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Vínland Revisited*

A Time for Celebration?

A good many people have persuaded themselves that the summer of 2000 is the right time for celebrating the thousandth anniversary of the Norse or Viking discovery of the American continent. This widely held belief deserves to be examined critically, even though it rests on shaky foundations. The Vínland voyages were important events, and no serious scholar who has studied all the relevant records is likely to question the fact that early in the eleventh century sea-faring traders sailed from Greenland to various parts of the eastern seaboard of North America. But the date 1000 A.D. is an arbitrary one, and to call these merchants 'Norse' or 'Viking' is very misleading indeed.

In the Norse language the term *vikingr* denoted 'a robber, pirate', and even in English the loanword *viking* has strong connotations with piracy and other atrocities perpetrated by armed Scandinavian bands in the British Isles and elsewhere in Europe during the Viking Age, from the end of the eighth century to the second half of the eleventh. But the traders who sailed to Vínland were peaceful people; indeed, merchants, irrespective of their nationality, were often the victims of viking attacks.

The use of the ethnic term *Norse* in connection with the discovery of America suggests that Norwegians, Shetlanders, Orcadians and other Norse-speaking peoples were involved in the venture, but the fact remains that most of the leaders of the Vínland expeditions belonged to the Eastern Settlement in Greenland, with a tiny population, far away from other Norse-speaking countries. Since Greenland was settled mainly by people from Breiðafjörður, that part of Iceland and its inhabitants in the tenth-eleventh centuries are particularly

relevant to the Vínland question. The first European who is said to have sailed to a country near Vínland (Ari Mátsson) belonged to Breiðafjörður, and so did the first Icelandic to write about Vínland (Ari Thorgilsson the Learned), as well as his two principal informants (Thorkel Gellisson and Thurið Snorradóttir). Several of the original settlers of Breiðafjörður came from Ireland or the Hebrides,¹ so it is not surprising that the principal navigators to Vínland were ethnically of mixed origin, partly Norse and partly Celtic. In fact, these voyagers had a common ancestor, an Irishman named *Kjarval* (Ir. Cerball), as will be discussed later.

The voyagers to Vínland put out from Eiríksfjörður in the Eastern Settlement, where Eirík the Red lived at Brattahlíð with his wife Thjóðhild (who came of Irish stock). Of the six most prominent leaders of expeditions to Vínland mentioned in the sagas, four were his children: Leif, Thorstein, Thorvald, and Freydis (who was not Thjóðhild's child); the fifth was his daughter-in-law Guðríð,² and the sixth her second husband Thorfinn Karlsefni.³ I can see no reason or justification for transferring the credit for the Vínland achievement from this narrow circle of known sea-farers to anonymous hordes of Norsemen or Vikings who had probably never heard of Vínland. We have no documentary evidence suggesting that the discovery of Vínland made any impact on Norwegian writings in the Middle Ages; the thirteenth century authors of the *King's Mirror* and the *Historia Norvegiæ* make no mention of it.

Those who have chosen this year to commemorate the millennium of the discovery of America firmly believe that Leif Eiríksson 'the Lucky' reached that part of the world in the year 1000 and gave it then the quaint but memorable name *Vínland* (Wineland). This belief is based on implausible statements in the *Heimskringla* of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241) which claims that Leif spent the winter of 999-1000 at the court of King Ólaf Tryggvason in Trondheim, who entrusted him with the task of converting the still pagan Greenlanders to Christianity. On his west-bound voyage in the following summer Leif is said to have found Vínland the Good. *Eirík's Saga* tells a similar story (see p. 19-20 below), but without

giving a date.

It is not known for certain where Snorri got this dubious piece of information, but it is commonly assumed that his source must have been the now lost Latin *Life of Ólaf Tryggvason* by the monk Gunnlaug Leifsson (d. 1219), who is regarded as an untrustworthy historian. Earlier authorities, including Ari Thorgilsson the Learned (1068-1148) and the monk Odd Snorrason (c. 1190),⁴ do not give King Ólaf the credit for the conversion of the Greenlanders to Christianity. Moreover, the *Historia Norvegiæ*, which was written in Norway early in the thirteenth century, asserts that the Icelanders brought the Christian faith to Greenland.⁵

If Leif did not go there as a missionary at the behest of King Ólaf, there is nothing to link the discovery of Vínland with the year 1000. In *Grænlendinga Saga*, it should be noted, Leif's role in the discovery of Vínland is quite different: he is presented as a true explorer who put out to sea from Greenland in search of three unidentified lands which Bjarni Herjólfsson had sighted farther south, and in the course of this voyage of exploration Leif is said to have found Vínland. The two saga accounts of Leif's voyages to Vínland are incompatible with one another: if he himself stumbled on the new land by accident, there was no need for him to follow directions from Bjarni Herjólfsson, who did not even bother to go ashore to explore the lands he sighted.

The Vínland experience which is described in *Eirík's Saga* and *Grænlendinga Saga* appears to have occurred early in the eleventh century. The precise chronology of those events is a matter for speculation, but in the most authoritative interpretation of the sagas to date, the Icelandic scholar Ólafur Halldórsson has cogently argued that Karlsefni, the leader of the most important Vínland expedition, and his wife Guðríð were born c. 995, and that the Vínland voyages took place in the years 1015-1030.⁶ Such a dating would invalidate the claim in *Heimskringla* that Leif Eiríksson reached America in the year 1000.

The Historical Background

The Vínland problem should be seen in its proper historical context, and in order to make sense of it we must go back to the beginning of Icelandic society. Iceland was discovered by Irish sailors not later than the eighth century and served as a place of refuge for Irish anchorites until the second half of the ninth century. It was colonised in the period c. 870–930, mostly by Norwegians, but an appreciable number of settlers came from Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland. This dual origin is reflected in Icelandic culture which is predominantly Norse but comprises certain Celtic features, including Irish loanwords and personal names. The early Icelandic world of imagination, as it is manifested in the sagas and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, shows some remarkable Irish features.

With the establishment of the Althing in 930 the Icelanders became the youngest nation in Europe, and from that date until 1262, when Iceland lost its independence to Norway, they practised a form of 'rural democracy' which had no parallel elsewhere.⁷ Icelandic farmers enjoyed more freedom than their counterparts in other countries, and one of the striking features of early Icelandic society was the common practice for the sons of prosperous farmers to engage in overseas trade for several years before settling down on their ancestral farms. This meant that numerous Icelanders had personal experience of foreign cultures; as a result the nation was intellectually much less isolated than is often assumed. The explorers of Vínland were young sea-farers searching for better living conditions than Greenland or Iceland could offer.

