

**The Vínland Sagas as Propaganda  
for the Christian Church:**

*Freydís and Gudríd as Paradigms for  
Eve and the Virgin Mary*



by  
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**Master Thesis in Nordic Viking and Medieval Studies  
Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies  
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## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Terje Spurkland. Without his help and advice regarding the technical, theoretical, and bibliographical aspects of this dissertation, as well as his steadfast moral support, this dissertation would not have been completed. I am also very grateful for the guidance and assistance I have received from Karl Johansson and Christian Keller in finding the proper sources, and during the editing process.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Leading problem:**

Over the last two centuries, the Vínland Sagas have become some of the most discussed of Medieval Nordic documents. There are arguments about every aspect of the sagas: What the name Vínland means, if Vínland existed, where it would have been geographically, and how much of their content is historically accurate. However, very few arguments have taken into account the strong Christian influence on written works of this period, and the interest the Church may have had in adapting popular tales to teach the populace about Christian values. While I believe that there certainly are aspects of the sagas that are factual, it is difficult, if not impossible, to single these elements out from the rest of the content. I suggest in my thesis that not only were the stories of the Vínland voyages adapted by the Church to reflect its values, but that many of the smaller scenes throughout the sagas came directly from common myths and folklore found across Europe. With reference to the first point, I shall in particular make a comparison of two primary female characters in the sagas, Freydís and Guðríd, to the Biblical characters of Eve and Mary, respectively.<sup>1</sup> I hope to show by the end of this dissertation how the historical facts of the Vínland journeys could have been rearranged and added to in order to better serve Church needs during a crucial period in the implementation of Church authority across Europe, particularly in Scandinavia.

## **1.2 Sources:**

How does one begin to address the concept of Vínland and the problems associated with it, when even our two main primary sources differ on the facts of certain events, and both are frequently used out of context? Most of the secondary sources disagree with each other outright. I shall be looking at the sagas with a focus on finding evidence that the Vínland sagas are made up of bits and pieces of other folkmyths, and with Christian paradigms that are evident enough to suggest a Church agenda in their composition. This will involve looking at sources that are not necessarily directly related to Vínland, both the Bible itself and other contemporary folktales from around Europe where I can access them. I shall especially be using a comparison of Freydís Eiríksdóttir and Guðríd to Eve and the Virgin

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the course of this paper, I shall use the modernized versions of names, such as Guðríd (instead of Guðríðr). However, in direct quotations I shall use whatever form is used in the original citation.

Mary respectively as evidence for Christian paradigms within the sagas. There may be some truth to the sagas, especially regarding personal names and settlement information, as well as information about the technology and social structures. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know with certainty the level to which these sources can be trusted, and so I will only address these “potentially factual” elements where they can assist my primary thesis.

My conclusion is that it is futile to search the Vínland sagas for the narrative core of what the first European explorers in America actually reported. Oral traditions changed from generation to generation and the written texts were also subject to alteration. Although we can compare the two different versions of the Vínland sagas it is very difficult to know how the texts changed and why [...] There is no doubt that people from Iceland and Greenland journeyed to America in the eleventh century but the Vínland sagas are obviously unsatisfactory sources for details of their achievements. On the other hand people may well have continued such journeyings to America from Greenland at intervals thereafter. The saga descriptions of the Vínland voyages could have been based on later reports and for that reason are worthy of serious scholarly consideration. The saga accounts bear witness to great sailing achievements of Norwegians, Icelanders and Greenlanders, both in the early eleventh century and, no less, in the high middle ages between 1050 and 1350.” (Helgi Þorláksson 2002: 75)

There is no doubt that written sources alone cannot be used as proof of voyages to an idyllic land of wine. This is, of course, an obvious statement, as all the problems that apply to working with written sources certainly are applicable here. There is very little information we can get out of the sagas themselves, other than trying to find metaphors and connections to the social, political, and religious situation of the time.

### **1.2.1 Primary Sources in addition to the Vínland Sagas:**

The idea of some mythic place even further afield than Scandinavia began as early as the fourth century A.D., from the voyages of Pytheaes and his mention of the Arctic island of Thule. Adam of Bremen writes of Helgoland lying nearer to Norway than Iceland and Greenland although a similar title was later used to refer to the landmark reached prior to Markland and Vínland, which again raises the question of whether he was just combining all the tales told to him into one larger work. The Celts, for example, had many different names for holy lands across the ocean to the west, and it would have been easy to create a Nordic version, such as Vínland hit Gotha, in this environment. According to Nansen, the Irish saint, Brendan, supposedly voyaged to the “Insula Deliciosa” (strangely close in title to Insula Fortunata), as is documented in *Navigatio Sancti Brandani*, a description of his seven year voyage in search of Paradise. Its other name, Insula Uvarum, means Grape Island. In

addition, the *Imram Maelduin* from the eleventh century, also Irish, tells of an island full of trees with fruits that produced wonderful wine (Nansen 1911: 358 – 360).

When we find that all these statements about the northern islands and countries, both before and after the mention of Wineland, are more or less fables or plagiarisms, when we further see what he [Adam of Bremen] was capable of relating about countries that lay nearer, and about which he might easily have obtained information – for instance, his Land of Women on the Baltic, to which he transfers the Amazons and Cynocephali of the Greeks [...] is it credible that what he says about the most distant country, Wineland, should form the only exception in this concatenation of fable and reminiscence and suddenly be genuine and not borrowed from Isidore, to whom it bears such a striking resemblance? It must be more probable that he heard a name, Wineland, perhaps confused with Finland, and in the belief that this meant the land of wine, he then, quite in harmony with what he has done in other places, transferred thereto Isidore's description of the "Insulae Fortunatae". When, therefore, Norsemen really found new countries in the west, precisely in the quarter where the mythical "Vínland hit Gotha" should be, according to Irish legend, this was simply proof that the country did exist; and the tales and ideas about it were transferred to the newly discovered land. (Nansen 1911: 383 – 384)

As I will show in later sections, the Vínland sagas are quite clearly a conglomeration of myths and folklore from many different regions across Europe and the Mediterranean world, as well as a carrying for Christian ideals and paradigms. They may be a wonderful series of heroic stories, but there is no reason to consider them histories.

