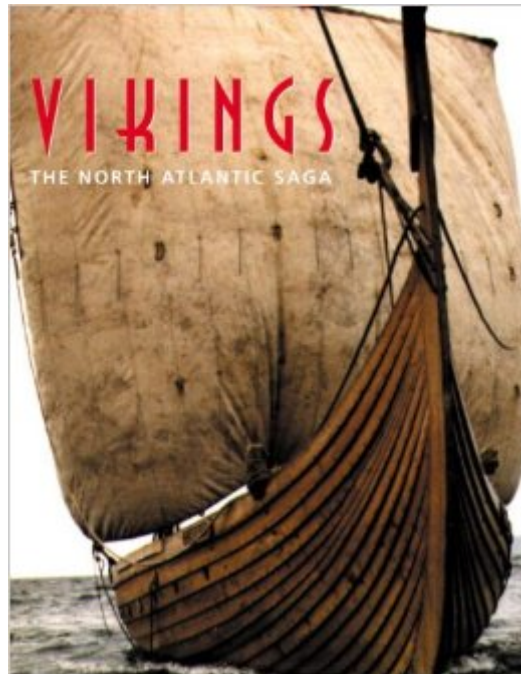


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Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga



Synopsis

Replete with color photographs, drawings, and maps of Viking sites, artifacts, and landscapes, this book celebrates and explores the Viking saga from the combined perspectives of history, archaeology, oral tradition, literature, and natural science. The book's contributors chart the spread of marauders and traders in Europe as well as the expansion of farmers and explorers throughout the North Atlantic and into the New World. They show that Norse contacts with Native American groups were more extensive than has previously been believed, but that the outnumbered Europeans never established more than temporary settlements in North America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga" is a book which should be on the shelves of any ordinary person who is seriously interested in the subject. Having said that I should warn potential buyers that the book is written by a number of authors of differing views. Readers should not just pick bits and pieces out of it but carefully read the whole. As would be expected, the book leans to the view of conservative scholarship, that the only proved contact between Vikings and North America is that of L'Anse aux Meadows, but some contributors seem to feel this means they must deny the possibility of any other contact and in my opinion they go overboard. For example, a strong attack with all the old gossip is mounted on the authenticity of the Kensington Rune Stone but what is not riddled with errors has by and large already been refuted. Surely too it was not necessary to describe R.A. Hall jnr, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at Cornell, who for nearly thirty years has been one of the strongest supporters of the authenticity of the Kensington Rune Stone, as an 'amateur'. Nor was it

reasonable to refer only to his 1982 book while omitting reference to his "The Kensington Rune-stone: Authentic and Important" published in 1994. In the attempt to protect received history, no mention was made of the probability that some of the survivors of the fourteen ships which went missing from Eric the Red's voyage of settlement to Greenland made it instead to North America and took residence amongst the natives. Similarly lacking is any mention that in the course of returning from his original voyage of discovery Lief Ericsson rescued Thorvald and his crew who had been wrecked in the waters between Vinland and Greenland.

This sumptuous and lavishly illustrated volume of 432 large pages, was published by the Smithsonian Institution in 2000 to coincide with the thousandth year, as close as we can reckon, of Leif Erikson's pioneering voyage to North America where he founded an outpost in "Vinland" that was used by subsequent expeditions until finally being abandoned after several skirmishes with the native inhabitants -- this according to the two pertinent surviving sagas. The book is an impressive compendium of scholarship by 40 writers in 32 different articles, naturally from often different viewpoints. It gets a five-star rating not because I don't have disagreements with certain conclusions of a number of articles, but because of the wealth of information it contains on Viking/Norse life and legacies for anyone seriously interested in the topic. It's divided into seven sections, titled Viking Homelands, Viking Raiders (in Europe), Vikings in the North Atlantic (including Iceland), Viking America, Norse Greenland, and Viking Legacy. (The term "Viking" is ill-used as applied to Iceland and the farther lands -- or for that matter in Europe after about 1100 -- but the label seems irresistible to publishers in titles, even to the Smithsonian. At least Greenland gets a proper "Norse" label.) Obviously it's not a work to be read cover to cover in one gulp. Since there are too many topics and regions covered in detail to look at closely in a review of any reasonable length, I'll focus briefly here on "Viking America," which presents eight major articles. Their topics range from Ellesmere Island in the High Arctic where Norse artifacts have been found, to, of course, Vinland in the far south (just how far south a matter of complex disputes often passionately held).

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