Notwithstanding the Christian settlers from Ireland and the Hebrides, the Icelandic society which came into being in 930 was organised on strictly pagan principles; every farmer was obliged by law to support the upkeep of a local temple, at which Óðin, Thór, Frey and other Norse deities were worshipped. According to *Landnámabók* ('Book of Settlements'), only a single family remained Christian throughout the pagan era; these people were descended from a Hebridean settler. However, Christianity was by no means forgotten by other descendants of 'Western' settlers during the

pagan period. The fact that several Christian terms in early Icelandic were loanwords from Irish strongly suggests an unbroken continuity from the time of the settlements.⁸ The evidence of Icelandic narrative in the Middle Ages shows without a doubt that Irish motifs must also have survived in oral transmission until the age of writing was fully established early in twelfth century; subsequently they were absorbed into the written sagas.⁹

One of the most memorable scenes in *Eirík's Saga* (Ch. 11) occurs when Karlsefni and his men were fleeing before the Skrælings, and Freydís who was pregnant at the time had to face the hostile crowd on her own. One of the Icelanders had been killed by the natives, and his sword lay there beside him. Freydis

snatched up the sword and prepared to defend herself. When the Skrælings came at her she pulled one of her breasts out of her bodice and slapped it with the sword. This frightened the Skrælings and they fled back to their boats and paddled away.

This has been compared to a famous incident in the Irish epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.¹⁰ When Cúchulainn is seen approaching Emain Macha, Conchobor orders naked women to confront him,

and they stripped their breasts at him. 'These are the warriors you must struggle with today,' Mugain said. He hid his countenance. Immediately the warriors of Emain seized him and plunged him in a vat of cold water. [...].¹¹

The golden age of paganism in Iceland lasted only for half a century. In 981 a German missionary named Fridrek began a systematic effort to convert the Icelanders to Christianity. As he did not know the Norse language he brought with him an Icelandic interpreter called Thorvald *inn víðförli* ('the Far-Traveller') whom he had baptised earlier. After four years of proselytising they left Iceland in 985, and never came back. Twelve years later, another German missionary, Thangbrand, came to Iceland at the instigation of King Ólaf Tryggvason; he

spent a couple of years there. In the year 1000 (or, as some scholars now argue, 999) the Althing adopted the Christian faith by law, which is probably one of the reasons why it is claimed that Leif Eiríksson (who is alleged in *Grænlandinga saga* to have had a German foster-father, Tyrkir) converted the Greenlanders in that particular year.

In 982, the year after Bishop Fridrek came to Iceland, Eirík the Red, a farmer in Breiðafjörður who had been sentenced to outlawry for certain killings, put out to sea in search of 'the land which Gunnbjörn, son of Úlf Crow, had sighted when he drifted west beyond Iceland, at the time when he discovered the Gunnbjarnarsker.'¹²

Eirík sailed south along the inhospitable east coast of Greenland, and then spent the next three years exploring the much friendlier regions on the south-west coast. He returned to Iceland, and in the summer of 985 or 986 set out again to colonise the new land. The discovery, exploration, and settlement of Greenland coincided roughly speaking with Bishop Fridrek's missionary work in Iceland, and it should be noted that the Christian faith is one of the sub-themes of the Vinland sagas taken as a whole. It is easy enough to understand why a keen story-teller might be tempted to enhance an explorer's reputation by making him a successful missionary, and associating him with the millennium as well.

In his *Íslendingabók* Ari the Learned states that twenty-five ships put out for Greenland from Breiðafjörður and Borgarfjörður, but only fourteen completed the voyage; some were driven back, and others lost at sea. Most of the people who reached Greenland made their homes in the so-called *Eystribýggð* ('Eastern Settlement') in the Julianehaab region, but a smaller number chose to live in *Vestribýggð* ('Western Settlement') some distance away to the north-west. Apparently, all the settlers of Greenland were pagan, and paganism seems to have survived there into the eleventh century, but most of the explorers of Vinland were Christians.

Eirík's Saga

The principal sources about early visits to Vinland are two Icelandic sagas: *Eirík's Saga* and *Grænlandinga Saga*. The following notes are intended as a rough guide to them.

Eirík's Saga is to be found in two vellum manuscripts: *Hauksbók*, which was written in 1306–1308, partly by its original owner Hauk Erlendsson (d. 1334) and partly by his two scribes; and *Skálholtsbók*, which was apparently written c. 1420; in spite of its late date, it is supposed to come closer to the archetype than *Hauksbók*. Both versions go back to a common original which was probably composed early in the thirteenth century. The saga consists of six independent episodes preceding an extended account of Karlsefni's exploration of Vinland. At the core of the narrative is his wife Guðríð who figures briefly in some of the preliminary chapters and acts out a meaningful role in the episodes of her two husbands.

I. *Auð the Deep-Minded*. The opening section deals with the principal settler of the Breiðafjörður region, the Christian matriarchal Auð; she was married to a Norwegian war leader who conquered Dublin. After his death in battle in Ireland, she and their son Thorstein went to the Hebrides where he married Thuríð, the daughter of an Irish woman named Rafarta Kjarvalsdóttir. Thorstein became a warrior king, joined forces with Earl Sigurð the Mighty of Orkney, and they conquered a large part of the Scottish mainland. After Thorstein's death in battle, Auð sailed with her grandchildren from Caithness to Iceland where she took possession of the Dalir district in the Breiðafjörður region and made her home at Hvammur, where her descendants lived afterwards, including her great-grandson Thórð Gellir (d. 965), who was a prominent figure in his time; his sons were partly responsible for Eirík the Red's expulsion in 982.¹³ There can be little doubt that Auð's story was first written by her descendant Ari the Learned;¹⁴ in due course it was incorporated into *Landnámabók*. This initial section gives the historical background of the Vinland voyages and puts them in a firm geographical context: *Ireland, the Hebrides, Scotland,*

Breiðafjörður, Greenland, Vínland. One of the members of Auð's retinue was called Vífil, who 'was of noble descent. He had been taken prisoner in the British Isles and was a slave until Auð gave him his freedom.' This Vífil is said to have been the grandfather of Guðríð, the first European mother to give birth on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

II. *Eirík's Story.* The next section describes the discovery, exploration and settlement of Greenland by Eirík the Red. He and his father left their home in Jæren, in Norway, because of some killings, and emigrated to Hornstrandir in Iceland. After his father's death, Eirík moved south to Breiðafjörður, and there he got involved in some killings for which he was sentenced to outlawry, as was mentioned earlier. Like the piece about Auð, Eirík's story was undoubtedly first written by Ari the Learned; chapter six of his *Íslendingabók* appears to be a short resumé of it; a much fuller version survives in *Landnámabók*. The relevance of this tale to Vínland is very obvious indeed; its discovery and exploration were regarded as a sequel to the Greenland story. Moreover, Eirík the Red's children were prominently involved in the Vínland venture, as was already stated.

