas, tell the story of Viking explorers such as Leifr Eiríksson, Bjarni Herjólfsson, Þórvaldr and Karlsefni who braved the Atlantic Ocean to discover, and settle, Greenland and who are believed to eventually attempt to settle America. Though there is some speculation of the authenticity of the sagas, since they were written sometime in the 13th century with the actual events suspected to take place between 970-1030 AD and even as late into the 14th century,<sup>142</sup> the sagas can tell us of how the attempt of settlement ended for the Viking explorers which can give us a blueprint of the entire European-North American relationship throughout history.

This thesis has attempted to analyze the Vinland Sagas in a historical global contextual analysis to the Native-Viking conflict which occurred in the Saga. Furthermore it attempted to

141. Jónas Kristjánsson, trans. Peter Foote. *Eddas and Sagas. Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavik: *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*), 1997: 204.

142. Jane Smiley et al. *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York, New York: *Penguin Classics*, 2000): 626.

a general overview of the Vinland Sagas, analyzing the primary sources and how it was interpreted by secondary sources to give a general idea to the ‘accuracy’ of the Vinland Sagas. This thesis also presented new arguments to suggest that Vinland was in fact the Atlantic region of Canada, not just isolated to Newfoundland and the North; analyzing the geography described in the Vinland Sagas compared to the geography we know today of the region, this thesis attempted to pinpoint the exact site of trade and conflict between the Vikings and the Natives of North America. The conclusion was either Cape Breton Nova Scotia, the Island of St. John’s Newfoundland or the coast of New Brunswick, all belonging to the extinct Beothuk, Mi’kmaq, and Maliseet peoples who belonged to the Native Iroquois Confederacy known as the ‘Six Nations’.<sup>143</sup>

Finally this thesis analyzed the conflict between the Vikings and Natives and explored the greater historical context, and significance, of the conflict; relating this conflict to later European-Native North American relations. The relationship began more as an inquiry of the different cultures, between the North Americans and Europeans, then evolved into a minor trade relationship which turned quickly into conflict; this pattern represents the European-North American relationship in later history. The historical context of the conflict represents the entire European-North American relations, based upon discovery, trade, and eventual war which followed the exact same patterns in the Vinland Sagas as it had in the 1700’s.

Important in proving the above theory a discussion of the Native American peoples, the weapons used, the tactics implemented and finally the location of exploration, trade and conflict

143. Bruce Elliot Johansen and Barbara Alice Mann. *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000): 7-10.

occurred which helped narrow down the possibilities of different Native North American, Canadian, peoples.

The importance of discussing Vinland is considered to be a great tie which links European civilization with Native North American civilization for the first time in history. This was the first time in history that Europeans met, traded and fought against the Native Americans, which set the tone for the rest of the history between the two cultures. In the greater historical context, it was proven that the conflict in the Vinland Sagas set up the rest of the European-Native relationship in the 1700's, based upon the model that the European-Native relationship was one of violence but also one of prosperity in trade.