Despite these setbacks, there are still elements within the sagas that can be very useful to us. The Vínland sagas are an informative source for the study of both the strengths and weaknesses of Old Norse navigation. The accounts show clearly that on these voyages the Vikings had reached the limits of their nautical and navigational abilities... It is sometimes stated that the Vínland expeditions are of limited historical importance because they lack any influence on the later history of the region. Be that as it may, these accounts are still a fertile source for studying how people apply knowledge and skills to achieve control of their environment and supposedly to improve their living conditions. (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 2002: 120)

Although much of the content of the sagas are clearly fiction, the composers would have been using technological and environmental descriptions of which they were familiar. It is likely that navigational and nautical information, as well as information about necessary resources, contained in the sagas are based in the truth of the time period, and can therefore be used as a source for determining the likelihood of journeys to the western Atlantic.

Many cultures have traditions about fantasy kingdoms that are difficult to reach. There is the Celtic legend of Avalon, which one could reach by sailing into the sunset over a

boundless sea. Irish tradition tells of St. Brendan travelling by sea for seven years, where he saw icebergs, whales, volcanoes, and foggy islands to the west of Ireland. Many scholars consider that Vinland is the mythical land of the Vikings and that it never existed in reality. "The Icelandic sagas and the few other written sources are only repeating myths that have no basis in reality" (Vinner 1993 B: 67 – 68). Authors such as Adam of Bremen, who were educated and had traveled through different countries, would have had knowledge of various myths and local folklore and used them in their own compositions. There is no reason to assume that Adam was doing his own personal research to the Land of Wine, when he could just compile the myths with which he was familiar into one volume from the comfort of his own home. As a traveler and member of court life, he would have learned many different tales from many different regions across Europe, and used these in his accounts of faraway lands. For example, Sven II of Denmark, at who's court Adam was a guest, could have brought the Insular Fortunata myth to Adam's attention, and Adam in turn could have made a false etymology from Anglo-Saxon origins and merged it into the Greenlanders' experiences with the Skraelings. In the following sections, I will address some of the figures who can be called responsible for the development of the Vinland myths.

### **Isidore:**

Saint Isidore was archbishop of Sevilla for more than three decades, until his death in 636 A.D. Most Medieval works regarding the Iberian Peninsula are based on his histories. In addition, he wrote many works about science, medicine, and geography. His most famous work, the *Etymologiae*, could be referred to as the first known encyclopedia. Isidore's concept of a round Earth was used as a model by many through the Middle Ages, although it is unclear whether he referred to a flat disk-shape, or a globular sphere. In his chapter entitled *De terra et partibus* (The earth and its parts), he discusses the islands, saying that "Of these the best known and the biggest, which many of the ancients investigated with export effort, should be noted" (Isidore: 293). The eighth island he mentions could easily be a precursor to Vinland:

The Fortunate Isles (Fortunatarum insulae) signify by their name that they produce all kinds of good things, as if they were happy and blessed with an abundance of fruit. Indeed, well-suited by their nature, they produce fruit from very precious trees; the ridges of their hills are spontaneously covered with grapevines; instead of weeds, harvest crops and garden herbs are common there. Hence the mistake of pagans and the poems by worldly poets, who believed that these isles were Paradise because of the fertility of their soil. They are situated



in the Ocean, against the left side of Mauretania, closest to where the sun sets, and they are separated from each other by the intervening sea. (op. cit.: 294)

Of course, situating these isles “against the left side of Mauretania” makes it likely that Isidore referred to the Canary Islands. However, these directions are vague enough that really any unknown area in the Atlantic Ocean could perhaps be the Fortunate Isles, and this description could well have been one of the impetuses behind the creation of the Vinland concept. He does say, as quoted above, that the Fortunate Isles are among and largest and best known of the islands. The *Etymologiae* were with all probability known amongst scholars in Medieval Iceland, and could have been connected with stories told by Norsemen who had traveled to North America and back. This could have been done intentionally by one composer or indirectly over several hundred years of development and change. The process can never be known due to the oral aspect of the Vinland Sagas.

### **St. Brendan:**

”The legend of Brendan the Navigator is a Christianized variation on one of the oldest known literary themes, that of the odyssey, a tradition of which the ultimate origins can be traced back, [...] by way of the Persian *Thousand and One Nights*, the Irish *immrama* [voyage-tales], the Latin, Greek and Sumerian epics, to at least the third millennium B.C. [...]” (Short and Merrilees 1979: 1). The Navigatio of Saint Brendan successfully combines a host of disparate traditions, from the Irish myths of the ”happy other world” in the western ocean, to the Christian versions of heaven and hell (op. cit.: 4). After almost two months of rowing, the wind brings the voyagers to an island ”whose high cliffs force them to search for three days before they can find a suitable place to land”. After years at sea, they reach Paradise, with fields of flowers and fruit. The journey back to Ireland took only three months (op. cit.: 18).

It has been suggested that within a hundred years of his death (thought to be sometime between 570 and 583 A.D.), a primitive account of Brendan’s search for the Happy Land already existed in Latin. This clerical work then influenced the secular heroic tale of the *Voyage of Bran*, written in late seventh or early eighth centuries A.D., about an Irish hero (not directly linked to St. Brendan) who went on maritime adventures. The official *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, written in Latin perhaps as early as 800, in turn influenced the creation of another heroic voyage, the *Voyage of Mael Dúin* (O’Meara 1982: ix-x). These tales of voyages, including that of St. Brendan, were not uninfluenced by early literary tales from other regions, such as the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. However, even the secular Irish stories show

a distinct Christian influence. The *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, as an ecclesiastical work, could even be called a Christian allegory. What is clear is that there are many connections between this work and the Vinland Sagas.

After some days the holy father prescribed a fast for three days. Then when the three days were over a great bird was seen flying near the boat, carrying a branch of an unknown tree. At the tip of the branch was a cluster of grapes of extraordinary redness [...] Then Saint Brendan called the attention of his brothers and said: ‘Look at the meal that God has sent you. Take it.’ The grapes of this cluster were as big as apples [...] they saw an island not far from them, covered completely with densely planted trees bearing the same crop of grapes of such incredible fertility that all the trees were bent down to the ground, with the same fruit of the same colour [...] [the island] had a perfume like that of a house filled with pomegranates [...] the venerable father found six copious wells full of flourishing plants and roots of many kinds [...]. (Brendan: 46 – 47)

It should be noted that after leaving this wonderful island and having more years of adventuring in the ocean, they sailed forty days *east* to reach the Promised Land of the Saints—not west. After the forty days,

[...] they saw a wide land full of trees bearing fruit as in the autumn time [...] They took what fruit they wanted and drank from the wells [...] [They] began to sail through the middle of the fog. When they had passed through it, they came to the island called the Island of Delights. They availed themselves of three days’ hospitality there and then, receiving a blessing, Saint Brendan returned home directly. (op. cit.: 68 – 69)

The direction in which they were sailing when these events took place, east, again provokes skepticism of the idea that any modern location can be derived from the mystical places mentioned in Early and High Medieval legends and sagas. Perhaps it was not the actual place that mattered so much as the idea of its existence somewhere.