III. *Thorbjörn Vífilsson.* He was the son of the Vífil mentioned above, a farmer in the Breiðafjörður region, and a supporter of Eirík the Red. A magnanimous man of great personal pride, Thorbjörn was hard up, and when a successful trader who was the son of a freedman asked for his daughter Guðríð's hand in marriage he resented the proposal and decided to emigrate with his family to Greenland.

IV. *The sibyl.* There was severe famine in Greenland when they arrived, and the farmer with whom they spent the first winter hired a sibyl to perform a pagan ritual to find out how long the present hardships would last. Her outfit and conduct are described in detail with a true antiquarian passion. Guðríð assisted the sibyl by singing an old pagan song during the ritual, and afterwards the old witch rewarded her by foretelling her future: she would marry a fine husband in Greenland but eventually go back to her native Iceland, and have a glorious progeny. Oddly enough, the sibyl had nothing to say about Guðríð's adventures in Vínland.

V. *Leif the Lucky*. The first part of this section is a love story. Leif put out from Greenland for Norway, but was blown off course to the Hebrides and fell in love with a woman named Thórgunna; she was of noble birth and skilled in witchcraft. She told him she was pregnant by him and wanted to go away with him, but Leif refused and went to Norway without her.¹⁵ He joined the court of King Ólaf Tryggvason, who asked him to preach Christianity in Greenland, which Leif agreed to do. The most celebrated part of his story runs thus:

Leif put out to sea; he had a long and difficult voyage, and finally came upon lands where he had not expected any to be found. There were fields of self-sown wheat there, and vines growing; there were also trees known as maples. They took some samples of all these things. Some of the trees were so large that they could be used for house-building.

Leif also came across some shipwrecked seamen and brought them home with him; he looked after them with all hospitality throughout the winter. In this as in other things he showed his great magnanimity and goodness; he brought Christianity to the country and he rescued the men. From then on he was known as Leif Heppni ('the Lucky').

Although Leif's mother Thjóðhild and many others in Greenland are said to have embraced Christianity, his father Eirík the Red refused to abandon the old religion. After this, Leif plays only a very minor role in *Eirík's Saga*.

VI. *Thorstein Eiríksson*. Leif's brother Thorstein decided to lead an expedition to the new land, and made ready the ship which Thorbjörn Vífilsson had brought from Iceland. They put to sea in high spirits, but had a long and difficult voyage and never reached their destination. They got back to Eiríksfjörður at the beginning of winter, worn out and exhausted. That same autumn, Thorstein married Guðríð, but they were not fated to enjoy marital bliss for long. They moved to his farm in the Western Settlement, and early in the winter a disease broke out there; several people died of it, including Thorstein

himself.

VII. *Karlsefni's Story*. In the *Hauksbók* version the genealogy of Karlsefni is traced back to King Kjarval of Ireland, the legendary Norse hero Ragnar Hairy-Breeks, and Thórð Gellir, who was mentioned earlier. Karlsefni was a sea-going trader and sailed to Greenland one summer,¹⁶ where he fell in love with Guðríð; they were married at Christmas, and put out for Vínland the following summer. They were joined by several named people from Iceland and Greenland, including Eirík the Red's illegitimate daughter Freydís, his son Thorvald, and Thórhall the Hunter, a pagan troublemaker and a member of Eirík's household.

Karlsefni's expedition in search of Vínland is described in some detail. First he sailed to the Western Settlement, then to Bjarney (= Disko Island?), Helluland and Markland. South of Furðustrandir¹⁷ they came across grapes and wild wheat. Still farther south, they reached a place they named Straumfjörður and spent a severe winter there. When they ran out of food Thórhall the Hunter used a Sami kind of witchcraft in order to attract a whale; the meat of it proved poisonous. Later he decided to sail north in search of Vínland, but 'they ran into fierce headwinds and were driven right across to Ireland. There they were brutally beaten and enslaved; and there Thórhall died.' Thus, ironically, the disillusioned explorer who put his trust in Irish tales of alcoholic beverages in the Western World ended his life as a miserable slave in the land of the inventive story-tellers.

Karlsefni, on the other hand, wanted to sail farther south 'for he believed that the country would improve the farther south they went.' He sailed south and 'found wild wheat growing in fields on all the low ground and grape vines on all the higher ground.' Soon they started to trade with the natives; then trouble started and fighting broke out. They had brought with them livestock in the hope of settling in Vínland, but lost faith in the project:

Karlsefni and his men realised by now that although the land was excellent they could never live in safety or freedom from fear, because of the native inhabitants. So

they made ready to leave the place and return home.

After searching in vain for Thórhall the Hunter by sailing north some distance, they encountered the mysterious Unipeds,¹⁸ one of whom shot Thorvald Eiríksson fatally with an arrow. Karlsefni and his men captured two native boys, 'taught them the language, and baptised them.' That was Karlsefni's final achievement before leaving the American continent for good and setting sail for Greenland. Two years later he sailed back to his home in Skagafjörður in Iceland and started farming there, just as was the custom of young men when they retired from sea-faring. The story ends with the statement that three of his descendants in the twelfth century were bishops.

Grænlendinga Saga

This is preserved in a single manuscript, the so-called *Flateyjarbók*, a huge codex written by two priests c. 1387 at Víðidalstunga in the north of Iceland. This version of *Grænlendinga Saga* is a copy of a lost manuscript. In its present form, the saga consists of seven sections about voyages, which are told in their proper chronological order.

I. *Eirík the Red*. The opening chapter is similar to the second part of *Eirík's Saga* and presents three major voyages, the first one by Eirík and his father from Norway to Iceland; the second and third ones were from Iceland to Greenland, a voyage of exploration being followed by another of colonisation.

II. *Bjarni Herjólfsson*. He was the son of one of the settlers who went with Eirík the Red to Greenland. Bjarni belonged to the south coast of Iceland, far away from Breiðafjörður, and there is no suggestion that he came of Irish stock. Bjarni put out from Iceland for Greenland but ran into serious troubles at sea. He sighted three unknown lands on his voyage but did not bother to go ashore until he reached Greenland.

