linear flakes, and large lanceolate bifaces, typically made of the locally abundant Rhyolite Chert. Beaches sites typically lie in a protected inner area of the bay, suggesting that the people utilized both terrestrial and marine resources. As the Dorset culture became extinct, the Beaches Complex people expanded their range and exploited an increasing number of resources previously unavailable to them. Over time, the Beaches Complex gave rise to a new cultural construct known as the Little Passage Complex.

Archaeologists differentiate the Little Passage Complex from the previous Beaches Complex by the changing style of lithic production. Beginning around A.D. 1200, members of the Little Passage Complex started to use fine-grained blue-green and gray-green cherts and created small triangular points for use as arrow projectiles. Initially these points possessed large side-notches, but over time this gradually gave way to a stemmed base that closely resembles the points produced by the historic Beothuks of Newfoundland—prompting most archaeologists to label the Little Passage people as the direct ancestor of the Beothuks, who came into contact with later Europeans during the colonization of North America. Like the Beaches people, the members of the Little Passage Complex chose to build their settlements in the sheltered inner regions of the coast. Although archaeologists have not found any Little Passage shelters, the people likely lived in dwellings that closely resembled those used by the Beothuk. Early European colonists in Newfoundland described these Beothuk shelters as “made of firre trees bound together in the top and set round like a Dovehouse, and covered with the barkes of firre trees.” John Guy, an early English colonist, adds that the houses were “nothing but poles set in round forme, meeting altogether alofte, which they covered with
Deere skins; they are about 10 foot broad, and in the middle they make their fire. . .”\textsuperscript{177}

So far, the only archaeological remains of the Little Passage dwelling consists of small hearths, lithic scatters, and bones—objects that would be associated with houses such as those described above and which suggest the Little Passage people made only temporary settlements.\textsuperscript{178}

Consequently, it is likely that the Little Passage people like the historic Beothuk lived a lifestyle timed with the movements of seasonal food, such as the migration of harp seal in early spring. Likewise, the Little Passage people probably lived in bands similar to those of the Beothuks, which consisted of between thirty-five and fifty people led by an influential individual. They also engaged in trading activities with other Native American groups living on the Labrador mainland, as evidenced by the Ramah Chert found in Little Passage sites and cherts from western Newfoundland discovered in sites on the mainland.\textsuperscript{179} Groups from the mainland may have traveled to Newfoundland for the purpose of trade, but it is just as likely that the Little Passage people made voyages to the mainland for the same purpose. The Beothuks possess canoes made of a light wooden frame with birch bark sewn with spruce roots and water proofed with spruce gum over the top and used these on trading expeditions. These bark canoes were capable of traveling at least as far as sixty kilometers and the Little Passage people probably possessed similar vessels.\textsuperscript{180} Thus, like many of the other coastal peoples in the region, the Little Passage people may have practiced an economy that exploited seasonal resources and possessed a material culture that included boats capable of making extensive hunting and trading trips.
The Prehistoric People of the Saint Lawrence Gulf

From Newfoundland south to the northern Saint Lawrence Gulf, archaeological evidence shows that the people practiced a relatively similar culture, which likely extended even further south into the southern reaches of the Gulf. In this region, the modern Canadian Maritimes, lived the ancestors of the historic Micmac, Maliseet, and Eastern Abenaki tribes. These prehistoric people possessed a larger and more settled population than their neighbors to the north. As a result of rich stocks of shellfish, fisheries, and the possibility of crops, the land held a much higher human carrying capacity and allowed its inhabitants to stay in one general location rather than forcing them to migrate in search of seasonal foods. In this region, people typically lived in large villages located in almost every bay and river mouth. These villages were in turn linked together through networks of trade, ritual, and periodic gatherings that served the purpose of uniting the area into a series of related cultures.

Norse-Native American Interaction

These then were the three major regions—Labrador, Newfoundland, and the northern Gulf of Saint Lawrence—that the Norse likely visited during their trips to Vinland along with brief descriptions of the archaeological cultures inhabiting these lands. The question still remains, however, as to how the Native Americans and Norsemen interacted when they came into contact with one another and how accurate of a portrayal the sagas provide of these instances. "The archaeological evidence suggesting Norse-Native contact is extremely thin, consisting of isolated finds upon which varying interpretations can be placed," writes Robert McGhee in a pessimistic summation of the
available information regarding the interaction between the Norsemen and Native Americans. While I agree that the archaeological record is sparse at best, I believe that with the help of the sagas and historic records from the later European Contact Period, a much fuller understanding of the relationship can be attained.

Physical Descriptions of the Native Americans and Their Material Culture

From the outset, it appears that the Norse had a relatively fair understanding of the inhabitants of North America. In Eirik the Red’s Saga, the narrator describes the natives as “short in height with threatening features and tangled hair on their heads. Their eyes were large and their cheeks broad.” John Guy, an Englishmen, describes the Beothuk of Newfoundland in a remarkably similar passage during the 17th century saying, “They are full-eyed, of a black colour . . . and their faces something flat and broad.” The similarity between these descriptions suggests that the Norse passage is describing a Native American group similar, if not identical, to the Beothuk of John Guy’s era. Both descriptions focus on the large eyes and broad faces of the natives, attributes characteristic of most Native Americans. Osteologically, such features as face breadth and eye size are typically used to associate skeletal remains with a Native American or European descent. As such, “robust and flaring” zygomatics, or cheek bones, are one of the defining characteristics of a Native American skull as opposed to “small and retreating” zygomatics in people of European descent. The fact that this accurate report of the facial structure and appearance of the Native Americans made it into Eirik the Red’s Saga after being passed on orally for several centuries indicates that the Norse had a good idea of what the Native Americans looked like. This in turn, implies that the
two groups must have interacted or at least seen each other regularly, and not just in the middle of a skirmish, in order for this accurate portrayal to survive and make it into the sagas.

In addition to possessing knowledge about the physical traits of the Native Americans, the sagas also impart an understanding of native material culture. On several of their expeditions, the Norsemen report seeing mounds in which they Natives live and make mention that the Native Americans came to visit them in skin-covered boats or slept under such watercraft. Some researchers have suggested that these traits are more consistent with Inuit material culture, but most archaeologists now believe that the sagas are in fact describing the summer camps of the various coastal Indian groups of the Canadian coast. For instance, prehistoric settlements along the coasts of Labrador, Newfoundland, and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence typically possess a single structure that likely was once a skin-and-bark covered frame dwelling with an interior central hearth. During historic times, early European settlers recorded that the Native Americans in the region usually built conical tents either by using tent poles or by bending thin alders or willows to form a dome shape frame and then covering it with caribou skins (Figure 13.). Both structures appeared hemispherical and might be described as a mound. Therefore, the mounds of the sagas likely represent these conical structures and indicate that the Norsemen possessed a relatively accurate, if slightly misunderstood, knowledge of the Native American’s domestic dwellings.

Likewise, the description provided in the sagas of the skin-covered boats used by the American Indians appears to be rooted in factual knowledge the Norse gained while exploring North America. While many researchers doubt that the prehistoric inhabitants
Figure 13.
Reconstruction of a Prehistoric Native American Dwelling
Pastore, 21.
of the Canada's eastern coastline actually used skin-boats, they agree that the Norsemen may have confused canoes constructed of sewn bark for skin-boats. Historic accounts of birchbark canoes exists in the context of the Beothuks who relied on canoes made of a light wooden frame and covered with birch bark, sewn with spruce roots, and sealed with spruce gum for travel and hunting. Such craft also were historically used by three-man crews who often slept under their canoes at night when making a temporary camp. This corresponds closely with the sagas' description of Norse ambushes on groups of three men sleeping under their boats. Finally, the southern range of the birchbark canoe is in Massachusetts, indicating that anyone sailing in the northern waters of Canada would likely encounter natives using these bark covered craft.

However, further evidence indicates that prior to the 17th century, the Micmac of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island did indeed use skin canoes and switched to a bark based technology much later during the historic period. As described by a Native American man around 1740, "We have had our canoes, Father, from time immemorial. . . . In olden times, instead of the birchbark canoes we use now, our ancestors used moose skin, from which they had plucked the hair, and which they had scraped and rubbed so thoroughly that they were like your finest skins. They soaked them in oil and then placed them on the canoe frame. These historic and archaeological accounts of the nautical technology of the Indians of Eastern Canada closely match the description of skin-covered boats provided in the sagas and provide further indication that the Norsemen possessed an intimate knowledge of the native peoples of the New World (Figure 14.).
A Comparison of the Description of Thorvald Eiriksson’s Voyage in The Saga of the Greenlanders with the Archaeological Record

Since the physical description of the Native Americans and their material culture in the sagas is relatively accurate, it seems that researchers might be able to match accounts of Norse expeditions in the Scandinavian literature with the archaeological record in order to gain a greater insight into where the voyagers went and what Native American groups they encountered. In the case of the expedition mounted by Thorvald Eiriksson in the Saga of the Greenlanders, researchers believe they have clues from both North America and Greenland that indicate where the Norsemen traveled and support the account of conflict given in the sagas.

