

FOREWORD

by Birgitta Wallace

When I arrived in North America in the 1960s I was amazed by the widespread fascination with Norse Vinland and the Norse themselves, commonly referred to as Vikings. This was particularly striking as, at the time, Scandinavians back in their own lands were not particularly interested in their Viking forbearers. This has since changed as the great tourist potential of everything Viking has taken hold.

One of my first assignments as an archaeologist with Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, PA, was to travel to every alleged Viking location in North America, to view every artifact, inscription, and site and to give them the same kind of assessment as one would any archaeological phenomenon. What struck me was the scant familiarity proponents had with the real Viking world, as well as the many myths that had developed around these supposed pieces of evidence.

Many people I met thought it perfectly natural that Vikings would have left runic inscriptions in inland Oklahoma, buried their dead on a mining claim in central Ontario, travelled through Minnesota on a religious mission in the 1360's, and left axes, swords, and lance heads throughout the North American Middle west. Vikings were travellers, but there were limits to the distances small groups based in Greenland could cover safely, and besides, none of the artifacts looked anything like the weapons used by the Vikings. Nor were the inscriptions in the language spoken by the Vikings. Yet these are not the conclusions wanted

by Viking fans. The romance of undiscovered Viking sites has a firm grip on the public in wide parts of North America but also in Newfoundland.

Newfoundland can lay special claims as we really know that the Vikings were there and that they regularly left their post in L'Anse aux Meadows to explore other regions. Thus it is understandable that local memories of the past and old rusty artifacts such as outlined in this collation are revived and connected with the Vikings. It all seems so plausible. My view as an archaeologist differs. I would not be doing my job if I immediately accepted everything as true evidence. Other explanations must be pursued with equal fervour if it is going to have any validity. The pleasure of an archaeologist lies in solving mysteries, not being seduced by them. The question of the location of Vinland is a case in point. It may be romantic to think of a Vinland still there to be found. In my opinion the archaeological evidence at L'Anse aux Meadows has given us a strong pointer where to look for it: the coastlines around the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with L'Anse aux Meadows being the *Straumfjord* of Erik the Red's Saga, Vinland's main settlement, and the Miramichi and Chaleur Bay area of New Brunswick the warmer and more hospitable *Hóp* where grapes really do grow wild. Clearly Vinland encompasses a vast area, and the Norse may have set foot in many locations.

The stories presented here are to some extent spurred by theories and a mix of professional and amateur investigations, some undertaken long ago and some more recent. Rona Rangsch has presented them as stories, stories that appeal to the imagination as they are, without judgement. To her, the driving factor lies in the almost inexplicable fascination with

Vinland, the way the Vinland sagas continue to stimulate passion for discovery, for interpretation, and leading to a variety of individual geographic spots and objects, here beautifully illustrated and described, dangling between myths and reality. *The Vinland Phenomenon* unites them into an interactive net of shared visions. Enjoy!



Steel sculpture on the hill next to the site. The silhouettes of a group of Norse look in both directions – towards Greenland where they came from and west to where they might go for further exploration.

The Vinland event, however we read it, was both insignificant and highly important: as a footnote to history it may have been no big deal, but as a chapter in the story of man's aspirations it has a fascination which will never die. (Magnusson, 2003: 95)

INTRODUCTION

OR: *HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT VINLAND?*

Until a couple of years ago, I hadn't. But once I touched on the subject, I was captivated by Vinland like so many before me. Or rather, I was fascinated by the hold of fascination Vinland had on others. Fittingly, it was in Bergen, Norway, that I first came across the Norse Vinland. I was an artist-in-residence at Kulturhuset USF and browsing the public and university libraries for material on the Norse voyages across the North Atlantic. The "wild" Atlantic was the last gap in human migration around the globe, and as it appears today, that gap was closed when the Norse reached North America about 500 years prior to Columbus or Cabot. With the encounter of Indigenous Americans and Norse, the encircling of the globe by humankind was complete.¹