III. *Leif the Lucky*. He bought the ship from Bjarni, hired a crew of thirty-five and put out to sea in search of the lands

Bjarni had sighted: his voyage is reminiscent of the account of Karlsefni's search for Vínland in *Eirík's Saga*. In the most southerly land Leif built some large houses, which were called *Leifsbúðir* and became a focal point for later explorers in *Grænlandinga Saga*; this was not far away from the spot where Leif's German foster-father found vine and grapes. On his way back home to Greenland, Leif rescued a ship's crew from a reef; their captain was a Norwegian named Thórir; his wife Guðríð¹⁹ was with him. That winter a serious disease broke out; Thórir and many of his men died of it.

IV. *Thorvald Eiríksson*. Thinking that Vínland had not been properly explored, Leif's brother Thorvald borrowed his ship, hired a crew of thirty and sailed to Leifsbúðir where they settled for the winter, 'and caught fish for their food.' Later Thorvald and his men were attacked by Skrælings,²⁰ and in the skirmish he was fatally wounded; his companions buried him at a place which he had admired for its beauty. His crew sailed back to Greenland.

V. *Thorstein Eiríksson*. While Thorvald was spending the last part of his life in Vínland, his brother Thorstein married Guðríð, the widow of the Norwegian skipper. When Thorstein heard the news of his brother's death he decided to go to Vínland and fetch his body. Using the same ship, he had a crew of twenty-five; his wife Guðríð went with him on the voyage. They put to sea and 'throughout the summer they were at the mercy of the weather and never knew where they were going.' Eventually, after the first week of winter, they made land at Lýsufjörður in the Western Settlement, where he and his wife found lodgings for themselves. Soon afterwards he fell ill and died. His widow Guðríð went to stay with her brother-in-law Leif the Lucky in the Eastern Settlement.

VI. *Thorfinn Karlsefni*. He came to Greenland, spent a winter with Leif the Lucky, fell in love with Guðríð, married her, and put out for Vínland, taking with him a crew of sixty men, his wife and five other women besides.

He made an agreement with his crew that everyone should share equally in whatever profits the expedition might yield. They took with them livestock of all kinds, for they

intended to settle in the country if possible.

When they arrived at Leifsbúðir, they put the livestock out to grass. Karlsefni ordered timber to be felled, and 'they made use of everything nature provided there, grapes and fish and game of all kinds and other good things.' The following summer they had their first brush with the Skrælings, who were frightened by the bull Karlsefni had brought with him, but then they started bartering; the Skrælings offered furs and sables and got dairy produce instead. About this time Guðríð gave birth to her first-born son. Early the following winter the Skrælings made a hostile attack, but lost many of their men and then fled away. In the spring Karlsefni announced his decision to return to Greenland. From there he sailed first to Norway and then back to Iceland.

VII. *Freydís Eiríksdóttir*. She persuaded two Icelandic traders to join her and her husband on another expedition to Vinland. They did not get on well together there, and for some obscure reason Freydís decided to slaughter all the members of the Icelandic party, including five women whom she killed in cold blood with an axe.

Like *Eirík's saga*, *Grænlandinga saga* includes a brief reference to Karlsefni's famous descendants, but it includes extra details about Guðríð. After Karlsefni's death she went abroad on a pilgrimage to Rome. Their son Snorri had a church built at Glaumbær. 'After that Guðríð became a nun and stayed there as an anchoress for the rest of her life.'

The Genesis of the Vinland Sagas

Grænlandinga Saga concludes with the following paragraph: 'It was Karlsefni who told more fully than anyone else the story of all these voyages, some of which has been written here.'

This is the most important statement we have in early manuscripts about the creation of the Vinland Sagas. In the first place, it is clear that the writer must have been aware of several narrators of the events involved. Second, he knew that

Karlsefni's account was fuller than the rest. Third, the expression 'some of which' shows unmistakably that *Grænlandinga saga* does not pretend to be a complete record of the voyages. Fourth, it would be a mistake to identify *Grænlandinga saga* in its entirety with Karlsefni's oral version, as he is credited only with matters relating to the voyages.

The preliminary chapters on Auð the Deep-Minded (in *Eirík's Saga*) and Eirík the Red were borrowed from written sources, but the origin of the material in the rest of the *Vínland Sagas* is more problematic. Broadly speaking the two sagas are concerned with the same people and the same events, yet they disagree sharply on various fundamental issues, such as the identity of the sailor who discovered *Vínland*. However, they also include details which are remarkably similar in both, such as (1) the account of Eirík the Red being thrown off his horse as he rode down to the sea to lead an expedition to *Vínland*; (2) the eerie description of Thorstein Eiríksson's death; (3) the death of Thorvald Eiríksson; and (4) various details concerning Karlsefni and Guðríð: their marriage in Greenland, the birth of their son Snorri, and the behaviour of their livestock in the Western World.

Considering the substantial differences between *Eirík's Saga* and *Grænlandinga Saga*, it would be imprudent to attribute these common features to oral tradition. As numerous short pieces about people and past events were written in twelfth century Iceland and later absorbed into written sagas,²¹ it is tempting to assume that the author of *Grænlandinga saga* may be alluding to a terse written account of the *Vínland* voyages which dated from c. 1121. Like other commentators, I assume that memories of these voyages were transmitted from Karlsefni and his wife Guðríð to their offspring and, also, that the scribe involved may have been one of their descendants.

It is not unlikely that Karlsefni's account was first committed to vellum by his great-grandson Thorlák Runólfsson (1085-1133); Thorlák may well have known his grandfather, Snorri Karlsefnisson, who had been born in *Vínland* c. 1020. Like Ari the Learned, who was sixteen years his senior,

Thorlák was educated at Haukadalur by Teit Ísleifsson (d. 1110), who must have aroused his interest in history. Snorri Sturluson says about Teit that he 'taught Ari the Priest and told him many things about history, which Ari later committed to vellum.' In 1118 Thorlák became bishop of Skálholt, and died there in 1133. It is relevant to mention that Ari dedicated his *Íslendingabók* to Bishop Thorlák and his colleague Ketil of Hólar. And in an appendix to that book, Ari traces Thorlák's pedigree from Auð the Deep-Minded, through Thórð Gellir and Karlsefni. The hypothetical written account of the Vínland voyages may have served as the basis for the two sagas, but their authors knew divergent oral versions of these events, which explains why *Eirík's Saga* is so radically different from *Grænlandinga Saga*.