As recounted above, during his first summer in Vinland, Thorvald sent a group of men to the west to explore the region. There the expedition found good land and forests, but saw no evidence of humans aside from a wooden grain trough. In the saga the word *kornbjaller*, or grain holder, is used to describe the wooden object and provides a few tantalizing clues as to where Thorvald’s men traveled. During the 11th century when the Vinland voyages occurred, agriculture did not exist, as far as archaeologist can tell, among the Native American cultures east of the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River and north of New England. Therefore, if the men did indeed observe a kornbjaller and not some other object during their voyage, they would have to be in the area of modern day Quebec or along the New England coast because cultures in this area are known to have made use of agriculture. Since the saga says they traveled west and found no evidence of actual humans, the area east of Quebec City seems a likely spot because of its light prehistoric population and western location.
The following summer the *Saga of the Greenlanders* says that Thorvald again set out on a voyage of exploration, but this time sailed east.\(^{196}\) If Thorvald and his men set out from L’Anse Aux Meadows or some other site in Newfoundland or the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and sailed east, they would likely have been following the coast of Labrador, which hangs over the southern coast of the eastern seaboard before turning north. After a few setbacks, Thorvald and his crew eventually entered the mouth of a large fjord and proceeded to anchor their ship and explore the land. Upon returning to their ship, they discovered three "hillocks" on the beach that were actually hide-covered boats and attacked the men sleeping beneath them. Hurrying to their ship to escape the area, Thorvald and his men surveyed the fjord and noticed more hillocks which they assumed were Native American settlement.\(^{197}\)

Since Thorvald and his men traveled east, they probably reached the coast of Labrador and encountered members of the Point Revenge Complex. As stated above, the Point Revenge people possessed conically shaped, skin-covered houses, which were similar to the hillocks described in the saga.\(^{198}\) In addition, like the natives in the saga, the Point Revenge people possessed canoes—used for traveling, hunting, and trading—and lived in dispersed settlements that probably appeared as clusters of single houses spread up and down the coastline such as the Norse as they attempted to flee. Finally, the large fjord that Thorvald and his men discovered may actually represent Groswater Bay and Hamilton Inlet, one of the largest inlets along the Labrador coast and in the center of the Point Revenge homeland. After sailing through Groswater Bay, the waterway narrows into Hamilton Inlet, creating a fjord like the Norsemen knew from Greenland, Norway and other regions of the North Atlantic.
While no direct archaeological exists to support or refute the idea that Thorvald and his men traveled to central Labrador and encountered the Point Revenge people, a find in Greenland demonstrates that the Norse directly or indirectly had contact with the Indians of Labrador. In the 1930s, archaeologists working in an early Norse cemetery at Sandnes in the Western Settlement found a small chert point with an expanding stem on the beach below the graveyard (Figure 15.). Typologically unrelated to any of the native Greenland lithic assemblages, researchers eventually identified the point as stylistically similar to the cultures of southern Labrador and Newfoundland and dated it to between A.D. 1000 and 1500. These finds provide further tangible evidence that the Norsemen in Greenland had some sort of contact with the Native Americans of Labrador, or the Point Revenge people. Although some Norsemen might have found both points and brought them home to Greenland, more than likely they either came back from America as a result of hostilities or trade.

In the case of Thorvald’s voyages of exploration, the researcher gains a better understanding of the regions in which he explored and the people that he and his crew came into contact with by comparing the saga literature with the archaeological record. Thorvald and his men probably began their adventure by sailing west across the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and exploring the sparsely populated lands of the coast of Quebec. Finding good land there, the men next decided to voyage eastwards and ended up following the Labrador coast, entering an inlet, possibly even Hamilton Inlet sometime during the summer. Here the Norsemen came into contact with a group of natives that
Figure 15.
The Sandnes Point, found in a Cemetery at Sandnes in the Western Settlement of Greenland

were probably members of the Point Revenge Complex. Both parties reacted violently to the other, indicating that the natives had a prior knowledge of warfare, and the Norse were driven out of the region following the death of their leader Thorvald. Two points from the region unearthed in Greenland attest to the potential danger that contact with the natives entailed and suggest that violent encounters did occur.

**Trade Between the Norse and Native Americans**

However, the sagas mention that not all of the encounters between the Norsemen and the Native Americans ended in violence. On the contrary, the sagas indicate that some such meetings proved equally lucrative for both sides because they resulted in trade. *Eirik the Red’s Saga* and the *Saga of the Greenlanders* each provide in-depth description of these friendly encounters. *Eirik the Red’s Saga* describes the trading process between the Native Americans and Norse during Karlsefni’s expedition to Hóp. “They [the natives] traded a dark pelt for the cloth and for each pelt they took cloth a hand in length, which they bound about their heads.” When these provisions became scarce, the Native Americans began trading entire pelts for small quantities of cloth.201 The *Saga of the Greenlanders* provides further evidence of how the Norse and Native Americans conducted trade through a description of the second encounter between Karlsefni’s expedition and the natives. During this exchange, the Norsemen remained behind a palisade and refused to meet the natives outside for trade. Undeterred, the natives flung their packs of fur over the palisade walls and in return the Norse brought out milk products that they consumed or took with them.202 Both sagas also mention that the
natives greatly coveted metal and metal weapons, but that the Norsemen refused to trade these items because of their military and utilitarian value.

On the surface, these exchanges seem to provide the Norse with a distinct advantage. For a few scraps of red cloth or doles of milk, the Norsemen received entire pelts of valuable fur, which they could either use themselves or trade in the markets back in Greenland. However, this initial assessment of the situation does not take into account the Native American perspective and, thus, fails to value the goods they received from a non-Eurocentric point of view. In the context of the prehistoric Native American world, the color red likely held some sort of spiritual and cultural significance. Across much of North America, researchers have found burials in which red ocher occurs, either as a grave good or smeared over the corpse or accompanying artifacts. The occurrence of red ocher is known from at least one Point Revenge Complex site located along an eroding road in North West River, Labrador. Excavated in 1972, the archaeologists found two hearths, a scatter of tools, charcoal stains, and traces of red ocher.\textsuperscript{203} Although the site produced only trace amounts of the substance, the mere presence of red ocher at such a site indicates that the Point Revenge people knew of the mineral and may have been transporting it when they stayed at the site.

More concrete evidence for the use of red ocher and the color red exist in historic descriptions of the Indian populations of the eastern Canadian coast. As Robert McGhee states, "Although there are slight changes in artifact style over time, there is no cultural or temporal break between these archaeological materials and those of the early European contact period."\textsuperscript{204} Since the material culture changed little over time, the ways in which people used these objects probably remained fairly consistent, meaning that historic
accounts can be used as models to better understand prehistoric cultures of the region. According to such a model, red cloth and the color red in general played a significant part in the culture and religion of the prehistoric Native Americans of the Vinland region.

John Guy provides a 17th century description of the Newfoundland Beothuk’s use of red ocher in which the Native Americans smear “their faces, something flat and broad, red with oker, as all their apparel is, and the rest of their body. . . .”205 A Dutchman from the 18th century who encountered groups of Native Americans off of the Labrador coast describes them as “looking more like Spaniards with their long black hair which they plait with red pieces of cloth into long tails or spouts. . . . The men had painted their faces with red crosses. Their canoes were also painted in the same way which may serve them as an ornament or as part of their religion.”206 Much of the red coloring described above comes from red ocher, which the Native Americans likely obtained during seasonal movements.207 However, the pieces of red cloth that the Indians plaited in their hair likely originated from Europeans as trade items. As a result, it seems safe to assume that since the natives traded for such red cloth to put in their hair, it possesses some value to them above and beyond other, possibly more essential, items and probably had a similar worth in prehistoric times.

More direct evidence of the value of red objects exists in the accounts of the bartering of glass beads with the Beothuks. According to historic records, the Beothuk regularly traded furs for glass beads and metal—including scraps of copper and brass. Certain colors of beads in particular such as translucent, white, red, and blue, were particularly prized trading commodities. Anthropologists working among the native people of the Canadian east coast have found that different colors possess different
spiritual meaning. For instance, white and translucent embody concepts of goodness and spiritual power, blue is associated with the sky and sky beings, and red represents life and health. Consequently, among the Native American cultures of Vinland, it appears that red colored objects held both a visual and spiritual significance that imparted to them value greater than the furs, which they used as payment.

In addition, within the native context, these exchanges might have had a more symbolic rather than practical significance. Within many Native American cultures, gift giving and exchange of goods serves the purpose of establishing and maintaining social ties. It remains a distinct possibility that the Native Americans, while appreciating the red cloth and dairy products they obtained from the Norse, were more interested in simply establishing some sort of viable relationship with the newcomers through the exchange of material goods. Of particular interest to this line of thought, is the description provided by the Saga of the Greenlanders in which the Native Americans simply throw their bundles of fur over the palisade and wait to receive goods in return. If the Indians were truly interested in making a personal gain from their interaction with the Norsemen, it is unlikely that they would simply throw their wares to their trading partners, but would rather keep them and attempt to bargain for the best price. Since they did throw their goods directly to the Norse without waiting to see what they would receive in return, it is possible that the Native Americans intended the exchange to build social relationships rather than as an opportunity for material gain.

More than likely, the trading relationship that existed between the Norse and the Native Americans represented a combination of both a desire to for new material goods and the attempt to create a social relationship. While the description of the Native
Americans throwing their goods willingly to the Norse seems to suggest the latter, it must be remembered that red had a social significance, and consequently, a high value in native cultures. As a result, by trading furs for red cloth, the Native Americans received an otherwise unattainable commodity that likely had both visual and spiritual worth. From the Norse perspective, these exchanges meant that they gained valuable furs in exchange for surplus goods in the case of the cloth or a renewable resource in the instance of the dairy products. However, in all likelihood, they failed to realize the social significance of such exchanges in building social bonds and consequently misinterpreted the intentions of the Indians, which in both versions of the story eventually led to armed conflict.

**Cultural Misunderstandings and Misinterpretations**

The opportunity for such misunderstandings existed on many levels and had the potential to not only harm social relations between the two societies, but to even provoke war. For instance, in the description of the exchange between the Norse and Native Americans in the *Saga of the Greenlanders*, Karlsefni orders his men to exchange milk and dairy products for furs and pelts. According to the saga, the Indians greatly enjoyed this offering and drank and ate their goods before they left. In order for the Native Americans to truly enjoy their gifts, they would have to possess lactase, an intestinal enzyme that aids in the digestion of lactose, or milk sugar. Unfortunately for the Indians, however, lactase typically occurs only in juveniles, and except for cultures that traditionally had a dairy based economy, the enzyme is seldom active in adulthood. As a result, most non-Western peoples are lactose intolerant. By consuming the dairy products offered to them
by the Norse, the Native Americans probably experienced bloating, flatulence, and diarrhea.\textsuperscript{210} Although the Norse did not intentionally poison their trading partners, the fact that the Native Americans likely got sick from eating their exchanged goods almost certainly hurt the relationship between the two groups. Subsequent violence that occurred between the two groups may be related to the anger the Native Americans felt about their illness and the ensuing distrust of the Norse.