The crossing of the North Atlantic was certainly an amazing achievement given the lack of navigational aids at the

time.² However, if one looks at the history of the Norse western voyages which successively took them to the British Isles, Iceland, and Greenland, which already belongs to America geologically, it also appears as the last step of an nearly natural development. The concurrence of the exceptionality of reaching North America and the implicitness of this achievement in the context of the Norse western voyages is mirrored in the ambivalence inherent to Vinland where it is both significant and irrelevant (as expressed in the quote at the outset), an ambivalence that is clearly related to the fact that the Norse presence in America was confined to only a few visits over a short period of time.³

So, there I sat at the desk in my studio in Bergen, looking west over the bay, and my thoughts travelled on, across the ocean, following those early adventurers. My focus at the time was on the Norse transatlantic voyages across the Atlantic proper (the outcome was the 3-channel video titled *fyrir hafvillu fram*⁴), but the recurrent appearance of *Vinland* in the context of the destination of those voyages in a large variety of texts, in print and online, planted a curiosity in me to learn more about what seemed to be not only a place, but an event and an idea. And so I set out to investigate the idea of Vinland and its impetus in greater depth.

¹ A nice illustration is the video *Completing The Circle - L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site*, produced by Sound Venture Productions in 2012 and distributed by Parks Canada.

² It is more than unlikely that the Norse had the compass on hand, and they were definitely unable to determine longitude as, to that end, precise ship-board timekeeping is required, which had to await the invention of the marine chronometer in the 18th century (Pope, 2003).

³ The Norse site at L'Anse aux Meadows has been shown to have been occupied for not more than a few decades (Wallace, 2003b).

⁴ Old Norse for "onwards, despite the risk of getting lost at sea"; see demo version at <https://vimeo.com/56087698>

Vinland in early sources

The earliest extant references to Vinland are made by the German priest Adam von Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* from around 1075, and by the Icelander Ari Thorgilsson (“the Learned”) in *Islendingabok* in 1127 (Magnusson 1965). However, these works only briefly mention Vinland. What has inspired the wide interest in and the large amount of secondary literature on Vinland from a wide range of disciplines are two medieval Icelandic texts which today are referred to as the ‘Vinland sagas’: *Eiríks saga rauða* (the saga of Eirik the Red) and *Grœnlendinga saga* (the saga of the Greenlanders), of which we have manuscripts from the 13th and 14th century. These sagas give vivid accounts of the Vinland voyages. In their common parts they tell us that Norse seafarers discovered new shores by sailing west and south from Greenland around the year 1000 and that Leif Eiriksson, son of the founder of the Norse colony in Greenland Eirik the Red, was the first to set foot on the new land. In subsequent years, a small number of expeditions were undertaken by other family members and affiliates of Eirik the Red to explore the new land and to exploit its rich resources. The attempt to settle in the new land, we learn, was eventually defeated by the Indigenous inhabitants who outnumbered the newcomers which is why Vinland never developed into an actual Norse colony (Ibid).

According to the sagas, Vinland offered “rolling grasslands, vast stretches of towering timber, an abundance of game of all kinds, rivers teeming with giant salmon, meadows rich with a harvest of wild wheat, and a climate so kind that winterfrosts were hardly known” (Magnusson 1965: 7). The most prominent of the recorded resources, however, were wild grapes (*vínber* in Norse) after which the new land was named *Vinland*.