### **Adam of Bremen:**

It is the texts of Adam of Bremen that are most used in consort with the Vinland Sagas to try and reach some semblance of a conclusion. He wrote of Heiligland (Helgoland) being found in the “deep recess of the ocean in the mouth of the Elbe River” and of how it is “hemmed in on all sides by very precipitous crags that prohibit access except in one place, where also the water is sweet” (Adam: 188 – 189). This description sounds suspiciously like that in the sagas of Helluland, the rocky region just before one reaches Markland and Vinland. In one of Adam of Bremen’s accounts, he says:

On the east Sweden touches the Rhiphaean Mountains, where there is an immense wasteland, the deepest snows, and where hordes of human monsters prevent access to what lies beyond. There are the Amazons, and Cynocephali, and Cyclops who have one eye on their foreheads; there are those Solinus calls

Himantopodes [One-footed men], who hop on one foot, and those who delight in human flesh as food, and as they are shunned, so may they also rightfully be passed over in silence. (op. cit.: 206)

This passage should be compared to the similar list of odd creatures found in *Vínland*, such as the Unipeds. It is just one more example of inter-regional folklore being mixed together to create a new legend.

Adam says of Greenland that “the people there are greenish from the salt water, whence, too, that region gets its name” (Adam: 218). This is the kind of statement that should instantly make a present-day scholar skeptical about using Adam as a source for geographic fact at all. Clearly, he is only using hearsay as his evidence and has no personal experience with which to back up his claims. This seems strange given that Adam was such an accomplished and curious academic. Why would he believe that Greenland was populated with green people? Perhaps he didn’t really believe it at all and was only interested in compiling as much information as he could in the service of the Christian Church. He then begins to discuss *Vínland*:

It is called *Vínland* because vines producing excellent wine grow there. That unsown crops also abound on that island we have ascertained not from fabulous reports but from the trustworthy relation of the Danes. Beyond that island, [King Sven of Denmark] said, no habitable is found in that ocean, but every place beyond it is full of impenetrable ice and intense darkness. (op. cit.: 219)

This passage is significant because it means that, according to current dating techniques, *Vínland* as a geographical concept was mentioned by name prior to the writing of the *Vínland Saga* manuscripts, as an island as far west as men could sail before reaching “impenetrable ice and darkness”.

### **1.2.2 Material Evidence:**

As mentioned above, there are a huge number of academic views in existence regarding the idea of *Vínland* and what the truth in the sagas is. Of course, much literary, linguistic, and historical work has been done with specific regard to the *Vínland* sagas and other written sources; over the last century, many translations and analyses have been done in an attempt to determine how much of the primary literature can be used historically. However, other types of sources have been used in cooperation with the literature. There has been work done on the famous “*Vínland Map*” to determine if any part of it was authentic, a topic that is still causing controversy among *Vínland* scholars. Artifact studies of such publicized gems as the Maine coin and the Kensington Runestone attempt to find proof of Viking

activity in North America in some very unreliable sources. The archaic coin found in the area of Maine, although its authenticity remains the subject of much debate, was found in 1957 and was supposedly minted in Norway during the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (Fitzhugh and Ward 2000: 206). Barely decipherable, the coin was found in association with native artifacts near the mouth of the Penobscot River in Maine. First believed to indicate Norse exploration in Maine, the coin is now believed to have traveled south in stages, possibly along a north-south trade route (Wahlgren 1993 “Maine Coin”: 404). The Kensington Stone, found in northern Minnesota in 1898, records an expedition in 1362 by eight Goths and twenty two Norwegians across central North America. However, the mix of rune types and the use of vocabulary not established until well after the Middle Ages has led most scholars to consider the stone an elaborate hoax. The most potentially reliable and important non-written source, however, is the archaeological work done at L’Anse aux Meadows and the surrounding landscape by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad. It is from the research at this site that we have most of our dependable data regarding the length and location of the Norse settlers’ stay on the continent. This section will be a summary of the last century of academic scholarship regarding the Vinland myth and the material history of the Nordic people in the North Atlantic.

In terms of the archaeological evidence, it is difficult to know for sure which material remains are even relevant, due to the vastness of the area that could potentially be Vinland. Greenland and the entire coastal area of southeastern Canada and the northeastern United States are all candidates for the destination of Nordic voyages to the west. One of the more promising finds is the L’Anse aux Meadows site in present day Newfoundland, excavated by Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad, which is one of the only Norse settlements found on the continent of North America. However, there have also been several runic inscriptions found, particularly in Greenland, as well as the Maine Coin, mentioned above. Also, geographical and environmental findings like soil too poor for husbandry or water too shallow to anchor a ship are constantly thwarting the newest hopes that Vinland has been found, strengthening my argument that “Vinland” as a specific, paradise-like settlement may not have existed. Rather, Vinland (under different names) was a concept that had been used from as early as the Roman Period in various cultures, and one that the Medieval Norse eventually adopted and ascribed to a certain mythic location which scholars have been trying to put on the modern map for more than a century.

The main problem with material sources is the obvious one that archaeologists have had to deal with no matter where they are excavating: the artifacts don't explicitly speak for themselves. We can learn that there were Nordic settlements in North America, and even infer the purposes of the settlements, but we cannot ever be sure if any of them are Vinland unless some lucky excavator comes across a signpost reading "Welcome to Vinland! Established 1000." Moreover, the popularity of the antiquities market means that fakes are being produced on a regular basis and that the authentic artifacts are constantly in danger of being sold to collectors on eBay and similar markets. However, more than artifacts, I will be interested in landscape archaeology and the practicality of Vinland as an actual destination of the Scandinavian settlers in the North Atlantic.

### 1.2.3 Vinland Maps:

Helge Ingstad was first drawn to the location of L'Anse aux Meadows by the sixteenth century map by Sigurdur Stefansson, shown below, which read Promontorium Winlandiae. Although not a map in the true cartographic sense, the schematic map gave tangible form to the saga reports, and Ingstad claims that it helped to lead him to the site after some searching along the coastline (Fitzhugh and Ward 2000: 20 – 21).