Likewise, the two societies faced cultural barriers that they had to overcome in order to interact with one another effectively. Foremost among these was the fact that neither group could understand the language of the other, meaning that they had to communicate through signs, symbols, and gestures. In the case of the interactions at Hóp described in \textit{Eirik the Red’s Saga}, the Norsemen had to decipher the meaning of decorated sticks, which “made a swishing sound as they turned them around sunwise.”\textsuperscript{211} Fortunately for the Norse, one of the men suggested this might be a peace sign and the men reciprocated the gesture by raising a white shield that prompted the natives to come ashore and trade. However, the Norsemen were again left to interpret the meaning of the poles when the Native Americans returned a third time after being chased off by one of the Greenlander’s bulls and were waving the poles counter-sunwise and shrieking loudly. Assuming this gesture to represent a declaration of war, the Norsemen armed themselves with their red shields and met the Native Americans in battle.\textsuperscript{212}

This encounter with its cultural symbols illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the Norse and Native Americans. Shanawdithit, the last survivor of the Beothuk, indicated that the decorated poles described in the sagas did exist in his culture and drew several sketches of “the scepter-like wooden poles about two meters and
surmounted by carved figures (Figure 16.). These poles were apparently used in some ritual fashion. Unfortunately, the religious purpose served by the poles remains a mystery, as does their usage in the context of the meeting between the Norse and Native Americans in the saga. Because the Norse did not know the cultural significance of the poles, they had to decipher meaning for themselves, leaving open the possibility that they misunderstood the shrieking and counter-sunwise waving as an aggressive signal.

Likewise, the Norse used the symbol of the white shield to represent peace and the red shields as a symbol of war—both Scandinavian cultural constructs. To the Native Americans, as mentioned before, the color white embodied goodness and spiritual power, while red represented life and health. Consequently, they too may have misunderstood the intent of the Norsemen's attempt at communication and reacted accordingly. In the end, confusion existed over the nature of the relationship between the Norse and Indian traders, what goods should be exchanged, and the cultural symbols used in communication. This likely resulted in the establishment of a tenuous relationship between the Norsemen and Native Americans that at any moment, due to a misunderstanding of miscommunication, could fall apart and result in hostility.

The Norse Perception of the Native Americans

Finally, in order to better understand the relationship between the Norsemen and Native Americans, an examination of the attitude of the Greenlanders towards the inhabitants of the New World should be attempted. For the Norse explorers, these various Indian groups must have appeared exotic and possibly even primitive. They did not know the use or iron, agriculture, or pastoralism, they often painted themselves with red ocher, and
Figure 16.
Drawings of Native American Poles Possibly Like Those Used for Signaling in *Eirik the Red's Saga*
McGhee “Skraelings of Vinland,” 51.
they practiced customs unknown in any European society. The only similar group of people that the Norse might have encountered were the Sami of Scandinavia, nomadic native peoples of the northern lands. Therefore, to the Norsemen, the Native Americans likely existed as the "other" group, set off and different from the European societies that they knew.

Compounding these differences, the Greenlanders and the entire North Atlantic Scandinavian world had recently adopted Christianity, and as the sagas relate, most of the members of the expeditions to Vinland were Christians. In Vinland, the Norse found people practicing a pagan and mysterious religion, and the sagas often imbue the natives, as a result, with magical powers. For example, on their return voyage to Greenland, *Eirik the Red's Saga* relates that Karlsefni and his men encountered a group of five natives in Markland and decided to pursue them. Although they captured two Indian boys, "the others escaped and disappeared into the earth." This description of the Native American's escape seems to insinuate that they possessed the power to open up the earth, making sorcerers of some sort and, from the Norse perspective, practitioners of the black arts and enemies of Christianity. As such, the Norsemen could kill the Native Americans indiscriminately as if they were outlaws, as the sagas relate they did on several occasions, and by means deemed generally cowardly within the context of Scandinavian culture—killing a man while he is asleep or attacking a man for no reason. However, in the case of the two captured boys from Markland, the Norsemen refrained from killing them, but rather took them back to Greenland where they were baptized and converted to Christianity. Consequently, the Norse apparently viewed young Native Americans as potential converts and, once Christianized, accepted them into Greenlandic society.
This then suggests a more complex theological relationship between the Norse and Native Americans in which the natives were not indiscriminately a primitive, savage, and pagan people, but that they could be reformed if introduced to Christianity. Thus, it seems likely that the Norse held an attitude of superiority over the inhabitants of the New World, but not to such a degree that a native could not become a member of Greenlandic society if they reformed their beliefs and customs.

**Reasons for the Failure of the Vinland Settlements**

Yet, the differences between the Norse and Native Americans should not be overly stressed because, in the end, they both followed many of the same practices. Evidence suggests that the Greenlanders and the native inhabitants of the Vinland regions subsisted off of much of the same food resources, chiefly aquatic mammals, fish, caribou, birds, and other small game. Both groups possessed a maritime culture in which they used ships and boats for travel and hunting purposes. They both likely timed their hunting parties to catch particular game at opportune times of the year and may have followed the same certain migratory animals to a degree. Finally, archaeological and historical records indicate that both the Native Americans and the Norsemen practiced cultures in which trade played an important part in gaining and dispersing materials, and possibly in the building of social relationships.

As such, the Norsemen of Greenland practiced a culture that in reality was neither socially nor technologically superior to the Native Americans. Robert McGhee summarizes the situation by stating, “The Greenlandic Norse were not Viking warriors, but inhabitants of a small farming and fishing society at the farthest end of the Norse
Even though they possessed steel weapons, they had little advantage over the bows and war clubs used by the Native Americans in the several brief skirmishes described in the sagas. Eirik the Red's Saga even describes a new weapon that "the natives lift up on poles a large round object, about the size of a sheep's gut and black in color, which came flying up on the land and made a threatening noise when it landed." This weapon may be a type of weapon known from various Algonquian tribes that consists of a boulder wrapped in skins and mounted on a pole. Such new and exotic weapons probably served to panic the Norse, regardless of the actual damage they created, and provided the Native Americans with an edge on the battlefield. In addition, the Indians knew the territory intimately and were fully capable of developing battle plans and strategies to take full advantage of this knowledge. In contrast, the Norse were more accustomed to treeless tundra areas, and likely viewed fighting in the thick forest with a degree of apprehension.

Much of the advantage that the Norsemen and Vikings possessed in their European raids were based upon the seaborne mobility and nautical supremacy they enjoyed over their fellow Europeans. Viking raiders could attack settlements along the Atlantic seaboard, raiding and sacking settlements, and then return to their own farms in Scandinavia, safe from retaliatory attacks. In America, however, the Norse possessed no great maritime advantage over the Native Americans, who had a well developed nautical culture with a knowledge of seafaring and local geography. They built and used maneuverable canoes that could quickly and easily move people from one place on the coast to another—be it for hunting, trading, or military purposes. While the Norse had at least five major ship types that they used throughout the North Atlantic—some of
which were sleek, maneuverable military ships capable of entering shallow waters—in Greenland and Vinland the Norse relied predominately on the *knorr* (Figure 17.). Knorrs were larger, heavier ships that often had half decks fore and aft and some limited space for cargo. Although the ship had room for oarsmen, typically the Norsemen relied upon sail power, making maneuvering difficult in some situations.\(^{226}\) Thus, in the realm of seafaring in America, the Native Americans appear to have had an advantage over the Norsemen.

Because of the limited cargo room on the knorrs, the Norsemen often had difficulty transporting enough men and material to the New World to sustain a viable colony.\(^{227}\) Unlike in Europe, the Norse had to establish permanent settlements in America to which they returned each winter from their explorations for shelter and resources. This created a fixed central location for the Norse activities in the New World that provided the Native Americans with an easy and obvious target for attacks. On the other hand, the Indians had no central settlement but typically migrated to different areas throughout the year, following the migration of various game animals without returning to one fixed camp. Consequently, the Norse had no discernable central target to attack in order to inflict optimal damage on the Native Americans.\(^{228}\) The population difference between the Native Americans and the Norsemen also resulted in a major advantage for the Indians, with estimates now suggesting that the regions south of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence possessed population densities comparable to medieval Scandinavia and the more northern regions only slight less.\(^{229}\)

In the end, when factoring in all of these considerations, it appears that the Norsemen possessed a rather severe disadvantage when dealing with the Native
Americans in North America. While the Norse possessed metal weapons and tactics that allowed them to gain military dominance over much of Europe, in the New World many of these tactics proved ineffective. Unlike in Europe, the Norse possessed fixed vulnerable settlements, while the native inhabitants lived in mobile and difficult to attack villages. The Indians utilized a nautical technology with maneuverable canoes that proved far more effective in the coastal waters of North America than did the rather unwieldy Norse knorr. Finally, the Greenlandic voyages to Vinland represented exploration parties of between thirty and sixty individuals, as compared to native populations that in some regions rivaled the number of people living in the Norse homelands of Scandinavia. If conflict arose between the two societies, the Native Americans had a decided edge.

Since both the Norse and Native Americans utilized the same basic natural sources for their subsistence and lived in similar environmental regions, competition and conflict remained a constant threat. Skirmishes, as recorded in the sagas, did apparently break out between the two groups, and although the Norse appear to have fared relatively well in these battles they apparently realized that if they attempted to colonize Vinland their safety would always be in jeopardy. Consequently, after only a short period of time—possibly no more than twenty years—the voyages to Vinland ceased and the settlers returned to Greenland for good. While further unrecorded expeditions to Vinland may have taken place, no historic or archaeological documents indicate that such activities occurred and it is unlikely that any such voyage attempted to establish a permanent settlement or even stayed in the region longer than it took to gather a cargo load of natural resources.
GREENLANDIC NORSE-EUROPEAN INTERACTIONS

With the failure of the Vinland voyages to establish a colony, interest in the new land to the west soon began to wane. Although most of the trips to Vinland returned with valuable cargo and trade items, the danger of the trip and the threat of hostile Native American groups probably served collectively to dampen the enthusiasm of Norse chieftains and merchants to resume the westward expeditions. Instead, throughout the remainder of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century and into the subsequent centuries, the Norse settlers in Greenland focused on expanding and strengthening their colonies and in opening up better connections and relations with the rest of the European world.