Wine was extremely precious in the Nordic world and figured as an important status symbol in the Norse society where power was demonstrated by hosting legendary feasts. Hence, “Vinland” must have sounded to Norse ears like the land of milk and honey. We do not know for sure if the Norse explorers really found grapes on the new shores, or if the name Vinland was chosen to impress the people back home (like Eirik the Red did when he named the icy Greenland a generation earlier). Nor do we know what is fact and what is fiction in the Vinland sagas. Medieval Icelandic sagas are to be understood as text-based oral traditions (Sigurdsson 2004). As such, saga-writing was “a unique blend of entertainment and learning, fact and fantasy, history and story-telling, literary endeavor and family pride” (Magnusson 1965: 37). The fact that the two sagas are roughly concerned with the same events and personages (if partly in different roles), however, and the suggestion by saga scholars that the texts represent two independent transcripts of the same oral tradition (Sigurdsson 2008: xvii), implies that they had a certain historicity even prior to their corroboration by archaeological evidence to which I will come below⁵. However, the Vinland sagas are more than simple accounts of an event, be it factual or fictive. Despite their relative brevity,⁶ they give inspiring depictions of the places belonging to Vinland with such intriguing names as *Kjalarnes*, *Leifsbuðir*, *Furðustrandir*, *Straumfjörðr*, and *Hóp* (which is sometimes spelled Hope)⁷ and

5 Especially among Scandinavian scholars, the view that the Vinland sagas are historically factual has always been popular since it opened up for a potential for Norse participation in the discourse on the “discovery of America” (Frakes 2001: 159).

6 *Grœnlendinga saga* contains 6602 words in standardized Old Norse spelling, *Eiríks saga rauða* 7825 words (retrieved from: heimskringla.no).

7 The place names translate to: Keel Point, Tidal Lagoon, Current Fjord,

captivating descriptions of the adventures of the protagonists. The sagas “illuminate history with humanity” (Magnusson 1965: 29) and stir the reader’s imagination. Indeed, medieval Icelandic saga writing can itself be seen as an almost miraculous phenomenon. Sagas were a singular genre in times when, elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East, literary manuscripts were only produced in ecclesiastical or aristocratic contexts and almost exclusively in Latin (Björnsson 2001), and they remain unique across literary history. Long before the advent of the European novel, the Icelandic sagas, including the Vinland sagas, were exceptionally well composed pieces that combined the individual and the traditional and presented characters not only as heroic prototypes but as “flesh-and-blood people” (Sigurdsson 2008: xiv).

Genesis of a myth

Leif said to his men, ‘Now we have two tasks on our hands. On alternate days we must gather grapes and cut vines, and then fell trees, to make cargo for my ship’. This was done. It is said that the tow-boat was filled with grapes.

(from *Grœnlendinga saga*, Magnusson & Pálsson 1965: 57)

A core feature about Vinland which has remained tantalizingly hazy to the present day, even if we accept the Norse voyages to North America as historical events, is its location along the American littoral.⁸ The sagas themselves give only

Marvel Beaches and Leif’s Camp. While *Kjalarnes* appears in both Vinland sagas, the names *Hóp*, *Straumfjörðr* and *Furðustrandir* are only given in *Eiríks saga rauða*, and the place name Leifsbuðir is exclusive to *Grœnlendinga saga*.

⁸ While the most accepted view among scholars today locates Vinland on the shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Wallace 2009), there are still plenty of

vague geographical information through Norse sailing terms, scenic descriptions, and hints to environment and climate, rather than definite answers to the riddle of the location of the new-found lands (Jacobsson 2012). Moreover, the information provided has to be treated with caution, given the particularities of the saga genre and of linguistic features of the time. The uncertainty about the location of Vinland goes back to medieval times. While *Islendingabok* (1127) mentions Vinland as a well-known place, its actual location is not revealed, and even if it was known to a small group of people at some point, it appears to have been forgotten already a century after the Vinland voyages took place, as the Icelandic Annals for 1121 report that “Bishop Eirik of Greenland went in search for Vinland,” a trip from which he never returned (Magnusson 1965: 28).