There is a particular reason why c. 1121 is a likely date for a written account of the Vínland voyages. *The Icelandic Annals* mention briefly that Bishop Eirík Gnúpsson of Greenland put out in search of Vínland in the year 1121. Although we know very little about Bishop Eirík,²² it seems unlikely that he would have set out in search of Vínland without trying first to gather relevant knowledge about previous voyages to the dimly remembered land. Undoubtedly, the bishop would seek information from Greenlanders, particularly the descendants of Leif the Lucky. But as Karlsefni was the principal explorer of Vínland, Bishop Eirík is likely to have tried to find out relevant facts from Karlsefni's descendants. His most likely contact in Iceland would be Bishop Thorlák. Did Thorlák write a brief description of the Vínland voyages for his fellow bishop Eirík Gnúpsson?

Other relevant things were taking place in 1121 or thereabout. It was the year when Ari the Learned completed his *Íslendingabók*, the first Icelandic work to mention Vínland. And many years ago the Norwegian historian Gustav Storm demonstrated that the first geographical piece in the vernacular, *Fylkjatal Noregs*, a list of the provinces of Norway, was compiled in 1120;²³ the author was Ari Einarsson of Reykhólar, a cousin of Ari the Learned, who included *Fylkjatal Noregs* in his first, and now lost, version of

Íslendingabók. Since that version included a section on the lives of the kings of Norway (*konunga ævi*), the learned author must have thought it relevant to include a piece on the geography of that country. Ari Einarsson was a retainer of King Eysteinn Magnússon (1103-23).

The Reyknesings

According to *Landnámabók* two of the original settlers of Iceland married cousins named Björg and Thorgerð, who were said to be the grand-daughters of King Kjarval of Ireland.²⁴ Although such claims of royal ancestry should not be taken too seriously, there is no reason to doubt that these women were of Irish extraction. Thorgerð and her husband made their home in Skagafjörður in the north of Iceland, and Karlsefni was their great-grandson. On his grandmother's side Karlsefni could also trace his ancestry back to Kjarval through a different line, including a woman named Álfðís who came from Barra in the Western Isles of Scotland.

Björg and her husband settled in Breiðafjörður and became the progenitors of the *Reyknesings*, one of the most distinguished families in medieval Iceland. From the tenth century onwards various members of the family were sea-going traders; one of them, Ari Mátsson, is associated with Vínland late in the tenth century. The family seat at Reykhólar was a major intellectual centre in the twelfth century. But the greatest seat of learning in Breiðafjörður was Helgafell, the birthplace of Ari the Learned and his uncle and informant, Thorkel Gellisson. Later, in 1184, an Augustinian House was established there.²⁵ The most famous member of the family was Ari Thorgilsson the Learned, the first Icclander to write about historical matters in the vernacular. His cousins were Ari Einarsson (see above) and Ingimund Einarsson of Reykhólar (d. 1169), who seems to have been the first Icclander to compose a saga and then read it aloud to entertain an audience, instead of reciting it from memory as was the traditional custom.

Björg was the great-grandmother of Ari Mátsson and great-

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aunt of Leif the Lucky. The following pedigree shows the common ancestry of the old explorers, and their relationship to Ari the Learned:²⁶

Kjarval			
Rafarta			Friðgerð
Björg	Jörund	Thurið	Thorgerð
Atli	Thjóðhild		Thórð
Már	<i>Leif the Lucky</i>		<i>Karlsefni</i>
<i>Ari</i>			Snorri
Thorgils			Hallfríð
Valgerð			Bishop Thorlák
			(1085-1133)
Thorgils Thorkel (informant)			
<i>Ari</i> (1068-1148)			

Björg's sister Thurið was the grandmother of Thórð Gellir (d. 965), whom I mentioned earlier. From him were descended both Karlsefni and Ari the Learned who wrote the now lost *Thórð Gellir's Saga*.

The Land of the White Men

According to *Kristni Saga*, Ari Másson of Reykhólar was one of the leading chieftains of Iceland in 981, the year when Bishop Fridrek began his missionary work there. His father Már married a woman named Thorkatla;²⁷ *Landnámabók* includes this unique account of their son:

Their son was Ari who drifted to White Men's Land (*Hvítramannaland*), which some people call Greater Ireland (*Írland it mikla*). It lies in the ocean to westward, near Vínland the Good, said to be a six-day sail west from Ireland. Ari could not get away, and was baptised there. This story was first told by Hrafn Limerick-Farer who spent a long time at Limerick in Ireland. Thorkel Gellisson quoted some Icelanders who had heard Earl Thorfinn of

Orkney say that Ari had been recognised in White Men's Land, and could not get away from there, but was very highly thought of.

This brief account appears to be a summary of a much fuller narrative, originally composed by Ari Thorgilsson the Learned, who was Ari Mátsson's direct descendant and bore his name. The informant, Thorkel Gellisson, was Ari Thorgilsson's paternal uncle and Ari Mátsson's great-grandson; it is tempting to assume that Thorkel learnt the story from his mother Valgerð, Ari Mátsson's granddaughter. Ari the Learned was keen to preserve from oblivion all kinds of facts about his forebears.²⁸ Elsewhere his uncle Thorkel provided him with relevant information about Greenland; it was from Thorkel that Ari learnt that Eirík the Red went to colonise Greenland in 985 or 986, and in all probability Thorkel was the source of the following piece in Ari's *Íslendingabók* about Eirík the Red and his men:

They found there human habitations, both in the Eastern and Western parts of the country, and fragments of skin-boats and stone implements; from which it can be concluded that the people who had been there before were of the same kind as those who inhabit *Vínland* and whom the Greenlanders call *Skrælings*.

This is the earliest reference to *Vínland* in Icelandic records (c. 1121),²⁹ and it is reasonable to assume that Ari the Learned's interest in this distant land may have stemmed from the fact that his ancestor Ari Mátsson was associated with it.

Reverting to the tale of Ari Mátsson, it is interesting to see that Thorkel Gellisson got his information about him from some Icelanders who in turn had learned it from Earl Thorfinn of Orkney (d. 1064). In this connection it is worth bearing in mind that the earl's favourite court poet, Arnór Þórðarson, wrote a memorial lay on Gellir Thorkelsson (d. 1173), who was Thorkel's father and Ari the Learned's grandfather. Although most commentators have chosen to ignore the relevance of Ari Mátsson to the *Vínland* enigma, the brief

anecdote about him appears to be based on a more solid tradition than many incidents in the *Vínland Sagas*.

Sea-going traders played a very important role in the transmission of oral information about current affairs and past events alike. There can be no doubt that Thorkel Gellisson who sailed to Greenland must have gone there as a merchant;³⁰ the same applies to the other informant, Hrafn the Limerick-Farer, and the nameless Icelanders in Orkney. Since Hrafn stayed in Ireland for a long while and was the first person to tell the story of Ari Másson's adventure in 'Greater Ireland', it is not unlikely that he may have known and told Irish voyage tales (*Immrama*) about sailors who drifted to distant islands west in the ocean.

