

The Viking Discovery of America, 985 to 1008: The Greenland Norse And Their Voyages to Newfoundland (Scandinavian Studies)



This book provides an account of Leif Erikssons discovery of Vinland and other Viking voyages to Newfoundland. The most important contribution of the manuscript is the authors contention that the Greenland Norse did not ballast their knarrs [freight ships] with loose stones, which might shift in heavy waves and imperil the shallow-draught vessels. Instead, they cut large stone blocks, beveled at one end to roughly conform to the shape of the hull, and laid them between the ribs. When loading the ships with a heavy cargo such as timber, the Norse would dump some or all of their ballast stones over the side. Therefore, it might be possible to detect a Norse site by locating a collection of distinctively shaped ballast stones on or near the shore. This hypothesis has apparently not been explored by anyone else involved in Norse research in Newfoundland. Vinding had a life-long fascination with the dramatic voyages of the Greenland Norse and the unsolved question of the location of Vinland. His research led him to a careful analysis of two of the Icelandic sagas, the Greenlanders Saga and Erik the Reds Saga. These sagas describe the same events, but there are discrepancies between them. Vinding compared the sources and created a plausible synthesized account of seven voyages of the Norse to Greenland and North America. Based on his readings, he hypothesized that Leif Erikssons first landing in North America was in Trinity Bay, and that Vinland was located on the Avalon Peninsula of southern Newfoundland. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century researchers published theories about the location of Vinland but without providing conclusive evidence. The theories suggesting locations far down the east coast of the United States have now been abandoned, in part because they demand that we disregard our primary sources, the sagas, which give precise

indications of sailing times and distances. All authorities agree that the second of the three lands discovered by Bjarni Herjolfsson, called Markland by the Norse, is Labrador. There is only one area that fits the sagas distances and directions from Labrador to Vinland, and that is the east coast of southern Newfoundland. No Norse artifacts have been found in that area except the ballast stones. Since ballast stones are likely to be indicators of Norse sites, they are markers of areas that deserve further archaeological exploration, be that a search for Vinland in Trinity Bay or a search for Hop in St. Pauls Bay.

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