



The Vikings in North America: The History and Legacy of the Norse Settlements in Greenland and Vinland

Charles River Editors

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Over the centuries, the West has become fascinated by the Vikings, one of the most mysterious and interesting European civilizations. In addition to being perceived as a remarkably unique culture among its European counterparts, what's known and not known about the Vikings' accomplishments has added an intriguing aura to the historical narrative. Were they fierce and fearsome warriors? Were they the first Europeans to visit North America? It seems some of the legends are true, and some are just that, legend.

The ubiquitous picture of the Vikings as horn-helmeted, brutish, hairy giants that mercilessly marauded among the settlements of Northern Europe is based on a smattering of facts combined with an abundance of prejudicial historical writing by those who were on the receiving end of Viking depredations. At the same time, much of the popular picture of the Vikings is a result of the romantic imagination of novelists and artists. However, the Vikings' reputation for ferocious seaborne attacks along the coasts of Northern Europe is no exaggeration. It is true that the Norsemen, who traded extensively throughout Europe, often increased the profits obtained from their nautical ventures through plunder, acquiring precious metals and slaves. Of course, the Vikings were not the only ones participating in this kind of income generation; between the eighth and the 11th centuries, European tribes, clans, kingdoms, and monastic communities were quite adept at fighting with each other for the purpose of obtaining booty. The Vikings were simply more consistently successful than their contemporaries and thus became suitable symbols for the inequity of the times.

Of course, the military reputation came about because the Vikings were the great mariners and explorers of Medieval Europe. While many of their journeys were ones of conquest, they also had a deep love of exploration.

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