<sup>2</sup> The Stefansson Map <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/archeo/oracles/norse/o40f1.jpg>, 5.10.2007

What can maps tell us about the location of Vinland? According to another map, the so-called Vinland Map (shown below), which is currently thought to date to the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, Vinland is an island situated further from Greenland than Iceland is, and Iceland in turn is situated too close to Norway.



It is clear from the relative distances that the cartographers and their informants could not have been paying close attention to the factual geographical information known during this period (Vinner 1993 A: 80). In terms of factual evidence, the Vinland Map essentially tells us nothing about locations. All we can learn from it is the Late Medieval views of geography and mythic locations. However, in terms of Vinner's suggestions that the cartographers were not observant enough of the geographical information of the time, it seems to me entirely likely that there was, in fact, very little is known in the way of "factual geographical information" about the lands to the west of Europe.

The Vinland Map, which is a Late Medieval map of the world, depicts Vinland as a large island west of Greenland.<sup>4</sup> Most scholars believe the map to be a fake due to certain crystals in the ink which did not appear until the modern period. The parchment however, has been radiocarbon dated to the Late Medieval period. The map was found bound together with the *Historia Tartarorum* (the description of the Tartars), although these two documents are not

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Vinland\\_Map\\_HiRes.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Vinland_Map_HiRes.jpg), 5.10.2007

<sup>4</sup> It is not clear when the map dates to, but it has been suggested that it is a late medieval map, redrawn from a thirteenth century original.

thought to relate to each other. One of the many reasons the map is considered a fake is that, while contemporary Scandinavian accounts from the fifteenth century depict Greenland as a peninsula extending down from Russia, the Vinland Map shows it as an island that is surprisingly accurate in relative size and shape. In addition, the text on the map uses the Latin form of Leif Eiriksson's name, which was more consistent with seventeenth century norms.

The dubious provenance of the 'Vinland Map', its hybrid cartographical style, the composition of its ink, and its strangely uneven vellum surface are troubling, and so is the note accompanying an island west of Greenland: 'Island of Vinland discovered by Bjarni and Leif in company.' This last is the sort of information Europeans feasted on long after the Middle Ages – not the kind of descriptions the Icelanders would have given either to their fellow countrymen or to foreign visitors in the first half of the fifteenth century. (Seaver 1996: 165)<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the writing style is one of a Medieval Christian court Europe, not the early Norse societies. In addition to this is the problem that neither of the Vinland Sagas documents Leif and Bjarni discovering Vinland together—in Eiríks Saga it is Leif who discovers Paradise and in the Greenlanders' Saga it is Bjarni Herjólfsson. "That statement appears to argue that there may once have existed a third Vinland Saga, for which there is no evidence" (Wahlgren 1993 "Vinland Map": 703).

To a large extent, the recent more northerly triumphs have shaken scholarly attempts to localize Vinland in New England, and observers are beginning to take for granted that L'Anse aux Meadows is literally the tiny 'capital' of Vinland that Leif Eiriksson named and that Thorfinn Karlsefni vainly searched for. That is the easy way out, but a problem [remains] because the successful identifications in Newfoundland have obscured several issues. Local patriotism and ethnic or national prestige are not genuine lodestones and will be discounted as an argument in any particular direction. (Wahlgren 1986: 139)

In the current debate of the location of Vinland, any argument based in nationalistic pride should be taken with extreme skepticism. Unfortunately, it is impossible to find an argument that is not biased in some way. The best way to avoid this as much as possible is to use the oldest possible sources, which is what I shall do in this thesis, and use as many different current articles from as many different regions as I can find, in an effort to eliminate prejudice.

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<sup>5</sup> There is also a longer legend describing this discovery and a visit made to Vinland circa 1121 by a bishop from Greenland. An entry in the Icelandic Annals for this year records Bishop Eirík Gnúpsson leaving Greenland *for at leita Vinlands* (to look for Vinland) and his return is not recorded. The note accompanying the Vinland Map has been thought to refer to this particular voyage (Seaver 2004: 6).

#### 1.2.4 The Hønen Stone:

The Hønen Runestone deserves special mention as a material source, because of the debates regarding its inscription that have been taking place for almost two centuries. Although the stone itself went missing shortly after the first studies were made, sometime in the 1830s A.D., we have several reliable drawings of the inscriptions that allow for further discussion. The key argument regarding the Hønen inscription is whether it records an expedition specifically to Vínland or more generally to somewhere west of Iceland. Regardless of which interpretation is the accurate one, the fact that the inscription clearly records a journey to the west of Iceland makes the Hønen Stone a piece of valuable evidence for the study of the Vínland excursions, although what remains of the source is far from conclusive.

A putative map was published in 1965; there have been an unusual number of scholarly studies of Nordic culture and colonization, and there has been the inevitable publicizing of fraudulent runic “finds”. Yet, the Hønen inscription, though the stone itself is no longer extant, has neither had its authenticity challenged nor been subjected to new critical scrutiny. (Taylor 1976: 1)

The most significant obstacle, of course, is the absence of the stone itself; nevertheless, a direct translation of the word Vínland on a written source cannot help but be enticing. However, there is still argument over the correct translation of the runes. Bugge has transferred the runes in Old Norse to produce this:

Út ok vítt ok þurfa, þerru ok áts, Vínlandi á ísa,  
í úbygð at kómu; auð má illt vega, [at] doyi ár.

“Far and wide and in need of dry clothing and food, from Vínland they came to uninhabited regions. Evil may so struggle with good luck that one dies early.” Olsen’s reading, on the other hand, gives us this:

Út ok vítt, ok þurfa þerru ok áts, Vinkalda á ísa,  
í óbygð at kómu. Auð má illt vega, at deyi ár.

“Far and wide and in need of dry clothing and food, they came in and over windcold ice from uninhabited regions. Evil can take away luck so that man dies early” (op. cit.: 3). It has been suggested that the stone is in memorial, although one would suspect that a memorial stone would bear the name of the deceased at least (op. cit.: 2). This is an example of the problems that are encountered while working with material sources, or any group of primary sources.



