

# Contrasts in the vinland sagas history essay



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The Vinland Sagas is made up of two separate sagas, the saga of "The Greenlanders" and "Eirik the Red's Saga". The sagas hold the first description ever of North America, before Christopher Columbus. The definition of a saga consists of a long story or a legend of heroic accomplishments. The sagas include a number of accounts that dealt with North America in the year 1000. They include the first successful trips taken across the Atlantic Ocean from Scandinavia. Most Voyages were carried out as a way to spread religion, others were to acquire land. The sagas include the first experience with the local ethnic groups living in North America and how they traded and battled. Between the sagas there were several voyages; all of which were departing from Iceland, Norway, and Greenland. All of these events were to create new opportunities or for fame and fortune. Throughout these sagas one would realize they are similar to one another. The accounts of Leif Eiriksson and Thorfinn Karlsefni contrast. The story of Leif and the discovery of Vinland differ in both of the sagas; Karlsefni's stories vary in each of the sagas particularly how the natives were portrayed. Leif the Lucky was the son of Eirik the red. Leif was the founder of Vinland in "The Saga of the Greenlanders" and "Eirik the Red's Saga", but the accounts behind the discovery were written differently. In "Eirik the Red's Saga", Leif settled in islands around Greenland, where he met a woman, and they had a child. Then he went on a second voyage to Greenland. None of this is mentioned in "The Saga of The Greenlanders". In "The Saga of the Greenlanders" it is said that Leif visited many island such as Helluland and Markland. In both accounts Leif finds North America (Vinland). In the "Saga

of The Greenlanders” he was said to of explored the land. During this exploration vines and grapes were found. Leif then named the

Land Vineland. “ Erik the Red’s Saga” goes in to nearly no detail about Vinland. This is how Vinland was described “...he chanced upon land where he had not expected any to be found. Fields of self-sown wheat and vines were growing there.” (p. 35). Although he does not name the land, one would conclude he was speaking of North America or Vinland. One would know that the two accounts were written about the same voyage because both accounts include how Leif saved the ship wrecked people and earned the nickname of Leif the Lucky. The two accounts also contrast in this sense. In “ Eirik the Red’s Saga”, Leif is sent to Greenland to spread Christianity by King Olaf. By the end of the account it is said that Leif successfully converted the country to Christianity. There is no spread of Christianity is not mentioned in “ The Saga of The Greenlanders”.

Karlsefni was a wealthy man; he married Gudrid in both “ The Saga of the Greenlanders” and “ Eirik the Red’s Saga”. After the marriage Karlsefni wanted to visit the land Leif founded, Vineland. In “ The Saga of the Greenlanders” Karlsefni asked Leif for his houses in Vineland, and Karlsefni and his crew arrived in Vineland without going off course. “ Eirik the Red’s Saga” holds a different story. This account does not involve Leif. Also on the way to Vineland the crew had stopped to explore lands, such as Helluland, Bear Island, Markland, and Keel Point. The accounts then line up again. Karlsfeni then traveled south to find Vineland. Once finding Vineland in both accounts Karlsefni is confronted by natives. In “ The Saga of The Greenlanders” Karlsefni was first approached by natives on foot where as in ‘  
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Eirik the Red's Saga" they came in hide-covered boats. The two accounts both mentioned the natives and Karlsefni's crew trading but Karlsefni would not let weapons be traded. In both accounts the natives were described as being short in stature and having very large eyes. Within the two accounts the battle between Karlsefni, his companions and the natives had broken out for two different reasons. " The Saga of

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the Greenlanders" told a story of the natives trying to steal weapons and being killed for these actions. But in " Eirik the Red's Saga" a bull had frightened the natives while they were trading. After these events took place the natives came back and battled against Karlsefni and his crew. At the end of the battle both accounts talk about the natives testing an axe. In " The Saga of the Greenlanders" it was said "...one of the natives then picked up an axe, peered at it awhile and then aimed at one of his companions and struck him" (Kunz p. 17). " Eirik the Red's Saga" had a different story, it was said that " One of them picked up the axe and chopped at a tree, and then each took a turn at it."(Kunz p. 46). Karlsefni and his companions then fled the country.

One would agree these two sagas hold value as historical documents. This is true because they hold information about the voyages Leif and Karlsefni took to Vinland. This offers the reader evidence that Scandinavian explorers such as Leif and Karlsefni discovered North America before Christopher Columbus. This is evidence that Christianity was practiced in North America in the year 1000. But to compare both sagas side by side, one could

conclude that “ Eirik the Red’s Saga” is a more valuable historical source in the fact that the voyages go into more detail, in ways such as describing the way natives work. Also how it goes more in-depth in Leif’s voyage. It shows how Christianity was spread to North America through King Olaf.

I feel the accounts of Leif Eiriksson and Thorfinn Karlsefni contrasted. By how the accounts in each of the sagas depicted Leif’s time spent in North America and how the natives were portrayed in Karlsefnis voyage to Vinland. One could conclude this essay knowing that “ The Saga of the Greenlanders” and “ Eirik the Red’s Saga” are comparable when looked at side by side. Kunz says this here “ when it comes to the Vinland voyages themselves, the sagas give two versions” (Kunz p. xviii). The accounts of both Leif and Kalrsefni left out key differences within each passage. I feel this could be connected to the origins of who wrote it and in what country. 3