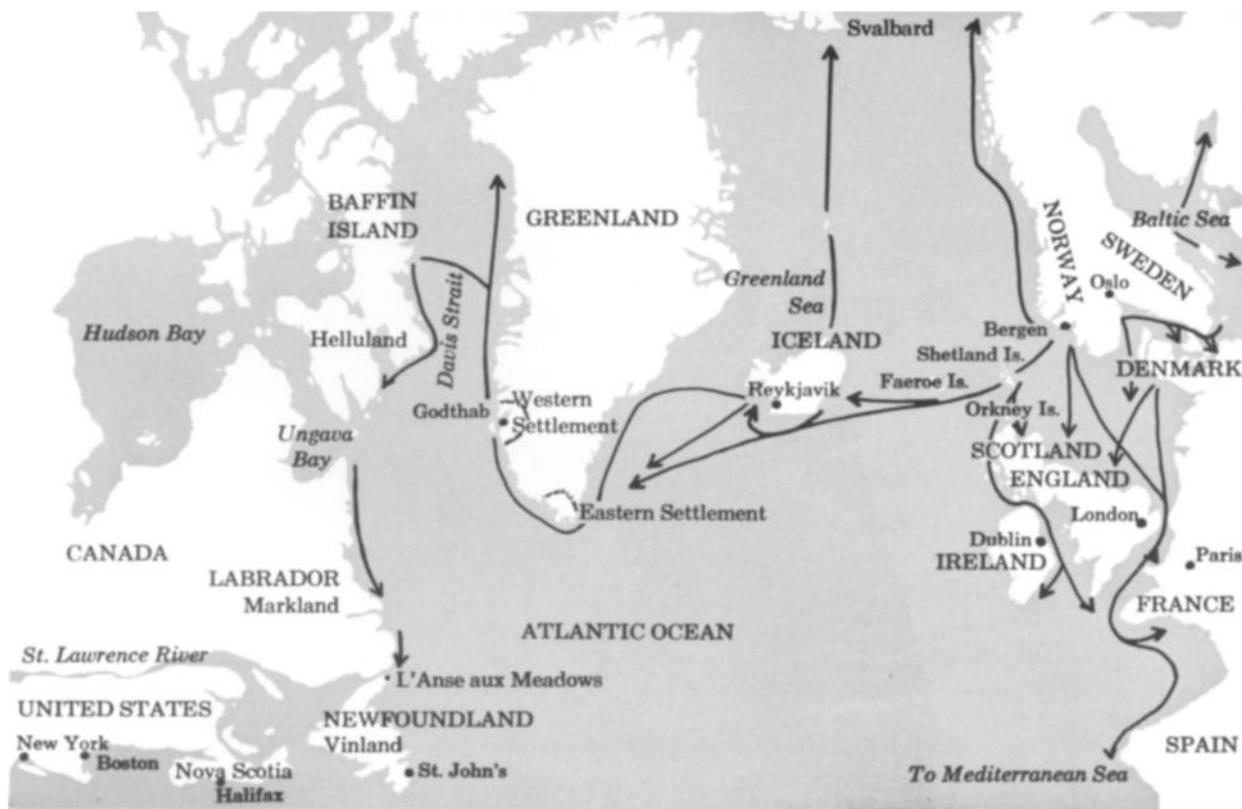
The actual conflict opened the door to a future relationship, as mentioned above, based upon discovery, initial prosperity in commerce trade, and ending in eventual violence, displacement and the overthrowing of North American Native culture to European culture. Without conflict there would have been no expulsion of the Vikings of Vinland and thus the history of European-North American Native relations would have been much different.

Attempting to conclude new ideas of the Vinland conflict, I have attempted to analyze the Vinland sagas using new interpretations given by descriptions of geography, weapons, people and trade goods within the sagas which helped a new idea to emerge of the Vinland sagas and attempted to identify the actual people group, and geographical location, which the Vikings came in contact with. More importantly this theory opened a new theoretical route which analyzed the research pertaining to the Vinland sagas and created new angles which, hopefully, re-ignited research of this part of the world for educational purposes.

As stated in the introduction I continue to believe that the conflict within the Vinland sagas was a major event in the history between the two cultures and set a guideline for the remainder of their relations which lasted well into the modern era. The discovery, trade, conflict and eventual eviction between the Vikings and Native Americans were to be repeated a few hundred years later, though the Europeans were to be the victors. The work for Vinland, of course, still is open for new interpretations, and my interpretation should not be the only one on the matter of conflict.

It is more important than ever to establish research based upon the Vinland sagas because it indeed was the first time Europeans ventured into North America, and due to the events resembling European-North American relations, it should hold high priority in Scandinavian studies based on these facts alone. New analysis must continue in order for the Vinland mystery to be solved, and in order for this to happen researchers, such as myself, need to continue to analyze the Vinland sagas from a military standpoint, but also one of social, economic, political, and interpretational history. The “Vinland Problem” may never be solved but we, as scholars, can, at the very least, try to open the world’s understanding of the importance of the event, not just in history but, in the modern world.

144. William Stetson Merrill. “The Vinland Problem Through Four Centuries.” *Catholic University Press of America* 21 (1935).

Appendix AVinland Map<sup>145</sup>

145. Hoidal K. Oddvar. "Norsemen and the North American Forests." *Journal of Forest History* 24 (1980): 201.

This map gives a 'detailed' description of the Viking voyage by using the Sagas' detailed account of the number of days it took to sail from one location to the next. Though this map is but one theory of the Viking sailing pattern it is still a source that should be viewed with thorough analysis. Also note that the map has the names of the areas that were described as being named by Leifr Eiríksson.



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