The uncertainty about the location of Vinland alone, however, could hardly have stirred anybody’s imagination. It is the riches mentioned in the sagas, together with the adventurous nature of the sailing endeavour and the vivid description of its heroic protagonists that touched upon the human fascination with ‘discovery,’ the yearning for recognition and fame, and the longing for a Promised Land. The dulcet name certainly added to the picture. This is why Vinland acquired a mythical status already in the medieval Norse world and inspired the oral tales on which the Vinland sagas are based. Between then and the nineteenth century, Vinland was not subject to much attention outside Scandinavian scholarly circles⁹. It experienced a boost

other theories circulating. And individual sites from the sagas could nowhere be conclusively identified and arguably never will.

⁹ Two non-Scandinavian exceptions from that period are the *History of the reign of King Henrie the Seventh* (1622) by Francis Bacon that mentions a land on the American continent that had been discovered prior to Columbus’ voyage in 1492 and the Latin *Historia Vinlandiae Antiquae* (1705) by Þormóður

in attention and popularity when the English-speaking world was introduced to the subject through the volume *Antiquitates Americanae* in 1837, largely the work of Danish scholar Carl Christian Rafn, which, alongside Danish and Latin translations and compendious background information, gives an English summary of the Vinland sagas (Barnes 2011). Since that time, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlendinga saga* have prompted ever new research, discussion, and argument, not to speak of the large number of fiction they have inspired. The aura of mystery and promise and the vividness of the saga narratives kept stimulating the imagination of scholars and enthusiastic amateurs alike, carrying the Vinland myth into the present. In the attempt to extract elements of historical truth and to identify the places depicted, the Vinland sagas have been studied more closely than any other saga text (Haldorsson 2001: 40). An impressive illustration of the quest to find the different locations depicted in the Vinland sagas, as well as the difficulty to provide ultimate proof, is a complex chart compiled by Gisli Sigurdsson (2004). It associates the different places in Vinland with locations along the North American eastcoast as suggested by different authors between 1837 and 2000 and covers the range from Labrador to Florida.

Thus far, Vinland has much in common with other mythical places, like Atlantis or Eldorado. They all combine legendary riches with an unknown location thus stirring the imagination of scholars and laymen alike. Yet, while they all represent concepts that bring the basic human urge for knowledge and explanation to light, as well as the striving for fame and the longing for a paradisiac place, Vinland stands out.

Torfason (Bergersen 1997).

An anchor in reality

The parallels between myths like Atlantis and Eldorado on the one hand and Vinland on the other came to an end when, in the 1960s, the Norwegian explorer Helge Ingstad and his wife, archaeologist Anne Stine Ingstad – with the aid of local residents and on the basis of earlier scholarly research – found and excavated a Norse dwelling at L'Anse aux Meadows at the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. What may sound like a straightforward process took many years of preparatory exploration and more years of strenuous work on site, until the mounds in a local pasture which locals had taken to be of Indigenous origin, were irrefutably identified as foundations of Norse sod buildings. What had been the Ingstad's theory from the beginning, was corroborated when a bronze ring-headed pin and a soapstone spindle whorl were unearthed that matched items found in Greenland and Iceland (Ingstad 1985). Final evidence for a Norse presence in Newfoundland, however, was only achieved after a careful examination of the site as a whole. These studies unequivocally revealed that seafarers had repaired their ships there using iron tools and a small number of iron nails produced on site around the turn of the eleventh century (Wallace 2009). With the archaeological finds at L'Anse aux Meadows, Vinland had acquired an anchor in reality. One might think that this could have put an end to the quest for Vinland. Yet, the mythical attraction by, and investigative interest in, Vinland was by no means affected by this connection to the real world. Indeed, the finds at L'Anse aux Meadows, rather than settling the discussions, fuelled them and created a "flurry of legitimate excitement" (Frakes 2001), because one thing appeared to be clear: L'Anse aux Meadows does not give the full picture. The Norse, once they had reached this exposed place