The Tale of the Greenlanders

One extant saga, the \textit{Tale of the Greenlanders} helps to illustrate many of the important features that characterized Norse Greenlandic society during this period. The tale takes place several generations after the conclusion of the Vinland voyages and centers around the establishment of a bishopric in Greenland. Sokki, one of the leading chieftains of Greenland at the time, lived at Brattahlid with his son Einar and both men were greatly respected throughout both the Eastern and Western Settlements. He decided that Greenland needed a bishopric and called together an assembly of the leading men of the country and asked them if they would support an Episcopal see in the Settlements. When they agreed to the proposition, Sokki asked Einar to travel to Norway and petition the king for to provide them with a bishop. Einar agreed to undertake the voyage and "took a lot of ivory and walrus-hide rope . . . to advance his case with the chieftains."\textsuperscript{230}
Upon arriving in Norway, Einar secured a meeting with King Sigurd Jerusalem-farer and gained his favor by presenting him with the gifts he had brought. He then asked the king to grant Greenland a see. King Sigurd agreed and summoned Arnald, a respected spiritual leader, asking him if he would undertake the challenge of establishing a bishopric in the far off lands. Initially, Arnald attempted to respectfully decline the post claiming, “in the first place . . . he was scarcely fitted; second, he would have to part from his friends and kinsmen; and in the third place, he would have to deal with an unruly population.”

King Sigurd insisted that Arnald go, however, but Arnald first required that “if it is fated that I should be consecrated bishop, then I want Einar to swear me an oath to protect and truly to support the Episcopal see and those possessions which are given to God, and to punish those who would violate these rights, and to be the defender of all property of the see.”

Einar agreed to these stipulations and, after traveling to Denmark so that Arnald could be consecrated by Archbishop Ozur, the two prepared to leave for Greenland. Before they left, Einar presented King Sigurd with a bear, probably a polar bear that he had brought from Greenland.

On their return voyage to Greenland, Einar and Bishop Arnald were accompanied by the merchant Arnbjorn and his crew of Norwegians who sought to trade in Greenland. Although the two ships intended to sail together, shortly after they set out they encountered strong winds that forced Einar’s ship to stop in Iceland for the winter, while Arnbjorn’s ship continued on. The following summer, Einar and Bishop Arnald resumed their journey and reached Eiriks fjord without incident, where they received a warm greeting. With the help of Sokki and Einar, Bishop Arnald established his bishopric at Gardar in the Eastern Settlement.
Meanwhile, no one had seen Arnbjorn or his crew in either Greenland or Iceland, and after several years they were given up as dead. Then one fall, a Greenlander named Sigurd was hunting and fishing in the wilderness areas with a crew of fifteen men when he happened upon a large ocean-going ship, with a hut and tent standing nearby. Venturing into the camp, the men found that it was full of the dead crew and determined that they had probably died of exhaustion and hunger. Assuming that these were the remains of Arnbjorn and his men, Sigurd's crew inspected the ships and wares of the deceased and found a ship with an ornamental prow, painted, and with a great treasure inside, a merchant ship, a ferry-boat, and a tow-boat. The merchant ship was in disrepair and unseaworthy, so the men stripped it of its nails and burned it. They then loaded up the bodies of the dead merchants and all of goods and sailed back to the Eastern Settlement with the extra ships in tow.

When the men reached Gardar, Sigurd went to see Bishop Arnald and told him about the ship the men had found. He offered to give the goods contained in the ships to the Episcopal see in order to pay for the men's burial and donated the ship with the ornamental prow to Bishop Arnald for the dead men's salvation. The rest of the valuables he kept and divided among his crew according to Greenlandic law. News of the find eventually reached Norway and a man named Ozur, Arnbjorn's nephew, and others expected to receive payment from their deceased relatives' cargo. In order to secure what they saw as their rightful inheritance, a number of them sailed to Eiriksfjord and began trading with the people there, establishing themselves in the Eastern Settlement for the winter. At the same time, two other groups of Norwegian merchants arrived in the Western Settlement under the command of Kolbein Thorljotsson and
Hermund Kodransson and took up residence there for the winter.\textsuperscript{238} During this period of relative inactivity, Ozur stayed with Bishop Arnald at Gardar and eventually brought up the issue of the inheritance that he and his companions expected to receive before they left Greenland. Taken aback by this request, Bishop Arnald informed Ozur that he had followed Greenlandic law and that the money went towards the dead men's salvation and to the church where their bones were buried. He also informed the Norwegian that he saw it as dishonorable to make claims on the money.\textsuperscript{239}

Angered by this response, Ozur soon left the company of the bishop and spent the remainder of the winter among his Norwegian companions. With the coming of spring, Ozur prepared a lawsuit which he took before the Greenlander's Assembly in the hopes of gaining money from the bishop. However, Einar and Bishop Arnald appeared at the Assembly with a large number of men. Einar then addressed the Assembly and said, "We want to follow the laws that are in force here," and reminded everyone that when they traveled to Norway they had to obey Norwegian rules so the Norwegians should respect their law.\textsuperscript{240} Stirred by Einar's speech, the Assembly decided in favor of the Bishop. Enraged, Ozur and the Norwegians left to join their countrymen in the Western Settlement, but first Ozur cut two planks out from either side of the painted ship's keel, making the vessel useless. In the Western Settlement, Ozur and his men met with Kolbein and Ketil Kalfsson, who agreed that the ruling of the Assembly was unjust but cautioned their countrymen to nonetheless to remain calm.\textsuperscript{241}

Ignoring this advice, Ozur soon set sail once again for the Eastern Settlement. In the meantime, Bishop Arnald learned of the vandalism to his ship and immediately sent for Einar. Furious over the insolence of the Norwegians, he ordered that Einar make
good on his promise to protect the property of the bishopric, and asked for Ozur’s life.

Einar agreed that Ozur deserved punishment, but reminded the Bishop that from Ozur’s viewpoint the Greenlanders had cheated him out of his inheritance. Further angered by Einar’s refusal to do his bidding, Bishop Arnald parted company with his closest ally on bad terms. Shortly after this encounter, Bishop Arnald held a church consecration mass and feast at Langanes, which Einar and many others, including Ozur, attended. Following the service, Bishop Arnald and the rest of his party left the church for a nearby hall to attend the accompanying feast. Secretly leaving this group, Einar returned to the churchyard, took up an axe, and crept up behind Ozur, striking him a fatal blow. He then returned to hall and took a seat across from the Bishop where he recounted what had transpired. A few men began to move to take care of the body and prepare it for burial, but Bishop Arnald stopped them, saying there would be time for that later. Only when Einar insisted that men go and sing over the body were they allowed to leave and attend to their duties. Bishop Arnald then declared that the people should bury Ozur outside of the churchyard, but Einar convinced him to rescind this statement.

Word of the murder soon reached the other Norwegians in the Western Settlement and they began to make preparations to seek redress. Ketil prepared a lawsuit for the Greenlandic Assembly and set off to deliver it, sending word to Kolbein to meet him at the Assembly with as many Norwegians as he could muster. At the Assembly Ketil presented his case, but Einar succeeded in breaking up the court before they rendered their verdict. Sokki, hoping to maintain peace, quickly approached the Norwegians and offered to bargain for an end to the feud, but Ketil and the others refused because of Einar’s actions. By midsummer, however, they decided to accept a settlement and all of
the Norwegian merchants assembled at the meeting in a show of force. Einar and his followers countered this threat by sitting on the slope directly across from the Norwegians in a wary truce. Sokki produced the goods meant to compensate the Norwegians for Ozur’s death and placed these in between the two groups for Ketil and Hermund Kodransson to inspect.245

As the bargaining commenced Simon, a large man and relation of Ozur, stalked up and down the field until he spied an old mail-coat made of plated-mail. He grabbed hold of the object and threw it on the ground claiming it was an insult to offer such an old item as payment for a man like Ozur. Simon then charged towards the Greenlanders, causing them to jump to their feet in preparation for a fight. With their attention momentarily focused on Simon, Kolbein snuck behind the Greenlanders and struck Einar in the back at the same instant in which his axe hit Simon’s skull, causing both men to fall down dead. Einar’s foster-brother Thord turned to strike Kolbein, but received a stabbing blow from Kolbein first that resulted in his death. Battle then erupted as both sides surged forward and met each other.246 A man named Steingrim attempted to force the two groups apart and with the help of a few others succeeded in separating the Norwegians and Greenlanders, but received a mortal wounds for his efforts. Leaving a number of dead and wounded Greenlanders on the field, Kolbein and the rest of the Norwegians escaped to their boats along with their three dead men and sailed away to safety across Einarsfjord.247

Preparing for an attack, the Norwegian merchants began to load all of their goods onto their ships and kept a watch out for the Greenlanders. Meanwhile, Sokki, distraught over the death of his son and foster-son, called for support and sought to lead a party
against the Norwegians. One of his supporters named Hall, however, mentioned that many of the men would likely die in an attack on the large Norwegian ships, now prepared for defense. He offered instead to act arbitrate for the two groups and gained safe passage for Ketil and Kolbein who agreed to abide by his verdict. While Hall deliberated on how best to settle the dispute, he ordered the Norwegians to continue their loading their ships so that they could leave as soon as the weather permitted, and Sokki added that if they delayed their departure they would receive no compensation and could expect an attack from the Greenlanders.

A meeting place and date were soon set, and at the appropriate time, the Greenlanders and Norwegians met to hear Hall’s verdict. Hall declared that he wanted the killings of Einar and Ozur to cancel each other out, but because Einar had a much higher standing, the Norwegians also collectively received outlawry in Greenland and could receive neither food nor shelter in the land. As for the other deaths, they all cancelled each other out: Steingrim the Greenlander and Simon the Norwegian, Thorfinn the Greenlander and Krak the Norwegian, Bjorn the Greenlander and Vighrat the Norwegian, and Thord the Greenlander and Thorir the Norwegian. This left only Thorarin the Greenlander unaccounted for, and thus, the Norwegians owed a payment to his dependents. Sokki called the judgment difficult to accept, but agreed that in the end it was just and left the meeting peacefully. For the next month, ice drifted into the fjords and prevented the Norwegians from leaving. Just as their allotted month of safe passage was about to pass, the ice flows opened up and they sailed out.
The Development of a Greenlandic Identity

The *Tale of the Greenlanders* recounted above touches on a number of key issues regarding the relationship of Norse Greenland with the rest of Europe. It also suggests that by several generations after the initial settlement of the Greenland, the Greenlanders had developed an identity separate from other Scandinavian cultures in the North Atlantic. When colonists led by Eirik the Red first established the Eastern and Western Settlements in Greenland, they were Icelanders establishing an Icelandic society and culture in a new region. Over time, however, a new Greenlandic culture began to emerge on the island, rooted in the Icelandic culture of the original settlers but with its own distinctive identity, laws, and material culture. Elements of this unique identity appear in the *Tale of the Greenlanders* and provide clues as to how the medieval Greenlanders viewed themselves and how the European world viewed Greenland.