### **1.2.5 Summary:**

The data I am planning to extract from all these aforementioned written and material sources will hopefully show an explicit shift in how the area was seen in the Viking Age to the mythical creation by Christian composers, as well as help to explain exactly how Christianity was woven into pre-existing belief structures in order to emphasize the values of the new European religious structure. By the end of this paper, an in-depth comparison of Freydís Eiríksdóttir and Guðríd Thorbjörnsdóttir to Eve and Mary, as well as comparative studies of other myths and stories from across contemporary Europe, will show a direct connection that indicates they were modeled on a specific paradigm. Freydís is modeled on an overt woman who over-stepped the boundaries of her accepted sphere and was therefore responsible for the downfall of good Christian men, whereas Guðríd is shown as a pious woman who let the men in her life make decisions for her and devoted herself to Christianity. The conclusions that can be gained from this, I believe will show a clear Medieval Christian influence on stories that may have had some basis in factual events from several hundred years previously.

### **1.3 Theory and Method:**

A systematic, hermeneutical approach must be applied to this type of research.<sup>6</sup> This means interpreting the texts using a method by which meaning can be found in the most productive manner, something that is especially important when using old texts that have been copied a large number of times. One must have hypotheses clearly laid out and have determined what evidence it is necessary to find to support the hypotheses. The relationship between the hypotheses one sets and the meaning one derives from working with the texts is key. I believe that a hermeneutical approach means cultivating the ability to look at a text with full regard to the cultural and social context which could have influenced its composition and writing. This understanding must then be applied to the process of extrapolating information from the text.

Even if hermeneutics should make interpretation conscious of its modes of procedure and of its justification, [it] would be right not to deem the usefulness of such a theoretical discipline as very great in comparison with its living practice. But above and beyond its practical merit for the business of interpretation, there seems to me to be a further purpose behind such theorizing, indeed its *main* purpose: to preserve the general validity of interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity, and to give a

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<sup>6</sup> Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation: setting criteria to determine how much information one requires to reach an understanding, and then setting goals to help one reach that understanding.

theoretical justification for such validity, upon which all the certainty of historical knowledge is founded. (Dilthey 1972: 244)

Gaining this understanding is more difficult with texts such as the *Vínland Sagas*, as there is no way to know for sure which elements are factual. To begin to derive an understanding of the sagas and their function in their socio-political milieu, we must first assume that all questionable information contained within them is fictional until proven otherwise.

However, the reliability of the information contained within the *Vínland Sagas* is not the main goal of this thesis. Rather, as I have stated, I shall seek to determine which of the elements in the texts could be paradigms from Christmas ideology, intentionally planted inside a non-religious text to influence the reader's subconscious or unintentionally inserted simply by virtue of the Christian mindset of the society in which the sagas were composed and written down.

There seems to be a lack of current serious research of the sagas in favor of reiterating the mythic elements for the everyday reader, and most of the serious studies done in the last fifty years contradict each other. Therefore, I will largely be formulating and presenting my own conclusions. I shall start by looking at each individual aspect of the sagas, such as the characters of Freydis and Gudrid, move on to compare vignettes and 'sub-sagas' from the *Vínland Sagas* with other myths and folktales from across Europe, and then address the Church's agenda as well as the potential manipulations that can be seen when reading carefully through the various written works of the period with an eye on anything that could be interpreted as intentional Christian influence. However, I will also be looking at as many recent secondary sources as possible to see where current research on this topic stands academically.

I am writing on this topic because I believe that not enough scholarly work has been done to differentiate between the obvious fact and fiction of *Vínland*; the most fantastical elements in the sagas are still being used right alongside the more believable themes for the purpose of trying to prove a point. I also will address the important, and frequently ignored, differences in pre-Christian and post-Conversion Period portrayals of the land to the west across the Atlantic Ocean. Would the Viking age composers have composed in the style of the *Vínland Sagas*? It seems obvious that the themes in the sagas are more relevant to a later Medieval social climate than to a Viking Period one. I will discuss this further later on. Not only could a deeper study of the Christianizing influence on the stories of *Vínland* have an impact on the arguments taking place regarding the location of this largely mythical location, it could explain many of the ideologically based phenomena in the *Vínland sagas*

such as the character of Freyðís Eiríksdóttir and the portrayal of women as trouble-makers and creators of sin, balanced by idealized female characters like Guðríd.

To look at Medieval writings on Vínland, such as the Vínland Sagas, and discern how the Christian mindset may have altered the concept of the land to the west and turned it from a navigational tool and geographical point to a mythic paradise, personified in the “Mary” figure of Guðríd (a caring mother and wise woman) and the “Eve” character of Freyðís (a key trouble maker and villainous person), is my main goal. In order to proceed with this premise, I will especially be using a neo-philological approach towards the transmission of manuscripts and attempts to determine their approximate age and accuracy of each copy. I believe the three main manuscripts, contextualized in more detail below, should be treated as three completely separate works and not as three copies of a lost original. I have looked at as wide a variety of alternate primary sources as possible. The pre-Christian sources will be more difficult to find and work with, as there are very few written sources from Scandinavia in the Early Middle Ages and the contexts are not usually readily apparent. Runic inscriptions are possibly the only link we have to pre-Christian sources that mention excursions to the West, and even then difficulties remain with regards to determining authenticity and context. However, due to the fantastical nature of the main corpus of Vínland texts, archaeological evidence will also provide a significant portion of the sources I will use, such as burials, and settlement remains. In addition, I would like to analyze some of the various secondary research that has been done and published recently on the subject of Vínland, Freyðís Eiríksdóttir, and the connections with the Church in Scandinavia, and relate them to earlier research. However, there are not as many of these as I would hope, and there may not be room to discuss them as much as I would like, as it may deviate too much from my main goal of looking at the sagas and other texts and archaeological remains themselves.

Of course, the three key primary sources for any study of Vínland are the three Vínland Saga manuscripts named earlier. However, the same problems exist here as one would find when attempting to use any literary source in the search for fact. The stories within the sagas were most likely told orally for several centuries before being written down, at which point they would have been altered to suit the background and opinion of the scribe. The sagas switch between informational and fantastical writing styles, although both aspects are portrayed as fact, making it very difficult to know which sections, if any, can be taken at face value. Sagas began as a “unique blend of entertainment and learning, fact and fantasy, history and story-telling, literary endeavor and family pride, pagan past and Christian

present” (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 37). In addition, the sagas were written down during the height of Church power in Europe, and Christian ideas on the myth of Vínland would no doubt have been worked into the narrative.