at the very tip of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula, would have sailed west and south for further exploration of the new land from there. And so, the quest for *Hóp*, *Kjalarnes* and the other Vinland sites continues to the present day. But let us pause a moment and ask : does the Norse dwelling at L'Anse aux Meadows really provide evidence for the factual existence of Vinland? It unequivocally proves that the Norse reached North America around the year 1000, but this is about it. L'Anse aux Meadows is not Vinland. As suggested above, Vinland was a region, not a singular place; and L'Anse aux Meadows does not match the abundance of resources described in the sagas (Wallace 2009); nor does it give final evidence of the historicity of Vinland in the first place. The Vinland of the sagas could still well be an imaginary place: its kinship with early Irish accounts of lands of plenty in the western seas – like the otherworldly islands described in the Old Irish *immram*,¹⁰ or the places visited by the medieval Irish monk St. Brendan on his voyages – with which the Norse would have been familiar, as well as similarities with medieval writing about Paradise, is quite obvious (Sigurdsson 2008). Already in 1911, Fridtjof Nansen argued that the Norse explorations of the eastcoast of North America around the year 1000, which he considered to be factual before any archaeological evidence existed, have to be seen separately from the Vinland legend of the sagas (Frakes 2001). Similarly, Magnusson (2003) suggests that “Vinland... may not have existed at all in the strictly physical, geographical sense” and that it “was essentially an intellectual concept, not a place on the map” (83). And yet, the historical elements of the sagas and the many realistic features they depict, together with

10 A class of tales about fabulous sea journeys written in Ireland between the late 8th and 11th centuries (Speake & Laflaur, 1999).

the archaeological evidence that supports the saga narratives, make it plausible that the Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows was part of Vinland (Lewis-Simpson 2003; Wallace 2008; Sigurdsson 2008). Ultimately, however, the only thing that is undubitably certain is that the unsettled nature of the scenario, the openness of the Vinland subject – its unique situation at the interface of fact and fiction, reality and imagination, historicity and legend – is extremely fertile soil for endless speculation and investigation. Indeed, the efforts undertaken to extract conclusive information from and about the Vinland sagas “represent an interesting history of the attempts by learned scholars to solve problems for which no convincing or comprehensive solutions exist” (Haldorsson 2001: 40). Enthusiasts along the popular fringes of the scholarly world who have always participated in the quest for Vinland have carried the theme beyond the institutional sphere. As Shannon Lewis-Simpson, editor of *Vinland Revisited*, a selection of papers from the *Viking Millennium International Symposium*, 2000 in Newfoundland and Labrador, puts it: The “readers [of the proceedings] are invited to draw their own conclusions as to where Vinland might be, or if it is actually a physical place at all, or merely a state of mind, or a dream.” (2001: 24)

A transatlantic event

The Vinland myth is unique in two more aspects that are related to its transatlantic character and the corresponding significance it acquired within the contested, yet still common concept of *Old* and *New World*. The ‘discovery’ of the New World from the Old plays a pivotal role for our view on, and

understanding of, Western history and culture. Old and New World, even if they are sometimes played off against each other by politics, form the core of the Western world, its values and schools of thought, its achievements and its flaws. And while the Norse exploration of America, failing to be followed up by colonization, did not have a lasting impact, it is still the earliest connection between and hence at the roots of what would eventually become the Western world. Moreover, for individual settler North Americans, Vinland appears to answer pressing questions of heritage and cultural identity. The realistic element of the Vinland myth – the archaeological evidence at L'Anse aux Meadows – has encouraged the perception of being connected to the Norse, those ultimate adventurers and explorers from the Old World, by descent or some other ideational relation. Ideas like these have recurrently been expressed by visitors to the Norse site in L'Anse aux Meadows, which became one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1978 (Loretta Decker, personal communication, June 6, 2015), and there are locals from the L'Anse aux Meadows area who are convinced that their lineage goes directly back to the Norse (Gabrielle Suley, personal communication, July 21, 2015).¹¹

The Norse in Vinland appear to resonate with ideas of identity and provenance for those who consider an ancient Old World heritage as superior to one that can be traced only a couple of hundred years. While this view is a twofold deception –