In the saga related above, a distinct Greenlandic identity runs throughout the entire story and plays a role in the conflict between the Norwegians and Greenlanders. The first sense of this Greenlandic identity comes from the hapless Arnald who is trying to convince the King Sigurd that he is not qualified to serve as Bishop of Greenland. While listing reasons that he wishes not to go to leave Norway, he mentions that in Greenland he would have to preside over an "unruly population." This statement appears to indicate that many members of continental Europe view the Greenlandic Norse with a degree of contempt, assuming they are somehow more wild and uncivilized than are the peoples living in more easterly lands. Likewise, it probably alludes to the fact that living on the other side of the ocean affords the Greenlanders a degree of autonomy from
centralizing royal and clerical authorities, meaning that without these offices to control them, they are socially less structured and controlled.

While this description is far from complimentary, once he arrives in Greenland, the Bishop soon seems to adopt his new homeland and assumes a Greenlandic identity in the ensuing dispute with the Norwegian merchants. During this entire affair, the saga tale sets up a dichotomy of Norwegians led by Ozur, Kolbein, and Ketil versus Greenlanders led by Bishop Arnald, Einar, and Sokki. In this conflict, all of the Greenlanders appear to support Bishop Arnald in his claim that the goods found on the dead merchants should be used by the church to ensure their eternal salvation. Einar admits that he agrees that Ozur has a right to seek out his inheritance, but in the end goes against his beliefs in the support of the Bishop of Greenland. Despite the close relationship that the Norwegian merchants probably had with certain individuals living in the Settlements, the tale does not mention Greenlanders supporting the Norwegians in any way. Consequently, this us-versus-them mentality purported in the saga seems to suggest that by this point, the Greenlanders had developed an identity as a distinct group and a united society.

As a society virtually independent from Norway and Iceland, the Greenlanders by this time had also developed their own legal system, probably through the Assembly mentioned frequently in the saga tale. In the *Tale of the Greenlanders*, the storyteller references this legal code three times to provide justification for actions taken that favor the Greenlanders over the Norwegians. The first of these instances occurs when Sigurd brings back the goods he found with along with bodies of the dead Norwegian merchants. Although he donates the ships and all of the goods held within in them to the church, he keeps a number of goods for himself and his crew as provided for in Greenlandic law.\(^{253}\)
Later on, when Ozur confronts Bishop Arnald about receiving his inheritance from his uncle's estate, the Bishop cites the fact that he handled the matters of the estate according to the precepts of Greenlandic law. Finally, in possibly the most interesting use of Greenlandic law in the sagas, when Einar addresses the Greenlandic Assembly concerning the dispute over the property he states "[W]e want to follow the laws that are in force here," and cites the fact that the Norwegians have their own laws in their own land. Through this statement, it appears that Einar is making a claim that the Greenlanders as a society have the right to make and enforce their own laws as they see fit. This again implies that Greenlanders had a sense that they were a distinct society, independent from the rule of other Scandinavian lands.

Finally, archaeologists working in the Eastern and Western Settlements have found evidence that over time the material culture of Greenland evolved from objects heavily influenced by Icelandic design to include items that are uniquely Greenlandic. For example, during the excavation of the Farm Beneath the Sand site, a Norse farm occupied from the 11th century until the 14th century in the Western Settlement, archaeologists recovered 174 textile fragments (Figure 18.). Analysis of these textile fragments showed that the majority of the specimens represented a weaving technology known throughout northern Europe that was probably brought to Greenland by women from Iceland. After several generations, however, the weaving pattern began to change at the Farm Beneath the Sand. Rather than using the traditional 10 warp threads to 8 weft threads, the new technique reversed the pattern and had 8 warp threads to 10 weft threads. This trend continued throughout the Norse occupation of the site and resulted in
Figure 18.
Fabric from the Farm Beneath the Sand Site
Ostergard, 62.
a weft dominated structure in the woven fabric and resulted in the development of a new Greenlandic cloth.\textsuperscript{257}

While the development of a new type of cloth does not seem like a great cultural achievement, it does suggest that Greenlandic society, and consequently its material culture, was developing a distinct identity and making technological advancements free of outside influences. As a result, while the settlements in Greenland continued to receive visits from Europe in the form of merchants and church officials, they succeeded in building society with its own unique identity, laws, and material culture. Although the Greenlanders eventually lost their political freedom to Norway in A.D. 1261, they probably continued to practice their own unique form of Scandinavian culture and identify themselves as Greenlanders.

The Church in Greenland

One point of pride that the Greenlanders achieved in A.D. 1125 was the establishment of an independent bishopric in Greenland. As described above, the Greenland Assembly met and decided that they were prosperous enough to support a bishop and that it was time to bring one to the island.\textsuperscript{258} Christianity first came to Greenland sometime around A.D. 1000 when, according to the sagas, Leif Eiriksson brought the new religion to the island and began encouraging the pagan Greenlanders to convert. Evidence suggests, however, that the island did not in reality become entirely Christian until around A.D. 1025.\textsuperscript{259} As Christianity spread, the Greenlanders began building churches, with the first one constructed at Brattahlid for Eirik the Red’s wife Thjodhild (Figure 19.). Initially, these churches were very small and constructed by wealthy chieftains and farmers, but
Figure 19.
Illustration of Thjodhild's Church at Brattahlid, Built Around A.D. 1000
Lynnerup, 289.
later the churches became increasingly large and ostentatious and tended to reflect the ecclesiastical hierarchy.\textsuperscript{260} Eventually, the Eastern Settlement housed two monasteries and fourteen churches, while the Western Settlement had another three churches.\textsuperscript{261}

When Bishop Arnald arrived in Greenland, he established his bishop see at Gardar, a farm located in the heart of the Eastern Settlement between Eiriksfjord and Einarsfjord. Although it was the largest farm in all of Greenland, Gardar did not differ drastically from most other farms, and the bishops lived much the same lifestyle as the neighboring chieftains and wealthy farmers.\textsuperscript{262} The church at Gardar measured thirty-seven yards long and nineteen yards wide, with a nave and two side chapels. Residents built the most recent church at Gardar in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, but two previous structures existed. Throughout Greenland, builders constructed most churches out of stone and turf, with only the latest churches build entirely of stone.\textsuperscript{263} All of the known Bishops of Greenland came from outside the island, with the vast majority, if not all of them, originating in Norway.\textsuperscript{264} This domination of the bishopric by foreigners might result from the long distance between Greenland and Norway and the hardships of such a long voyage. The distance may have caused difficulty in getting attention from the king for Greenlandic candidates and posed an obstacle for Greenlandic men attempting to gain the appropriate ecclesiastical training to receive the title of bishop. In addition, the king may have desired to gain tighter control over Greenland by appointing men loyal to the Norwegian crown as bishops.

Whatever the case may be, when Bishop Arnald arrived in Greenland, he brought with him stronger ties to Europe and European culture that significantly changed Greenlandic society. Many of the smaller family churches scattered across the island
were abandoned as the new cleric and his successors began to implement the parochial system of the Catholic Church. Prior to the arrival of the bishops, all of the churches in Greenland were *eigenkirche*, or private churches, built in connection with a particular farm. The individual that built the church owned it and had rights to collect and use the tithes generated from church services. With the arrival of the bishops, however, much of this power passed from the hands of the wealthy landowners to the new cleric who was the only man in all of Greenland vested with the power to consecrate a church and officially grant permission for a mass. Consequently, the arrival of the Bishop Arnald and his successors served to curb the power of the wealthy chieftains and farmers.

Not only did the bishop wield spiritual authority, according to the *Tale of the Greenlanders*, he also held great secular power within the context of Greenlandic society. Before the establishment of the see, Greenland’s society was dominated by powerful chieftains, farmers, and merchants, such as Sokki and Einar, whose power derived from their wealth in land, goods, servants, and personal prestige. These men made most of the important decisions in Greenland through the Assembly and served as leaders in important trading and hunting expeditions. However, when Bishop Arnald came to Greenland the secular leaders suddenly had a rival power figure. In only a short period of time, Bishop Arnald was able to place himself over one of the most powerful families in Greenland, by making Sokki and Einar do his bidding. For instance, when Bishop Arnald learns about the damage caused to his ship by Ozur in the *Tale of the Greenlanders*, he orders Einar to honor his promise to protect the property of the see and to kill Ozur. Although Einar initially refuses to carry out the order, believing Ozur had a legitimate claim to his relative’s merchandise, he eventually does the Bishop’s bidding.
As a result, Bishop Arnald, in the saga, shows his supremacy over one of the most powerful and well-respected men in Greenland.

While the arrival of the bishop changed the political structure of Greenland, it also influenced the material culture of the settlements. At the Farm Beneath the Sand site, archaeologists uncovered sixteen different artifacts identified as a cross or having a cross image, with more of these images occurring after the early period of the colony. Among these crosses, researchers identified both Latin-style and Greek-style crosses, the former characterized by the transverse line being above the center of the vertical line and the latter crosses having arms of equal length. The presence of both styles of crosses in the assemblage at the Farm Beneath the Sand suggests that the Norse had an intimate knowledge of the Christian fashions in Europe and, thus, probably had ties with the Church in Europe. In addition, archaeologists located two independent crosses at the Farm Beneath the Sand that, for the first recorded time in Greenland, were not associated with a burial. This indicates that people likely used crosses to denote their religious affiliation outside of strictly spiritual events: they might have worn a cross around their neck or hung them inside their houses (Figure 20.).