The Vínland sagas are, of course, written accounts from oral tradition rather than from eyewitness testimony, and they contain stories and information about remarkable voyages undertaken more than 200 years earlier. Thus the stories about these voyages were changed and reshaped in oral tradition. They may have been kept alive not only by descendants of the original voyagers but also by others—not least seafarers who told each other stories and exchanged information about how to reach and recognize foraway lands and locations [...]. There is no doubt that the Vínland sagas contain memories about actual characters who lived, and actual events which took place, around the year 1000. But it is unlikely that the saga accounts of such characters and events reflect historical reality in every respect. (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005: 296)

To me it is most sensible to argue that the Vínland Sagas are the product of centuries of oral tradition, and that they combine various elements from Adam of Bremen, St. Brendan, Isidore of Sevilla, and other Christian and pre-Christian sources that we may never be able to discern.

#### **1.4 Historiography:**

Although there has been no previous attempt to compare Freydís with Eve and Guðríd with Mary, there have been several modern works written that point to obvious Christian influences in the three Vínland manuscripts, and even mention Freydís and Guðríd as mechanisms of Christian indoctrination. As observed by William Sayers, one of the key aspects of the Vínland Sagas are “actions appropriate to gender or inappropriate (the latter illustrated by Freydís Eiríksdóttir brandishing the fallen sword while exposing her full breast, her murderous plotting, in contrast to the normative Guðríðr)” (1993: 10). Freydís oversteps her boundaries in both of the Vínland Sagas, while Guðríd seems to have mastered the art of staying in one’s sphere and not speaking or acting out of turn. However, according to Barnes, “*Grænlandinga saga* contrasts Guðríðr and Freydís as positive and negative exemplars of womanhood, while in *Eiríks saga rauða* the distinction is, arguably between heroine of romance (Guðríðr) and epic (Freydís)” (2001: 29). The beautiful Guðríðr is wooed, fulfils the dazzling prophecy about her, and lives happily ever after with Karlsefni back in Iceland. In both sagas, Freydís is a woman who transgresses the traditional boundaries of gender; but whereas she is monstrously evil in *Grænlandinga saga*, dauntlessness is her style in *Eiríks saga rauða* (Barnes 2001: 29). Regardless, I do not think she is painted in a positive light in Eirík’s Saga; she may not be a criminal as she is in

the Greenlanders' Saga, but her actions surely cannot be condoned as those appropriate for a Christian women.

Freydís does not seem to regard her gender as any reason to forego the family tradition of mounting trading voyages to Vínland, and in partnership with two Norwegians she sets off and almost immediately breaks the terms of their commercial agreement [...] Her bloody-mindedness then turns to lethal threat, as her companions are warned that if they reveal her crime back in Greenland, they will be killed [...] Freydís is not mentioned as having converted. (Quinn 2005: 530)

### **1.5 New Philology:**

Because I shall be working with original manuscripts to discern their meaning, the study of philology is an important step in my work. There are several different methods that can be used in the interpretation of primary texts. As I shall explain in this section, I will especially be working with a neo-philological approach and looking at the text for its own sake, rather than trying to prove how it records specific historical events as so many have done in the past two centuries. "Medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance" (Cerquiglini in Nichols 1990: 1). In order to begin to understand a text, we must look at it with regard to its socio-technological context. For example, compound words which use hyphenation or apostrophes are conventions of a print culture, not manuscript culture where writing is dictation and reading is oral (Nichols 1990: 3). This particular point appears to be quite a minor thing, but there are dozens of points like these that must be kept in mind when looking at texts from a certain historical period. We must try and put ourselves in the positions of those who composed and inscribed the texts.

Before undertaking to study literary history, in consequence, 'one must understand what the people are who produced it, ponder the influences they underwent, what milieu traversed, and the phases of their development before the hour when their literary history began'. (Nichols 1990: 4)

Philology is now divided into two branches, old and new. Old philology names as its goal, looking at all versions of a manuscript with the intent of combining them in an attempt to come closer to the 'lost original'. One of the first implementers of 'old philology' was a man named Karl Lachmann, who was criticized by Joseph Bédier; "Bédier's program struck directly at Lachmann principles of "scientific" editing by classifying manuscripts into a "genealogical tree" that would permit the editor to discover the manuscript(s) closest to the lost original" (Nichols 1990: 5). One of the problems with this approach is that ignores the material artifacts of medieval literature:

If one considers only the dimensions of the medieval illuminated manuscript, it is evident that philological practices that have treated the manuscript from the

perspective of text and language alone have seriously neglected the important supplements that were part and parcel of medieval text production: visual images and annotation of various forms [...] (Nichols 1990: 7)

Even in the Medieval Period, texts were not safe from adjustments during the copying process. A scribe could change words or narrative order, shortening some sections or adding material to others. This could represent changing aesthetic tastes over the course of time, or simply a scribe's sense of superior judgment vis-à-vis the original composer (op. cit.: 8), not to mention dialect variation and etymological derivation. If texts represent the situated uses of language, as Gabrielle Spiegel argues (in Nichols 1990), then each individual text and copy should be treated separately and looked at in its own historical context.

It is because of problems like these that *neo philology*, or new philology, was developed. It has been argued that philology is no longer relevant to the new objective of literary studies: to understand, appreciate, and evaluate works of literature as material works of art, and that philology should be replaced by literary theory and criticism. The new philological approach looks at each individual work for its own sake, instead of using it only as a means to an end (discovering the original form of the text or the ultimate meaning of the author). Respect for the facts and concrete realities regarding each manuscript, whether a copy or an original, should remain basic (Wenzel 1990: 18). Each text should be looked at for what it itself can tell us about the socio-political climate in which it was composed, and about those who composed it.