11 While I am referring here to a contemporary phenomenon on an individual level, these observations also hold against the background of a populist movement in the 19th century, when white Anglo-Saxon Protestants in North America, with increasing immigration from Ireland and Southern and Eastern Europe, saw their political, cultural and religious hegemony at risk and turned from Christopher Columbus to Leif Eiriksson as the heroic discoverer of their young nation (Björnsdóttir, 2001).

the Norse are unlikely to have had any direct descendants in the New World,¹² and a lineage from ancestors who came to North America from Europe much later can in principle be traced back to medieval times and beyond as well – it implies that the North Atlantic is here perceived as a barrier or gap that separates its opposite shores. As a consequence, the descent from, or other ideational connections to, Europeans who were the first to cross that gap over a thousand years ago, is considered a gift that makes the holder stand out among their fellow North Americans.¹³

The Vinland Phenomenon

Vinland shares basic features with other mythic places. Not unlike Atlantic or Eldorado, the longing for a paradisiac place and the praise for Vinland's riches, together with the uncertainty of its location surround Vinland with an aura of mystery and promise that calls on the Western striving for conclusive knowledge and the recognition for delivering it. However, the particular nature of the Icelandic sagas, our main sources about Vinland, their ambivalence as works at the intersection of historical accounts and literary pieces designed for entertainment, their fabric that interweaves the factual with the imaginary, and the tantalizing discrepancies that intervene their common threads, create an unmatched ground for continued interpretation and defy any final conclusion about the Vinland event. What exactly happened where and when (and if!), and who was involved and how will never be fully disclosed. What

12 Those who came to Vinland only stayed for short periods and their relations to the Natives were problematic and ultimately hostile.

13 The urge for an ancient heritage moreover relates to the deep-seated yearning of settler colonizers more generally for an ideational connection to the land that predates and “indigenizes” them (Goldie 1989).

further distinguishes the Vinland myth from other myths is its link to the real world through the finds at L'Anse aux Meadows that rejuvenated and increased the quest for *Hóp* and *Straumfjörðr* on the eastern littoral of the North American continent. This ongoing enthusiasm is further amplified by Vinland's situation within the colonial yet popular concept of Old and New World that gives it a special significance related to heritage and cultural identity as seen from a settler point of view. Related to this topicality is the observation that Vinland, unlike other mythical places of past glory, is often considered as still existing somewhere out there. One frequently hears or reads about the riddle where Vinland *is*, rather than where it *was*, located.¹⁴

The combination and interplay of these aspects make the Vinland myth unique. What I am calling *The Vinland Phenomenon* is the ensemble of perceptions of this unique myth and the imaginative and investigative stimulus these perceptions create. Most of all, *The Vinland Phenomenon* manifests itself in the vast secondary literature written over the last two centuries. *The Vinland Bibliography* by Robert Bergersen lists over 6400 publications related to the Norse in Greenland and America, and the author himself was aware that his compilation was by no means complete when he published it in 1997. Authors engaged with Vinland have a wide variety of backgrounds – from literary studies and history, over archaeology and anthropology, to meteorology, nautical studies, and other sciences, to self-taught amateurs – and take ever different approaches to assess the primary sources. What they share is the aim to increase our knowledge and understanding of an event or place that defies final determination or identification. Other manifestations

¹⁴ See for instance the website “Where is Vinland?” (<http://www.canadian-mysteries.ca/sites/vinland/home/indexen.html>)

of *The Vinland Phenomenon*, based on the same impetus and wide range of scholarly and non-scholarly motivations, are Vinland conferences, Vinland websites, and Vinland blogs that are elaborately maintained and passionately commented.¹⁵ The millennium celebrations of the Vinland event in and around the year 2000 prompted a new wave of publications, symposia, telecasts, and web activities. In 2016, the news that evidence for another Norse site at Point Rosee in the Codroy Valley in southwest Newfoundland might have been found with the aid of satellite imagery has obtained wide media coverage.¹⁶ Although the aspirations have not been met, the excitement about the mere possibility to locate another Norse site was clearly a manifestation of *The Vinland Phenomenon*.