The term *Hvítramannaland* has been compared to the legendary *Tír na bhFer bhFionn* in Irish romance; both have precisely the same meaning 'The Land of the White Men'.³¹ The alternative name 'Greater Ireland' and its location 'six days' sail west of Ireland' show clearly that we are dealing with an Irish tradition; the fact that one of the informants lived for a long time in Limerick serves to corroborate the same notion.

Many years ago it was suggested that the term *Hvítramannaland* was used ambivalently, relating both to an unknown land on the other side of the Atlantic and also to Ireland itself or Scotland, whose Gaelic name Alba was associated with Latin *albus* 'white'; there are several known instances of Icelanders and other people from the North being taken captive and enslaved in Ireland and Scotland.³²

Ari Másson's experience appears to echo certain descriptions in *The Voyage of St Brendan* and the Irish *Immrama*. *Eyrbyggja Saga*, one of the best sagas from Breiðafjörður,³³ includes a fascinating tale about a local poet who was forced to leave the country because of an illicit love affair with a married lady; incidentally, the cuckold had been a trader in his younger years and had visited Dublin. It appears to have been about 999 A.D. that the poet left Iceland, and nothing was heard of him for the next thirty years. Shortly before 1030 a great sea-faring merchant called Guðleif who lived near Breiðafjörður, went on a trading

voyage to Dublin, and on his way back to Iceland he ran into easterly and then north-easterly gales, and they were driven far out to sea, first to the west, and then to the south-west. Eventually they caught sight of a strange land, where they went ashore and were attacked by a hostile crowd who spoke Irish; they were taken to an assembly, where some people wanted to enslave the Icelandic crew, and others wanted to put them to death. Then an old man who spoke Norse appeared on the scene; he was evidently a chieftain in authority; he intervened and secured their safe departure. He asked Guðleif where he came from, and then asked him about important people in Breiðafjörður; in particular he enquired closely after Thuríð of Fróðá (the poet's lady-love) and her son Kjartan (who was not her husband's son but the poet's).³⁴ When the old chieftain was asked who he was he refused to reveal his identity,³⁵ but from a cryptic remark he made about his former lady-love and her brother it was clear that he was the missing poet. Guðleif and his crew put out to sea again and reached Ireland late in the autumn. Like the account of Ari Másson, this tale may contain echoes of Irish stories about a legendary land west beyond the sea.

The Name Vínland

The story of how the country got its name derives from *Grænlendinga Saga*, which tells a humorous anecdote about a man named Tyrkir, Leif's German foster-father, who went missing in Vínland but happily came back:

Leif soon saw that his foster-father was in excellent humour. Tyrkir had a protruding forehead and shifty eyes, and an insignificant face; he was short and puny-looking but very skilled with his hands. Leif said to him, 'Why are you so late, foster-father? How did you get separated from the rest?'

At first Tyrkir spoke for a long time in German, rolling his eyes in all directions and pulling faces, and no one could understand what he was saying. After a while he spoke in

Norse: 'I didn't go much farther than the rest of you,' he said. 'I have news to tell you. I found vines and grapes.'

'Is that true, foster-father?' asked Leif.

'Of course it is true,' he replied. 'Where I was born there were plenty of vines and grapes.'

They slept for the rest of the night, and next morning Leif said to his crew, 'We have two tasks on our hands now. On alternate days we must gather grapes and cut vines, and fell trees, to make a cargo for my ship.'

This was agreed. It is said that the tow-boat was filled with grapes. Then they felled a load of timber for the ship.

When spring came they made ready to leave and sailed away. Leif named the country after its natural qualities and called it *Vínland* (= Wineland).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this episode is the presence of Tyrkir who happened to have been born where there were plenty of vines and grapes and knew what he was talking about. In the circumstances it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Tyrkir was invented by the saga author, who wanted to produce irrefutable evidence that Leif the Lucky had actually found a land of grapes. Or should we persuade ourselves that the pagan Eirík the Red was so prescient that he chose as a foster-father to his son a Christian from a wine-growing region in Germany who could therefore identify the vines and grapes which made his son so famous?

In his masterful and wide-ranging study *Nord i Tåkeheimen*,³⁶ the great Norwegian explorer and scientist Fridtjof Nansen interprets the *Vínland Sagas* in the light of ancient and medieval tales about the Fortunate Isles (*Insulæ Fortunatæ*) and other imaginary lands of happiness and beauty. His researches include pertinent references to *The Voyage of St Brendan*, and the Irish *echtraí* (Adventures) and *immrama* (Voyages). Of other scholars who have written on Irish elements in the sagas I would single out the folklorist Bo Almqvist.³⁷

Elsewhere I have argued that the name *Vínland* is much older than the Norse settlement of Iceland.³⁸ In spite of all the

vines and grapes which the explorers found in the land they discovered, the name Vinland belongs more properly to the poetic imagination of Irish legend than to actual geography. The story of Ari Másson suggests that the Icelanders must have been familiar with Irish tales about Atlantic voyages and 'wine-lands' or 'wine islands' which were supposed to lie somewhere far away in the ocean.³⁹ The grapes which Tyrkir found in *Grænlandinga Saga*, and the Scottish couple Haki and Hekja found in *Eirík's Saga*, served as evidence to prove that a 'wineland' from Irish legendary lore had at last been discovered.

When Thórhall the Hunter in *Eirík's saga* complains that no wine had passed his lips he may have had in mind incidents in Irish tales, such as those mentioned below. We can begin with St. Brendan who warned his companions not to drink the water from a certain spring; 'if anyone drinks it, he immediately falls asleep and remains in that condition for twenty-four hours';⁴⁰ this was the kind of potent stuff which poor old Thórhall must have been pining for.