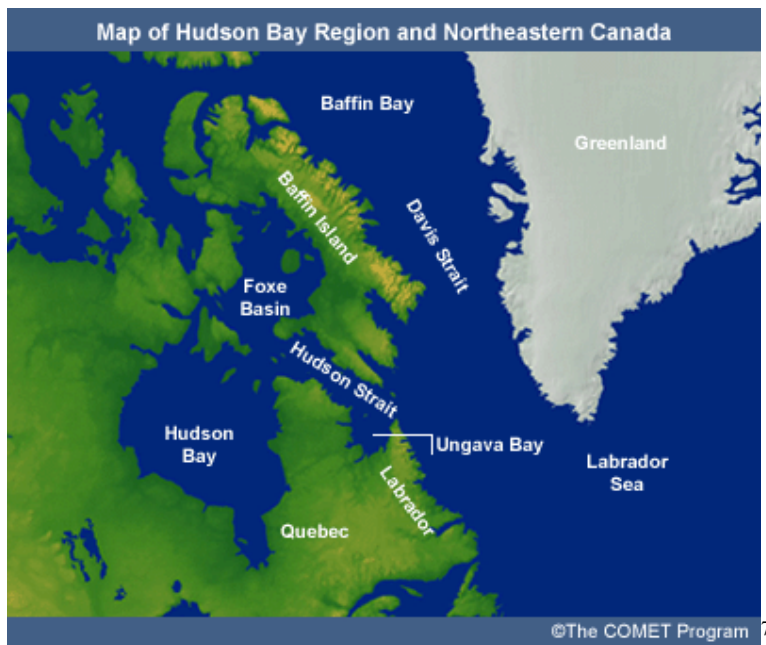
## **Chapter 2: Background Information**

### **2.1 Vínland as a geographic location:**

There are many different theories regarding the reality of Vínland (was it a paradise-on-earth or just another piece of land that could potentially be settled or exploited for resources?) and the logistics of settling so far west during the Early Middle Ages. The main problem with all of these theories is that they are all based on subjective evidence, with a huge amount of importance placed on the primary sources. Unless some monumental conclusive piece of evidence is found in the future (and how could we know for sure that it was authentic and factual?), this problem will never be completely resolved. Some scholars have argued that the east coast of North America would have been a good (and attractive) source for many natural resources. Others say that to come all that way would have been illogical when one could more easily travel to Greenland or back to Europe, especially

given the navigational and maritime technologies of the age. In this section, I shall try to address as many of these views as possible, while also offering my personal viewpoints and attempting to resolve what I believe to be the most likely option.

*Norðrsetur*, on the central west coast of Greenland, and *Markland*, thought to be the coast of Labrador, were both rich hunting grounds easily accessed by the Norse settlers in Greenland, although it is unclear which of the two was used more frequently. If *Markland* was being used as a hunting ground, then moving further along the coast would have been the assumed next step. A strong incentive for exploring Baffin Island and the other Canadian Arctic islands to the west of Greenland could have been the mass walrus migrations from Disko Bay to the eastern coast of Baffin Island (Ljungqvist 2006: 27). The eastern coast of Canada would have been an available (though not necessarily easily accessible) source of resources for the groups of settlers living on Greenland during the Viking and early Christian period. Explorations to the west could easily have brought ships along the coast of Baffin Island and Labrador, areas rich in timber and game. What is apparently a Norse ritual burial of walrus skulls has been found on the southern coast of Baffin Island, matching those found on Greenland at the cathedral of Garðar (op. cit.: 32). Nordic voyages were clearly made to this part of the world, but it has not been historically proven that these were expeditions to find a western paradise. I believe that it is far more likely that the people living in these settlements were being practical and looking for goods and materials, or for that matter just being curious about what lay to the west, than that they were embarking on religious pilgrimages.



It would have been easy enough for ships to get lost, given the navigational technology of the time, and end up along the American coast rather than Iceland or Norway; we can well assume that this happened at some point during Medieval Norse exploration. However, the journeys to the west may well have been intentional for whatever reason. The *Vínland* voyages followed the classic route north, west, and then south and along the south-east coast of Labrador, approximately to the island of Disko. If they were to turn south-west to the eastern shore of Canada, they would have been conforming to a classic principle of Norse navigation: to make the shortest practical ocean passage and use the clearest landmarks. They would also have benefited from the northerly wind from the Davis Strait. This would most likely have brought them then to the southern coast of Baffin Island, and going further would have come to the entrance to Hudson Bay and the forest land of Labrador, and then the pale sandy beaches of the distinctive Cape Porcupine (Jones 1986: 10). If Jones' analysis is accurate, this succession of landmarks fits with the description given of America in the sagas.

It has been suggested that the size of timber needed by the Greenland elite to satisfy their shipbuilding needs could only be obtained from *Markland*. *Norðrsetur*'s resources could not have properly been exploited without access to larger vessels (Ljungqvist 2006: 49). It is entirely likely that this mission was based around resource acquisition rather than to seek out truth in legend. We can identify three separate resource spheres, according to

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[http://www.eumetcal.org.uk/polarlow/cometplows/polarlow\\_case/media/images/east\\_canada\\_map.gif](http://www.eumetcal.org.uk/polarlow/cometplows/polarlow_case/media/images/east_canada_map.gif), 5.10.2007



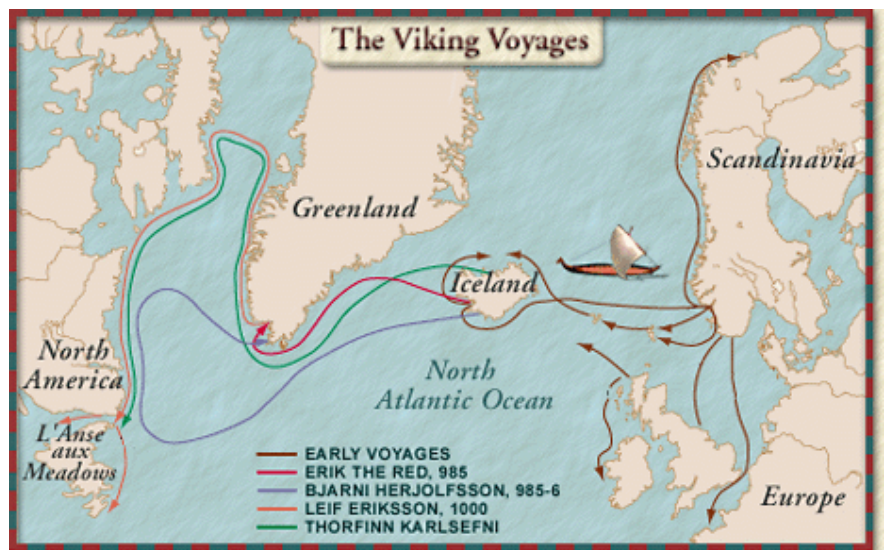
Ljundqvist: first, the settlement sphere, second, the peripheral region sphere, and thirdly, the remote resource sphere. *Markland* belonged to the last sphere (op. cit.: 50), and, while it was probably unnecessary to travel to the east coast of North America on a regular basis, there may have been occasional trips to find larger timber. “Written evidence indicates that the Greenlanders maintained a connection with Markland as a source of timber until at least the fourteenth century. With *Vínland*, however, contact seems to have been lost after the explorations of Leif Eiríksson and Thorfinn Karlsefni in the early eleventh century” (Vidar Hreinsson 1997: xl). The distance from Iceland to North America was just as long as that to Europe, and all the resources available in “*Vínland*” could also be found in Europe alongside luxury items and manufactured goods (the distance from Herjolfsnes in Greenland to L’Anse aux Meadows is almost exactly the same as from Herjolfsnes to Norway), not to mention the ecclesiastical ties to Europe. It is therefore easy to reach the conclusion that Nordic settlement in the region of L’Anse aux Meadows was not long lasting; it would not have been practical, when they could go east instead, where familiar civilizations were already established.