Finally, the establishment of bishopric in Greenland resulted in the bonding of the island closer to the European religious society through the payment of tithes. According to the custom that developed in Greenland, the Bishop decided which farms paid tithes to which churches and oversaw the shipment of the yearly tithes to Norway so that it could enter the coffer of the Church. These yearly payments typically took the form of a large shipment of natural goods, such as ivory or walrus-skin rope, that the clerics in Europe sold for coin currency. For example, in A.D. 1282, Pope Martin IV wrote
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building pl with pieces stones on v sink into t had been a the room v room to at were remo the openin the founda consisted to gether wit fixed by tw with wood with bale strap of ca

Figure 20.
Devotional Cross Found at the Farm Beneath the Sand Site
Archbishop Jon of Nidaros telling him that Greenland's tithes of ox hides, seal hides, walrus-skin ropes, and ivory should be sold and converted into silver or gold currency.\textsuperscript{272} Again in A.D. 1327, Church documents record a ship arriving in Bergen, Norway with between 800 and 1100 kilos of walrus ivory as payment for dues owed by Greenland for Peter's pence and for the Crusading Tithes. A merchant from Flanders bought the entire stock of ivory for twenty-eight pounds of silver.\textsuperscript{273} By paying such religious dues, the Greenlanders became full participants in European religious culture, with their money contributing to the Crusades in far-off lands and their ivory decorating cathedrals throughout Europe. Tithing also opened up communication and trade routes between Europe and Greenland, because at least once a year a ship had to sail west in order to collect the tithing dues. Consequently, while tithing took away revenue from Greenland, it also served to bond Greenlandic society more closely with the rest of Europe.

Likewise, the arrival of the bishop in Greenland brought about a number of significant changes, from spiritual, to secular, to material culture, and impacted Greenlandic society for much of the remainder of its existence.

**Trade with Europe and the Greenland Economy**

Increased contact with the Catholic Church brought regular voyages from mainland Europe to Greenland to collect tithes and deliver messages. As stated above, this steady contact helped to open trade routes and established stronger relations between Greenland and foreign merchants, integrating the Greenland Norse with the European economy. Evidence of merchants traveling to Greenland, however, exists within all three of the sagas dealing with Greenland and several foreign merchants, such as Thorfin Karlsefni
and his partners Snorri Thorbrandsson, Bjarni Grimolfsson, and Thorhall Gumlason, play a prominent role in the Vinland Sagas. Yet, in the *Tale of the Greenlanders* the extent of the influence and power these traders possessed becomes evident through the action that the Norwegians take against Bishop Arnald and Einar.

The story begins with a crew of Norwegian merchants under the command of a man named Arnbjorn setting sail with Einar and Bishop Arnald so that they could trade in Greenland.\(^2\) When these men disappear, Arnbjorn’s relative Ozur travels to Greenland in order to claim the recently found remains of Arnbjorn’s wrecked ship and the cargo it held. Around the same time that Ozur lands in the Eastern Settlement of Greenland, two other Norwegian merchant ships commanded by Kolbein Thorljotsson and Hermund Kodransson arrived in the Western Settlement.\(^2\) With so many Norwegians arriving in such a short period of time, it seems reasonable to conclude that voyages between Norway and Greenland by the time of the *Tale of the Greenlanders* in the 12th century had become relatively common place. If the voyage was exceptionally treacherous, it is unlikely that Ozur and his companions would mount such an expedition solely to claim a cargo lost at sea.

Similarly, the *Tale of the Greenlanders* does not treat the arrival of new merchants from Norway as a major event, stating, “They came into Eiriksfjord, and people came to meet them and made purchases. Then the men found themselves lodging. The skipper, Ozur, went to the bishop’s house at Gardar and stayed there for the winter.”\(^2\) This passage implies that while people met the ship as it came into the harbor, it was more of a routine affair that did not require any particular fanfare. While Ozur received lodging with Bishop Arnald, his crewmembers found their own lodging, likely
at a price. In contrast, *Eirik the Red's Saga* describes the arrival of Thorfin Karlsfni and his crew of Norwegian merchants to Eiriksfjord in a more celebratory tone. “Eirik rode to the ships, along with other of his countrymen and busy trading commenced. The skippers of the vessels invited Eirik to take his pick of their wares and Eirik repaid them generously, as he invited both crews home to say the winter with him in Brattahlid.”

The arrival of Karlsfni’s men in Eiriksfjord prompted not only the people to come down to trade with them, but also brought Eirik the Red down to the ships, the head chieftain and most powerful man in Greenland. They also all received lodging at Brattahlid with Eirik for the winter and, in general, seem to have been greeted with more honor and enthusiasm than were Ozur and his men. This suggests that during the initial periods of the settlement of Greenland during the 10th and 11th centuries, the arrival of foreign merchants was still a fairly novel and sporadic occurrence, but by the 12th century, as Greenland became more integrated into European society, merchants came more frequently, resulting in less celebration or surprise expressed by their arrival.

If the arrival of more and more Norwegian merchants in Greenland meant that their individual prestige decreased, it also resulted in an increase in their collective power. As evidenced in the *Tale of the Greenlanders*, the Norwegian merchants created a formidable economic, military, and political force on the island by banding together to further their collective cause against the Greenlanders. In the story, the Norwegians succeed in gaining a court hearing from the Greenland Assembly in which they present lawsuits against Bishop Arnald and Einar, possibly the two most powerful and influential figures in all of Greenland. When these political moves fail, the Norwegians together fought Einar and his supporters in open battle. Since these foreigners had the strength
and will to take on two of the most powerful figures in Greenland, merchants in Greenlandic society apparently possessed a great deal of political authority.

Even more important was the power that these foreign merchants exerted over the Greenlandic economy. Lying on the extreme western reaches of European society, Greenland was far outside of the normal trading routes and received visits only from those merchants daring enough to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, the Greenlanders were at the mercy of these traders in regards to the prices paid for various trade items. Greenland was chronically short of certain essential commodities as iron and wood. As described in the 13th century medieval Norwegian book the King's Mirror, "It happens in Greenland . . . that all that is taken there from other countries is costly there, because the country lies so far from other countries that people rarely travel there. Every item, with which they might help the country, they must buy from other countries, both iron and all the timber with which they build houses." Thus, for at least part of their history, the Greenlanders relied upon foreign merchants to import iron and lumber to their settlements for house building, boat construction, and other daily needs. This reliance on an outside source for such commodities gave the Norwegian merchants a virtual monopoly on trading these important goods, providing them with much of their economic clout.

Utilitarian goods, however, were not the only things the Norwegians brought with them. In addition to selling essential materials, they also probably traded fashionable items and luxury goods from Europe that allowed the Greenlanders to keep up with the latest fashions on the continent and to participate in European material culture. At the Farm Beneath the Sand, researchers found several combs made of caribou antler. The
first of these, a single sided comb, was about 20 cm long, with a slightly curved top and ornamental horn on either end (Figure 21., A). Archaeologists have not found many similar combs in Greenland, but this type of comb is known from Norway, Sweden, and Germany and dates from the beginning of the Viking Age until the 13th century.\textsuperscript{281} Another comb found at the site had decorations identical to a comb found in Lund, Sweden and one found in Oslo, Norway (Figure 21., B). A third comb had a dome-shaped body and was stylistically similar to combs known from Trondheim and Bergen in Norway (Figure 21., C).\textsuperscript{282} These items in particular are interesting because they are made of caribou antler, a readily available resource in medieval Greenland, and were likely produced locally and intentionally made to resemble European combs.

Greenlanders seem to have sought to mimic artistic and decorative designs from mainland Europe and copy the designs on goods brought into the country by foreign traders, possibly to feel a connection with European society.

In order to gain utilitarian and luxury items from the Norwegians and other foreign merchants, the Greenlandic Norse had to possess trade goods of their own precious enough to entice merchants across the Atlantic Ocean. Fortunately, the Greenlanders had abundant natural resources such as walrus ivory and polar bear skins in their colony, but first they had to travel into the wilderness and attain them. One of the major hunting regions was an area north of the Western Settlement known as Nordrsetur, modern day Disko Bay. Located about 800 kilometers from the settlements, the bay had rich hunting grounds for walrus and polar bears, providing valuable trade goods in a relatively close proximity to their homes (Figure 22.).\textsuperscript{283} This land proved so important to the Greenlanders that a A.D. 1261 treaty between Greenland and Norway appears to
Figure 21.
Combs from The Farm Beneath the Sand
Arneborg, "Artefacts from Rooms XVII, XVIII, XXVII, and XIX," 39 (A), 41 (B,C).
Figure 22.

1555 Depiction of a Walrus Hunt

recognize the territory as an extension of the settlements stating, “The Greenlanders agree to pay fines for homicides, whether the killing takes place in the settlements or ‘in the northern summer camps up to just under the Pole star.’”\textsuperscript{284} However, hunting in these northern regions also represented a large expenditure in time, boats, efforts, and even lives.\textsuperscript{285}

At the beginning of the \textit{Tale of the Greenlanders}, a man named Sigurd appears to be hunting in these northern waters and has a debate with his crew over whether they should continue on with their hunting or return to the settlements.

Then Sigurd said, “Which would you rather do, turn back or go on further? There’s not much summer left, but the catch has been poor.”

The crew said they would rather turn back, and said it was very dangerous to navigate the big fjords below the glaciers.

He said that was true – “but I have the feeling that there will be a bigger catch awaiting us if we can get there.”\textsuperscript{286}

This dialogue adds insight into how the Greenlanders themselves weighed the danger of the trips to Nordrsetur. Sigurd and his crew actively weigh the benefits of continuing on with the hunt against the danger that a prolonged stay in the region past summer holds for their lives. Shortly after this conversation, the men find proof of the deadliness of the region when they come across the remains of Arnbjorn’s ship and crew.\textsuperscript{287} Although experienced seamen and likely used to hardships, the men of Arnbjorn’s crew succumbed to starvation and exhaustion in Nordrsetur and died before they could sail safely from the region.
What then were the benefits that caused men to risk their lives in such a hostile environment? According to both the historic and archaeological record, men made trips to Nordrsetur in order to hunt walrus and polar bears. Evidence of the success of these hunts appears in the many sites in the settlements. Worked pieces of walrus crania and os penis occur in the archaeological assemblages of most sites, with walrus post canines producing raw material used in making buttons, chess pieces, and figures of animals such as walrus and polar bear. Although researchers typically recover some post-cranial remains, the majority of walrus material comes from the skull, in particular the maxillae. Consequently, most researchers believe that hunter killed and butchered the walrus while in Nordrsetur and brought home only the head, or possibly just the maxilla. The final extraction of the valuable ivory tusk then occurred at home during the winter, probably under more controlled circumstances than would be possible in the hunting grounds.