Like Leif and other Greenlanders, St Brendan and his companions indulged themselves in eating grapes. The largely fictive tale of his celebrated voyage tells of a bird which

flew straight towards the boat, carrying in its beak a branch of some unfamiliar tree. On the end of this branch hung a large bunch of bright red grapes. The bird dropped the branch into Brendan's lap [...] Brendan shared the bunch out, grape by grape, and it lasted twelve days.⁴¹

In the *Voyage of Mael Dúin*, the sailors came upon an island where there grew trees with 'marvellous fruits on them, with great berries.' Mael Dúin

'squeezed part of them into a vessel and drank, and it sent him to sleep from that time until the same time the next day; and it was not known whether he was alive or dead, with the red foam round his lips, until he woke up the next day. He said to them, "Gather this fruit," he said, "for its worth is great." They gathered it then, and mixed water

with it to moderate its power to intoxicate and send to sleep. They gathered a great quantity of it then and pressed it, and filled a great many vessels with it; and they rowed away from that island.⁴²

The delightful tale *The Voyage of Bran* describes the joys of a distant land: 'Listening to sweet music /Drinking the best of wine.'⁴³ *The Voyage of the Uí Chorra* mentions a wonderful island,

and in it a great grove of marvellous beauty, laden with apples, golden coloured and sweet scented. A sparkling rivulet of wine (*sruth fine*) flowed through the midst of the grove [...] They ate some of the apples and drank from the rivulet of wine, and were immediately satisfied. And from that time forth they were never troubled by either wounds or sickness.⁴⁴

In Search of Vínland

In the Skálholtsbók text of *Eirík's Saga* the term Vínland occurs only three times, and in every case it is the object of the verb *leita* 'to search for'. The implication is obviously this: the location of the country which Leif had found was in doubt. The situation is different in *Grænlendinga Saga* in so far that Vínland is explicitly said to lie where Tyrkir found the grapes, and Leif built his Leifsbúðir. Many commentators have found it tempting to identify this with the site at L'Anse aux Meadows so successfully excavated and described by Helge and Anne-Stine Ingstad. However, the evidence of *Grænlendinga Saga* is inadequate for the purpose of determining precisely where Vínland was supposed to have been located.

Early Icelandic geographers saw the Vínland situation in a different light. They believed that the North Atlantic was a land-locked sea, as can be seen from the following statement:

To the north of Norway lies Finnmark; from there the land sweeps north east to Bjarmaland (Permia) which renders

tribute to Garðariki (Russia). From Bjarmaland there is uninhabited land stretching all the way to the north until Greenland begins. To the south of Greenland lie Helluland and Markland; and from there it is not far from Vínland which some people think extends from Africa.

England and Scotland are one island, but separate kingdoms; Ireland is a large island. Iceland is also a large island to the north of Ireland. These islands are all in the part of the world called Europe.⁴⁵

In another geographical treatise entitled *Gripla* it is stated that south of Greenland lie Furðustrandir where severe frosts render the region uninhabitable. 'Farther south is Helluland which is called Skrælingaland, from there is a short distance to Vínland [...].'

Here as elsewhere in early Icelandic geography, the Atlantic Ocean is made ludicrously small. The idea that Vínland marked the southern boundary of the ocean is apparently an Icelandic speculation, an attempt to find a place on the map for the elusive 'wineland' of Irish legend. The notion in *Landnámabók* that the 'Land of the White Men' lay close to Vínland reminds us of the Irish term *Tír na bhFear nGorm*, 'Land of the Blue Men', which denoted Morocco. Did Icelandic geographers have that particular country in mind when they suggested that 'Vínland extended from Africa?'

Notes

- * In this paper I am essentially concerned with two aspects of the Vínland voyages: first, their historical and cultural contexts and, second, the medieval sources describing them. I have deliberately eschewed several pertinent topics, including Helge and Anne-Stine Ingstad's remarkable archeological excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, and also the identification of various trans-Atlantic places mentioned in the Vínland Sagas. I wish to thank my friend Magnus Magnusson KBE for criticism and corrections of the first draft of this paper and permission to quote passages from *Eirík's saga* and *Grænlendinga Saga* in his recent anthology *The Icelandic Sagas* (The Folio Society 1999).

- 1 It is worth noting here that three islands in Breiðafjörður are called *Írland* 'Ireland', and the fourth one bears the name *Pjattland* 'Pictland' which is reminiscent of *Pjattasteinn* 'Boulder of the Picts' on the north side of the fjord. Before putting out on his voyage of exploration, Eirík the Red hid in a bay called *Dimunarvogur*; the first element of the name (*dímun*) is a borrowing from Irish. North of Breiðafjörður two Celtic saints are commemorated in the place names *Patreksfjörður* and *Trostansfjörður*.
- 2 She belonged to the Breiðafjörður region.
- 3 Although Thorfinn Karlsefni was born and bred in Skagafjörður in the north, his paternal grandmother and many other forebears of his belonged to Breiðafjörður.
- 4 The Latin original of Odd's *Life of Ólaf Tryggvason* is now lost, but two Icelandic translations of the thirteenth century are still extant. Odd is also credited with the authorship of *Yngvars saga víðförla*, which tells the story of a Swedish chieftain (d. 1041) who sailed east in search of the source of a great Russian river.
- 5 See Gustav Storm, *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middelalderen* (Kristiania 1880), p. 76.
- 6 Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum* (Reykjavík 1978), pp. 378–82.
- 7 For the term *rural democracy* I am indebted to W.H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds* (London 1968), p. 63, where he argues that this was 'the first and last time in civilized history' that a rural democracy was created: 'elsewhere, democracy has always been an urban phenomenon.'
- 8 For Irish loanwords in Icelandic, see Helgi Guðmundsson, *Um haf innan. Vestrænir menn og íslensk menning á miðöldum* (Reykjavík 1997), pp. 121–68.
- 9 Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland. Historical and literary Contacts. A survey of Research* (Reykjavík 1988).
- 10 Stefán Einarsson, 'The Freydis-incident in *Eiríks saga rauða*'. *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 13 (1938–39), pp. 246–56.
- 11 *The Táin*. Translated from the Irish Epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge* by Thomas Kinsella (Oxford 1970), pp. 91–92.
- 12 This name is supposed to refer to a group of rocky islands to the east or northeast of Angmagssalik on the east coast of Greenland. According to the tragic *Snæbjörn's Story*, which survives only in an abridged form in *Landnámabók*, a man called Snæbjörn put out to explore the Gunnbjarnarsker and spent a winter there late in the tenth century, and that is where he met his untimely death. Like other Icelandic explorers, he was of Irish descent.
- 13 It was at Hvammur that Snorri Sturluson was born in 1178 or 1179.