One of the core features of *The Vinland Phenomenon* is that it is not confined to professionally conducted undertakings. A deep fascination for Vinland as a place, an event, or an

¹⁵ Selected Vinland websites and blogs: K. Kris Hirst, “Is Vinland Wineland?” on: *about education* (archaeology.about.com/od/vikings/a/vinland_2.htm); “Where is Vinland?”, on: *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* (canadianmysteries.ca/sites/vinland/home/index.html); “Vinland 2013 A.D.” (lavalhallalajah.wordpress.com); *VinLand Blog* (djalmbina.wordpress.com/vikings-erik-the-red-leif-eriksson/)

¹⁶ Archaeologist Sarah Parcak and her team had spotted quasi-square structures on particularly processed satellite images and received permits for excavations in 2015 and 2016. While alleged signs for primitive iron processing, a uniquely Norse activity, were reported in the first year, they ultimately turned out to be of natural origin. Selected media items on Point Rosee pre-dating this final result: “View from Space Hints at a New Viking Site in North America”, *The New York Times*, March 31st, 2016; “Vikings Unearthed”, *PBS / NOVA*, TV broadcasting, April 1st, 2016; “New Evidence of Viking life in America?”, *BBC News*, Magazine, April 1st, 2016; “Das Geheimnis von Point Rosee”, *stern*, Nr. 16, 2016, pp. 128-131; “Possible Viking Site in Canada”, *CBC News: The National*, published 07/09/2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAOVRhfjQ2A>)

idea can be found among scholars and amateurs of various backgrounds and motivations alike. And while the amateurs, who have often developed a very personal connection to the Vinland theme, do not always stick to rational arguments and evidence, their commitment does not lack profundity and seriousness. On the other hand, those who are professionally engaged with the Norse western voyages, pursuing their studies with great rationality and developing theories of high scholarly standards, often also have a personal idea of Vinland that goes beyond their professional interest. Finally, there is the group of people who, while not striving for recognition or publicity, are touched by the Vinland theme and develop their own ideas about its relevance both for them personally and more generally.¹⁷ It is this multifaceted phenomenon, the observation that the fascination with Vinland today does not only reach across disciplines and media but also from the public and professional into the private and personal realm and from rationality to wishful thinking, that I attempt to convey.

Based on the study of sources of varying scholarly and popular character in print and online, and drawing from a wealth of material collected during extensive field studies, the visual and textual works created gather conceptions, imaginations and manifestations of Vinland in Newfoundland as the only region in North America where unequivocal evidence for a Norse presence has been found. The project aims to convey the nature of *The Vinland Phenomenon* through the combination and interplay of different perspectives and representations in four work series: a collection of illustrated Vinland-related short-stories collected all over the island of

17 See for instance Ruth and Terry Travers in the *Vinland Story* from Little Port, or Ivan Budden in that from Sop's Arm.

Newfoundland (*Vinland Spots & Stories*); artworks based on the unique Newfoundland scenery which convey the mystery and beauty of Vinland as well as the ambivalence of the sagas as a blend of factual account and literary fiction (*Vinland Visions*); quotes from interviews with people engaged in the subject through professional or personal interest, residence, or family ties (*Vinland Quotes*); and a series of photographic diptychs documenting my own Vinland quest for this project.

I would like to close this introduction with two observations. First, beside the places appearing in the *Vinland Spots & Stories*, there are numerous others in Newfoundland and along the North American littoral which fit the scenic and environmental depictions in the Vinland sagas (Wallace 2003a). It is thus foreseeable that the longing to find, inhabitate, or “possess” *Hóp*, *Straumfjörðr*, *Kjalarnes* or *Leifsbuðir*¹⁸ will continue to result in new allocations in Newfoundland and beyond. As we know from L'Anse aux Meadows and Point Rosee, even potential new archaeological corroboration will not conclude the story, however, but further fuel the quest for ever more evidence of the Norse presence in the North America.