Polar bear remains also occur frequently in the Norse settlements sites in Greenland, but typically only include the phalanges and other elements of the bear that would be left in the hide after a quick field skinning.

While most settlement sites exhibit walrus and/or polar bear remains as described above, the Sandnes site in the Western Settlement had produced the highest concentration of walrus remains anywhere in Greenland. Archaeologists working at the site have discovered, however, that the density of walrus bone fragments increases between A.D. 1150 and A.D. 1200. In all likelihood, part of this increase results from past excavation techniques that failed to recover and identify all of the bone fragments. But even with this bias, the amount of bone still seems to become larger during this time period.

During this general time frame, Greenland was undergoing a number of important
changes, like the founding of the bishopric, and was strengthening its ties with Europe. Consequently, the increase in the number of walrus bones at Sandnes may reflect a growing trade with Europe that required hunters in the Nordrsetur to bring back more walrus resources.

Because of the preponderance of walrus maxilla and polar bear phalanges, bones that indicate the hunters probably brought back only the tusks and hides of the animals, it appears that the trips made to Nordrsetur were meant as cash hunts to gain items for trade and only indirectly used for subsistence. Walrus limb bones do exist on a number of Western Settlement farms, indicating they were used as food, but throughout the majority of sites walruses do not appear to represent one of the primary food sources for the inhabitants. Instead, the Greenlanders appear to have relied upon seals and deer for the majority of their meat—more so than any other Norse settlements in the North Atlantic which usually focused on mammals and fish. The Greenlanders appear to have hunted harp seals, hooded seals, and common seals in collaborative efforts that probably involved groups of hunters driving the seals into nets and drowning them or chasing them onto shore and where they could be dispatched easily. Like the cash hunts, seal hunting occurred away from the settlements in the outer fjords, particularly during the periods when the seals migrated. In addition, the Greenlanders, particularly those living in the Western Settlement, relied heavily upon caribou for a terrestrial meat source, as evidenced by the number of caribou bonds found at many settlement sites.

Greenlanders, like other European societies, also raised domestic animals including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, and dogs, and relied upon these animals for meat, clothing, and dairy products. In both the Eastern and Western Settlements, the
majority of domesticates were either cattle or caprines, with the number of goats, in particular, occurring in a much higher incident that in any other Scandinavian region in the North Atlantic. This likely resulted from the fact that the Greenlanders could raise goats more effectively in a tundra environment dominated by dwarf trees and shrubs and may have utilized mixed flocks of goats and sheep to better utilize the available resources. While this would not produce large quantities of wool, it would allow the Norsemen a ready supply of meat and other animal products. Cattle, on the other hand, were apparently not raised for their beef, but rather kept primarily to produce milk and milk goods. Thus, through these domestic animals, the Greenlanders appear to have produced food, clothing, and occasionally surplus good for trade that when combined with the animal products and meat they hunted allowed them to subsist in the sub-arctic environment of Greenland.

While the Norse made voyages to the Nordrsetur and the outer fjords to hunt animals for trade and subsistence, evidence also suggests the Greenlanders made trips to the New World in search of lumber and iron. An entry in the Icelandic Annals from 1347 records that a small storm battered Greenlandic ship blew up on the coast of Iceland after losing its way home from Markland. This ship was probably in Markland gathering either lumber or iron for use in the Greenland. Recent analysis of wood taken from ten different ship parts found in Greenland shows that all of the wood is either spruce or larch. Neither species grows in Greenland, and larch is not native to Norway. The researchers concluded that the wood used to construct the ship parts came from driftwood found along the shores, but salt-soaked driftwood is hard to work with, less resilient than freshly cut wood, and poorly suited for use on ocean-going ships. However, large
spruce and larch trees suitable for use in ship building do grow along the protected shores of Ungava Bay of northern Labrador (Figure 23.). This may have been the destination of the voyage recorded in the 1347 Icelandic Annals. In this region, the treeline spikes north out of the territory of the Native Americans and the bay typically does not freeze over until November, providing the Norse with a safe and easily accessible source of good lumber. 362

In addition to collecting lumber in the Ungava Bay region, the Norse may have sought to gather iron. In this region lie deposits of iron ore in which the top layer is a carbonate formation that would simply need to be scooped up and smelted into portable blooms for transport back to Greenland. Iron does not occur anywhere else along the Labrador coast. 303 Archaeologists working at Gardar and other sites in Greenland have found smithies and many pieces of slag that are consistent with the refinement of crude iron blooms. No heath pits for the smelting of iron from bog ore exist in the archaeological record in Greenland, however, and more importantly Greenland does not have deposits of bog iron. 304 It seems likely that the Greenlanders imported unworked iron blooms from regions such as Ungava Bay and then smelted their own iron on their farms because merchants would probably not transport unworked blooms to lumber starved Greenland. Instead they would have likely brought processed iron. 305 Therefore, it seems probable that the Greenlanders eventually began to return to the New World, making trips to Markland in search of lumber and iron deposits in order to eliminate the need to import the expensive and essential materials from foreign merchants.

As has been demonstrated above, the Norse Greenlanders relied upon European society for products such as lumber, iron, and other luxury and fashion items and
Figure 23.
Modern-Day map of Labrador including Ungava Bay
Rowe, n.p.
attempted to ease this dependence by finding the material locally or producing them from alternate regional sources. But how much did European society rely upon Greenlandic goods in return?

From Greenland, the European markets received a number of natural goods that could not be attained anywhere else within the European sphere of influence. Pelts of muskrats, black and white bear, mink, otter, wolverine, fox, and wolf all came in from the Greenlandic hunters. Oil from the livers of cod and Greenland Sharks were exported for heating and lighting purposes. Eiderdown and sealskins provided warm garments as did the coarse, warm wool spun and woven by the Greenlandic women. European buyers sought all three products. Other more curious and rare items fetched higher prices. White gyrfalcons were exceptionally difficult to catch and known almost exclusively from Greenland. Therefore the Greenlanders had a monopoly on the marketing of these expensive birds, rumored to be so highly sought after that the Duke of Burgundy ransomed his son from a group of Saracens for only of them. Such exotic curios made valuable gifts, and the Tale of the Greenlanders mentions that Einar presented the King of Norway with a live bear, most likely a polar bear, as thanks for his assistance in finding Greenland and bishop. Since Greenland was the sole reliable source of many of these products, the Norse Greenlanders were able to control the flow of the goods, issuing rare animals to powerful figures in order to gain their favor and trading other valuable products for material needed back in Greenland.

Of all of the resources at the disposal of the Norse Greenlanders, however, the walrus produced the greatest number of goods sought after by European merchants. From the skin of the walrus, Europeans made a thick rope, unparalleled at the time for its
durability, and used it as ship’s rope to tow and bind vessels together.\textsuperscript{310} More valuable, though, was the ivory gained from tusks of the large sea mammals. From the beginning of the Crusades in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century until the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, hostilities between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land prevented African ivory from reaching Europe.\textsuperscript{311} During this time, the only dependable source of the material lay in the Greenland where hunters procured it from both walruses and narwhal. While narwhal horns typically proved too brittle for carving, they were still valuable as “unicorn horns” and were believed to hold magical and medicinal powers. Walrus tusks, on the other hand, proved exceptionally suitable for carving and were in demand throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{312}

Ivory working in medieval Western Europe dates back to the Carolingian period, when a restoration of Roman art led to the development of a new artistic culture in the region that included ivory reliefs.\textsuperscript{313} From this period until the end of the Renaissance, the demand for ivory remained high throughout Europe. Beginning in the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} centuries, just as the first colonists began to settle Greenland, the lower Rhine region and Flanders emerged as important centers for ivory working; in particular a number of masters lived in Liége.\textsuperscript{314} By the time of the Romanesque period in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, artisans were creating beautiful ivory bishop’s crosiers along with other religious symbols and decorations. Secular leaders also began to commission works of art in ivory for their personal use, such as caskets, knife and sword handles, chess pieces, combs, and ornaments (Figure 24.).\textsuperscript{315}

This increasing interest and demand for ivory objects increased the value and need for new shipments of walrus tusks from Greenland, and as the colonies began to grow, the Greenlanders likely recognized the benefit of exporting this limited resource
Figure 24.

Objects Made of Walrus Ivory from Greenland: (A) Bishop’s Crosier from Gardar, Greenland, (B) Chessmen from the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, and (C) Princess Gunhild’s Cross from Denmark.

Arneborg, “Greenland and Europe,” 312 (A), 305 (B), and 310 (C).
and started to expand their hunting activities in Nordrsetur. The increasing amount of walrus maxilla bones at the Sandnes site also probably reflects the Greenlanders’ attempts to meet this increasing demand for ivory. Evidence of the importance of ivory in the medieval economy of Europe is reflected in the *Tale of the Greenlanders* through Einar’s gift of ivory to the King of Norway in order “to advance his case with the chieftains.” Einar presented this gift to the leading men of Norway before he gave the king the bear or any other good, which suggests that of all of the goods exported from Greenland, ivory represented the one universally excepted as a valuable commodity.

In the end, the trading relationship between Greenland and Europe between the 10th and 13th centuries appears to have been an almost equal partnership. From Europe, Greenland received essential goods such as iron and timber along with other luxury items that allowed the Greenlanders to import aspects of continental Europe to their island society. In return, the Europeans received from Greenland furs, oil, walrus-skin ropes, ivory, gyrfalcons, and a host of curios valued for their mystical, magical, and even comical powers. By relying upon a combination of imported goods, domestic items, and natural resources, the Norse Greenlanders succeeded in surviving in the often harsh environment of the Greenland sub-arctic. Out of an initially Norse-Icelandic culture, the Greenlanders built their own distinct identity and culture, but retained relatively strong ties to Europe through the Church and trade, and from the late 10th century to the 13th century, created the westernmost outpost of medieval European society.
CONCLUSION

Through my examination of Norse society in Greenland and Vinland, I have come to the conclusion that the sagas are valuable resources that researchers should examine more carefully, for they hold cultural truths unattainable from any other annal, church document, or archaeological report. Unlike formal documents such as annals and other official documents, the sagas are stories. They are meant to be enjoyed by audiences, while imparting factual truths about certain events or people. While undoubtedly stories such as these are embellished for interest's sake or even for propagandistic reasons, such exaggerations and distortions do not automatically render the sagas invalid for historic research. Instead, the historian must approach these stories with the same deal of skepticism that he or she uses dealing with any historic document. All histories are by their very nature an interpretation of a certain event or chain of events. As long as researchers keep in mind that the sagas are not word for word literal truths, the tales provide a valuable tool for the examination of past cultures.