- 14 See my *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing* (Vienna 1999), pp. 45-47.
- 15 The story of Leif and Thórgunna is a variant of the widespread international tale of Sohrab and Rustem. See Bo Almqvist's article referred to in note 37 below.
- 16 Bearing in mind the family background of the two sea-faring traders, Leif and Karlsefni, I find it tempting to assume that the latter sailed to Greenland and Vínland at Leif's suggestion.
- 17 Literally 'Marvel Strands'. Like Vínland, the name *Furðustrandir* belongs to imaginary places in oral tales rather than to reality. It reminds us of the name *Tír na nIgnadh* 'Land of Marvels' in the Irish Tale *Ectra Airt meic Cuind*. *Ériu* III (1907), p. 156.
- 18 The notion of one-legged people is an interesting piece of medieval learning, ultimately going back to the seventh century scholar Isidore of Seville.
- 19 There is no indication here that Guðrīð was an Iclander.
- 20 The name applied to the native inhabitants of Greenland and Vínland. Eirik Valkendorf (1520) used the term about the Sami. See Nils M. Knutsen (ed.), *Mørkets og kuldens rike* (Tromsø 1994), p. 41.
- 21 See Jón Jóhannesson, *Gerðir Landnámabókar* (Reykjavík 1941), p. 176.
- 22 His place of birth and upbringing are unknown, but according to *Landnámabók* he was descended from Örlyg Hrappsson, one of the Hebridean settlers of Iceland; this Örlyg built a church at Esjuberg across the bay north of Reykjavík and dedicated it to St Columba.
- 23 Gustav Storm, 'En Levning af den ældste Bog i den norrøne Litteratur'. *Historisk Tidsskrift*. Fjerde Bind (Kristiania 1877), pp. 478-84.
- 24 He has been identified with King Cerball mac Dúnlaing of Osraige (d. 888). Various other Icelanders were supposed to be descended from him. See my *Keltar á Íslandi* (Reykjavík 1897), pp. 119-27.
- 25 For manuscripts written at Helgafell in the Middle Ages, see Ólafur Halldórsson, *Helgafellsbækur fornar* (Reykjavík 1966).
- 26 Both Karlsefni and Ari the Learned claimed descent from Rafarta through her daughter Thuríð; Karlsefni and Ari's grandfather Gellir were second cousins.
- 27 She is the eponymous heroine of the sixteenth century ballad *Kötludraumur*, which is a dream vision in which she was led to the Otherworld by a fairy woman whose son loved Katla without ever having met her. This kind of love is a well-known motif in Old Irish; it was called *serc écmaise* 'the love of one who is absent'. Much against her will, Katla slept with the love-sick stranger, and that is how Ari Másson was conceived. This is another recurrent motif from Irish: the conception of a hero by a god or some other mythical being. It seems likely that this tale may have sprung from the legend of Ari's adventures in White Men's Land.

- 28 See *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing*, pp. 44-58.
- 29 Much earlier is a statement in Adam of Bremen's *History of the Archbishopric of Hamburg* c. 1075; Adam says that his informant King Svein Úlfsson of Denmark recounted that there was another island in the ocean which had been discovered by many and was called Vínland, because vines grow wild there *and yield excellent wine*, and, moreover, self-sown grain grows there in abundance; it is not from any fanciful imaginings that we have learned this, but from the reliable reports of the Danes.
The italicised phrase has no parallel in the Vínland Sagas. Considering what we know about the period, it seems not unlikely that King Svein's informant could have been Guðríð who went on a pilgrimage to Rome after her husband's death and probably passed through Denmark on her way south and also on her return journey.
- 30 Two other informants of Ari, Hall Thórarinsson (995-1089) and Bishop Gissur Ísleifsson (1042-1118) had been sea-faring traders before settling down as farmers.
- 31 Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum Locorum et Tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae* (Dublin 1910), p. 638.
- 32 See Jean M. Young 'Some Icelandic Traditions Showing Traces of Irish Influence'. *Revue Celtique* 2 (1938) pp. 118-26. Séamus mac Mathúna, 'Hvítramannaland'. *Celts and Vikings*. Edited by Folke Josephson (Göteborg 1997), pp. 211-24; and 'Hvítramannaland Revisited'. *Islanders and Water-Dwellers*. Edited by Patricia Lysaght, Séamus Ó Catháin and Dáithí Ó hÓgáin (Dublin 1999), pp. 177-87.
- 33 This was Sir Walter Scott's favourite saga: 'Of the various records of Icelandic history and literature, there is none more interesting than the Eyrbyggja-Saga.' See M. Mallet, *Northern Antiquities* (London 1874), p. 517.
- 34 This reminds us of a situation in *The Voyage of Snédgus and Mac Ríagla*. The two clerics came to a distant island in the ocean where there were many people who spoke in Irish. One of them asked where they came from, and when he heard that they were Irish he asked how many sons of Domnall were still alive. He had killed one of Domnall's sons.
- 35 This is reminiscent of an incident in *The Voyage of St Brendan*. Barinthus and Mernoc come to the Land of Promise of the Saints where a man suddenly turns up and starts explaining the landscape. He was asked where he came from and what his name was but, like the old poet in *Eyrbyggja Saga*, the stranger never revealed his identity. *Lives of the Saints*. Translated by J.F. Webb (Harmondsworth 1956), p. 34.
- 36 It was published in Oslo in 1911. Quotations here are taken from the English version: *In Northern Mists, Arctic Exploration in Early Times* by Fridtjof Nansen. Volumes I-II. Translated by Arthur G. Chater (London 1911).

- 37 See in particular his essay 'Before Columbus. Some Irish Folklore Motifs in the Old Icelandic Traditions about Wineland'. *Celts and Vikings*. Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica. (Göteborg 1997), pp. 225-52.
- 38 'Vínland er eldra en Íslands byggð'. *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, Sept. 18, 1999; and 'Vínland í írskum fornritum'. *Op. cit.*, Sept. 25, 1999.
- 39 Although the proper name *Vínland* does not occur in early Irish, the idea of islands where wine is plentiful is well known. In this connection it should be mentioned that Fridtjof Nansen draws attention to the name *Insula Uvarum* 'Grape Island', one of the fortunate isles visited by St Brendan (Nansen 1911: I, 344).
- 40 *Lives of the Saints*. The Voyage of St Brendan, etc. Translated with an Introduction by J. F. Webb (Harmondsworth 1965), p. 44.
- 41 *Op. cit.*, p. 57.
- 42 Kenneth H. Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany* (London 1951), p. 172. For the Irish original see A. G. Van Hamel, *Immrama* (Dublin 1941), pp. 45-46.
- 43 *The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal to the Land of the Living*. Edited and translated by Kuno Meyer (London 1895), pp. 8-9.
- 44 P. W. Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances* (Dublin 1968; originally published 1879), p. 276. For the Irish original, see Van Hamel, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- 45 See Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth*. Translated by Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg 1974) 104. This piece is preserved in the manuscript AM 736 I, 4^{to}, which dates from c. 1300, but appears to go back to a twelfth century original.