The second observation is that, while the aspects and manifestations of *The Vinland Phenomenon* presented here focus on the ways Vinland is perceived by individuals and on the imaginative and investigative impetus it creates, this medieval myth can be traced in Newfoundland on a less personal level as well. Vinland is not only exploited by local tourist boards and businesses, but the Vinland sagas have been commonly taken to be closely connected to the island of Newfoundland even before the finds at L'Anse aux Meadows. This is reflected

18 See the *Vinland Quote* by Dale Wells, senior Parks Canada interpreter at L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site.

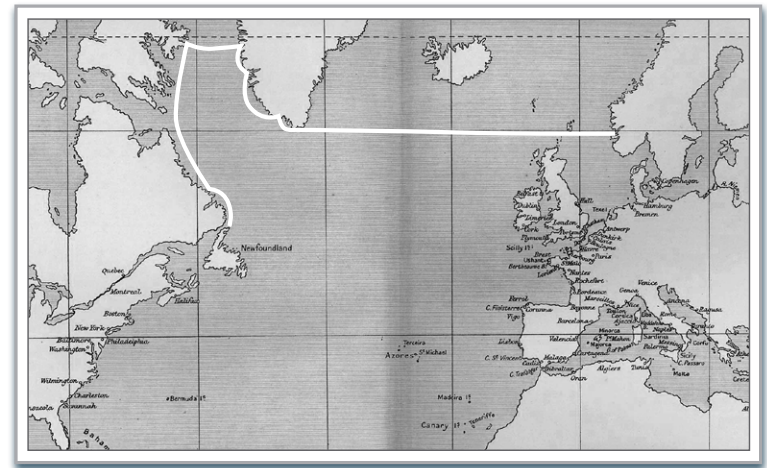
in the naming of two settlements, *Markland* and *Vinland*, that were (or were attempted to be) created in the 1930s (Handcock 1970),¹⁹ and the same holds for the naming of the paper boats *Markland* and *Vinland* from the Markland Shipping fleet²⁰ which have been calling regularly at Corner Brook on Newfoundland's westcoast to pick up their cargo for delivery along the American eastcoast in the 1940s and 1950s. Today, we find, among other examples, *Vinland Material Inc.*, a bulk raw material supply company in Corner Brook, the annual *Vinland Music Camp*²¹ in Lomond, Gros Morne National Park, and the *Skandi Vinland*, a supply vessel of the Norwegian DOF Group in Canada that operates between St. John's and the White Rose oilfield in the Grand Banks. In the Labrador Sea, on the Norse sailing route from Greenland to America, there is a fracture zone named after Snorri, the first child who, according to *Grœnlendinga saga*, was born in Vinland and thus "the first Vinlander" (Sigurdsson, 2008: x). It is worth noting that, while the respective literature often refers to the first child born in Vinland, it is rarely mentioned that, by all means, Snorri was also the last child born into a medieval Norse culture in North America. This is another manifestation of the widespread perception that Vinland, rather than having ceased to exist long ago, is a contemporary place to be rediscovered and re-explored time and again.

19 See the story from Markland in the *Vinland Spots & Stories*.

20 The Markland Shipping Company was based in Liverpool and became the Bowater Shipping Company in 1959.

21 The *Vinland Music Camp* is a week-long workshop dedicated to teaching and preserving traditional music, storytelling and dances of Newfoundland and Labrador and was started by guitarist, composer and publisher Eric West in 2000. Eric is also the director of Newfoundland's first music publishing company, *Vinland Music*, founded in 1989.

These observations lead us back to the quote at the outset. They suggest that, together with the more general fascination surrounding the Vinland myth, and regardless of new 'discoveries,' *The Vinland Phenomenon* will live on.



Norse transatlantic sailing route

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