In this light, my research leaves me skeptical that the three sagas discussed in this paper are purely products of their time, providing more information regarding the 14th and 15th centuries when they were first recorded than they do about the time period they represent. By comparing the stories recounted in Eirik the Red's Saga, The Saga of the Greenlanders, and The Tale of the Greenlanders with other historical and archaeological records, it has become apparent that the sagas hold important insights into the culture of medieval Greenland and Vinland that other sources of data miss. For instance, the Vinland Sagas collectively provide descriptions of Native American material culture that corresponds well with archaeological evidence from the time period. The Tale of the
Greenlanders recounts Sigurd's hunting voyage to the wilderness, which echoes descriptions of Nordrsetur in the archaeological and historical literature. Finally, and most impressively, the Saga of the Greenlanders tells about the Native Americans trading entire pelts for mere scraps of red cloth in a story that initially seems ludicrous, but when compared with the historic record it is apparent that the historic Native American groups highly valued the color red and attached cultural significance to objects with that hue.

Consequently, it appears that the sagas hold valuable cultural insights not only for the time period in which they were written, but also for the era in which the action occurs. As oral histories, the sagas are among the few documents that allow members of the culture to tell their story in their own words and cultural milieu. Transcribed after centuries later into writing, the stories may hold cultural markings that even the transcriber did not fully understand when he first committed the story to paper. Thus, while they, like all other documents, have their flaws, the sagas provide a valuable resource to academia that scholars interested in understanding medieval culture should examine closely for subtle insights into past societies. By using the three sagas described above as the starting point for my research, I had a model to test against other historical and archaeological sources, which, in my opinion resulted in a fuller understanding of medieval Norse society in Greenland and Vinland than I would have attained by relying solely on historic documents or the archaeological record.

Through an examination of Eirik the Red's Saga, The Saga of the Greenlanders, and The Tale of the Greenlanders, and subsequent comparisons of these texts with the historic and archaeological literature, three phases of cultural development become apparent during the first centuries of Norse Greenland. The first of these phases lasts
from A.D. 985 to some time around A.D. 1000. During this span of time, Icelandic
colonists under the leadership of Eirik the Red settled Greenland and established a culture
primarily based upon the Icelandic model. Most of the men that followed Eirik to
Greenland were in some way or another desperate to leave Iceland. Some were outlaws,
others were debtors. But for most everyone who sailed to Greenland, the land promised
them new opportunities and the chance for riches. As the land became populated, the
Norsemen set up the Eastern and Western Settlement several hundred kilometers apart
and began a pagan, hierarchical society dominated by powerful chieftains, farmers, and
merchants living on dispersed farms throughout the fjords and valleys of the region.

Several generations after the initial settlement of Greenland, the second phase of
cultural change began with two major events: the establishment of Christianity and the
undertaking of the Vinland voyages. The sagas record that Leif Eiriksson brought
Christianity to Greenland around A.D. 1000, and most scholars agree that by A.D. 1025
the new religion had taken hold as the dominant faith in Greenland. While the struggle
between paganism and Christianity never resulted in widespread strife or division in
Greenland, the adoption of the religion undoubtedly altered the culture of the Norse
society by outlawing numerous traditional pagan practices and through more subtle
means.

Shortly after Christianity arrived in Greenland, the actual Vinland voyages began,
with wealthy chieftains and merchants associated with the household of Eirik the Red
leading expeditions to explore the newly found lands to the west. During the time period
between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1020, Greenlandic society likely focused much of its energy
on supporting and manning these expeditions in the hopes of finding rich new lands.
Initially, these voyages sought to simply explore the land and assess its suitability for exploitation and settlement. However, after the first couple of voyages returned laden with valuable cargos of lumber and grapes, the new motive for the expeditions became not just exploration, but also the attainment of the more of these natural resources and settlement of the land if possible. The sagas relate that the Norsemen succeeded in establishing temporary settlements at Straumsfjord, Hóp, and Leifsbuðir, but no permanent settlement ever resulted. Archaeologically, a Norse settlement is known from the site of L’Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland, which dates to this time period and supports the sagas’ description of Norse camps in the New World.

While exploring Vinland, the Norse Greenlanders became the first Europeans to encounter and interact with the Native Americans. According to the sagas, these meetings occurred sporadically. The sparse archaeological record on Norse-Native contact seems to confirm that the two groups did not have prolonged and intimate relations. But, this does not mean that the two societies did not know each other well or that they did not associate with one another. The sagas indicate quite the opposite because they provide what seems to be relatively accurate data on the Native Americans and recount that the Norse traded with the Indians on several occasions, with both groups receiving goods from the other. These trading interactions may have been misinterpreted by the Norse, however, because rather than seeking to gain valuable goods through the trade, the Native American may only have sought to build a symbolic relationship with the newcomers through the exchange of material objects. Other instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication likely occurred between the Greenlanders and Indians, as each group attempted to understand concepts and symbols foreign to their
native culture. In addition, since the two groups practiced relatively similar subsistence patterns, the two groups probably came into conflict for certain types of game and regions.

Because of these misunderstandings and competitions, the Norse and Native Americans in several instances in the sagas came into direct conflict and fought short battles against one another. At other times, individual groups of Indians and Norsemen ambushed and killed members of the other group seemingly for no reason. As a result of this hostility, the Norse eventually decided to abandon Vinland without ever attempting a major settlement, ceasing the voyages altogether around A.D. 1020, likely due to the threat of violence posed by the large native populations. In the end, the Norse and Native Americans seem to have had relatively little direct contact with one another. The relationships between the two groups varied widely, ranging from peaceful trade to outright hostility, and appear to have been somewhat dependant upon the situation in which the two cultures met. Because the Norse and Native American did not experience prolonged contact with one another, cultural exchanges were likely minimal.

Finally, the last phase of early Norse society in Greenland lasted from A.D. 1020 to some time in the late 1200s or early 1300s. As the Vinland voyages ceased and the Norse Greenlanders abandoned the idea of attempting a new settlement in the west, the focus and energy of society turned inward, and the Norse began to build a mature and distinct cultural identity as Greenlanders. During the period from A.D. 1020 until A.D. 1125 and beyond, the Norse in Greenland began to develop a culture distinct from their Icelandic predecessors, socially and culturally. The Greenland Assembly passed laws that deal specifically to Greenland and the situations that occurred there, and as the
Norwegians in the *Tale of the Greenlanders* make clear, these laws did not always correspond to the laws in place in other Norse North Atlantic societies. Similarly, in the material culture of the Greenland, differences begin to occur that distinguish Greenlandic archaeological assemblages from those in Iceland. These changes indicate that during this period, the Greenlanders actively began to create a cultural identity unique among the Norse societies in the North Atlantic.

While continuing to build their own cultural identity, beginning in A.D. 1125 and lasting until the late 1200s/early 1300s and beyond the Norse of Greenland attempted to integrate themselves into the larger medieval European world. They initiated this process in 1125 when they successfully petitioned the King of Norway and received a bishopric, as recounted in the *Tale of the Greenlanders*. The arrival of Bishop Arnald in Greenland rapidly changed and transformed society by adding a new power figure outside of the traditional chieftains, farmers, and merchants. As the head of the church in Greenland, bishops represented the highest ecclesiastical power in the land and both dispensed religious duties and handled the lucrative finances of the Church. In political and social matters, powerful bishops succeeded in forcing the once dominant chieftains to do their bidding, demonstrated in the relationship between Arnald and Einar. However, the bishop also served to integrate Greenland more fully into European society by ensuring the regular flow of communication and annual tithes between the western island and continental Europe.

This steady flow of ships from Greenland to Europe brought with it an increasing number of merchants to Greenland who traded lumber, iron, and certain luxury goods to the Greenlanders, and in return received products such as ivory, gyrfalcons, and polar
bear skins, which were gained from hunting in the wild areas surrounding the
Settlements. Through this trade, the Greenlanders gained essential items such as iron and
lumber, but also began to import fashionable items from Europe, attempting in some
instances to reproduce these European items, as exemplified in the combs from the Farm
Beneath the Sand site. These European-influenced items likely represent an attempt by
the Norse Greenlanders to participate in the greater European culture. On the other side
of the ocean, the continental Europeans became dependent upon the Greenlanders for the
procurement of such luxury goods as ivory and walrus throughout the High Middle Ages.
Consequently, trade bound the Greenlanders and Europeans through mutual need and
allowed the Greenlanders access to European cultural goods, integrating them more
thoroughly into the European world.

Although Greenland existed as the extreme western outpost of European culture,
through the Church and trade, the Greenlanders managed to integrate themselves into
European society. Growing and developing throughout three initial cultural stages, by
the 1300s, the Norse Greenlanders lived in a stable and mature society that possessed a
distinct Greenlandic identity, but which existed as a part of European society. Living on
the border between the New World and Old World, over the course of their development,
the Greenlanders learned to interact and exchange with both Native Americans and
Europeans. According to the stories recorded in Eirik the Red's Saga, The Saga of the
Greenlanders, and The Tale of the Greenlanders, the Norse Greenlanders interacted with,
traded with, and at times fought with both the Native Americans and other Europeans, but
throughout these encounters developed and retained a distinctive Greenlandic identity
and culture. This culture, developed in a new world and forced to deal with peoples,
situations, and environments that no European peoples had ever faced before, provided the Norse people of Greenland with a strong and stable society by the 14th century that would allow the people of Greenland to continue to inhabit and prosper in their settlements for the several more centuries.
Endnotes


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