The three lands discovered by Bjarni and Leif in the *Vínland* Sagas, Helluland, Markland and *Vínland* are now generally believed to be, respectively, Baffin Island, Labrador, and somewhere south of the Gulf of St. Lawrence—possibly Newfoundland or New Brunswick. There is, of course, a huge amount of disagreement in the matching of names to locations. L’Anse aux Meadows, on the northern tip of Newfoundland, is thought by some to be *Vínland* and by others to be a short-term stopping place between Greenland and *Vínland*. I believe the most likely case is that the L’Anse aux Meadows settlement was a base camp for further exploration south into the resource-rich area of *Vínland* (if *Vínland* was even a place name used by Norse settlers this early). While L’Anse aux Meadows appears to have been abandoned after only several decades of use, ‘Markland’ seems to have been exploited for resources well into the Middle Ages (Jónas Kristjánsson 1997: 15 – 16).

The Norse site of L’Anse aux Meadows was discovered in 1960 by Anne Stine and Helge Ingstad, occupation of the settlement is currently dated from 1000 and 1030 A.D. (Wallace 1993: 378). Much of the space in the buildings at L’Anse aux Meadows appears to have been used sparingly, judging from the scarcity of artifacts. The location is well suited for a base camp, from which one could circumnavigate practically the entire Gulf of St. Lawrence without ever losing sight of land. From there it is easy to follow the coastline eastward to the rest of Newfoundland. The settlement did not last long, perhaps not even

more than one year, for reasons that seem clear. I find it more likely that, rather than steady occupation, this site was used for occasional expeditions in search of resources—perhaps for not more than a few seasons.

One of the most significant finds from this archaeological site is the remains of butternuts, a North American walnut from the St. Lawrence Valley and New Brunswick. This nut is found further south than L’Anse aux Meadows, in the same distribution range and with the same harvest period as wild grapes. This would seem to indicate that Norse settlers did travel south and in all probability found an area rich in wild grapes and grain (also plentiful in the St. Lawrence regions) (Wallace 1993: 379).



Any settlement in this period of the eastern coast of North America would have been an impractical venture. “An operation the size and complexity of L’Anse aux Meadows could only have been sponsored by a political authority [...] Whoever controlled L’Anse aux Meadows, controlled the route to Vinland, be it in the Gulf or anywhere else [...] Were there other Norse settlements in North America? At the time of L’Anse aux Meadows, all of Greenland would have had less than 1000 inhabitants [...] any such voyage would have been a serious drain of manpower for the community” (Jones 1986: 301 – 302). Four points can be discerned. First, the Greenland settlements were too small to afford a splinter colony. Second, distances were great and treacherous; the risks were greater than the gain. Third, Norse safety would have been threatened by hostile native populations. The Norse people

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.yorku.ca/kdenning/vikings/vikingvoyagesmap2.gif>, 5.10.2007. While this map gives a good basic geographical layout of the North Atlantic, the maritime paths that Norsemen such as Leif Eiriksson and Thorfinn Karlsefni took are still being debated and the paths plotted on this map should in no way be seen as conclusive.

were outnumbered and possessed no superiority of arms. Lastly, in comparison with Europe, North America had very little to offer in the way of resources that would make the journey worth the risks. Also, the Church had more vital links to Europe than to the New World (Wallace 1993: 42). There is no cause to think, however, that L'Anse aux Meadows was the only Norse site in the region, and must therefore be Vinland. It may have only been a stepping-off point, a gateway to the forests and other resources further inland. Also, given the four stipulations listed above, there is little reason to think that the Norse settlers would have journeyed to the western Atlantic unless they were lost or desperate for new goods and materials.

## **2.2 Religion in Greenland:**

The end of the Western Settlement may have interfered with the Greenlanders' ability to spend a summer season in Markland obtaining timber of the quality needed to build relatively large and sturdy ships, but it is impossible to guess how soon or how strongly this change would have made itself felt.

Nor have we any idea of when – or if – the remaining Norse population stopped going north to hunt walrus for their hides and tusks [...] In any event, McGovern and Bigelow thought the late levels at [Narsaq] showed a decline in walrus bones [...] If a clear picture eventually emerges of declining walrus hunts in the last period, we must also allow for the possibility that the Greenlanders chose to spend their energy on other pursuits that had grown more profitable [...] (Seaver 1996: 248)

This connects to an earlier quote from Ljungqvist, which suggests the Norse settlers moved towards Labrador and Baffin Island to follow the walrus. If “Vinland” was an occupied settlement during the late Viking and early Christian periods, then it was only a temporary base camp. After permanent abandonment, it would have been simple to turn the region into a mythic location from a glorious common past (of course, a glorious Christianized past).

It is unlikely that the church met with insurmountable cultural resistance when it asked people to believe in the power of words, spoken over the sacraments, or of the symbols accompanying the words, for the Norse had long believed that spells could be worked through the power of the spoken word or of carved runes [...] The blurring of the line between religion and magic in Norse culture, as well as between Christianity and heathendom, is obvious when, for instance, a Thor's hammer and a cross were made simultaneously to be used as amulets. (Seaver 1996: 99)

It is clear that myths and legends from various cultural and religious backgrounds were being utilized by the Church and the populations of the Nordic world during this time period. Authors such as Adam of Bremen would have easily combined different bits and

pieces of folklore into their works. It would have made sense for the Church to utilize already existing myths and legends of the Nordic peoples to make Christian doctrine more palatable to the pagan populations. The tales told in the Vinland sagas use the paradigm of heroic Viking voyages while indoctrinating the characters with the Christian value system. For example, the dichotomy between Freyðís and Guðríd gave the personifications of Eve and Mary a Norse flavor that would have been easily swallowed by the Nordic populations.

Church buildings and funeral customs do tell us something about religious faith and practice in medieval Greenland, but most of our information comes from the various pagan and Christian symbols recovered by archaeologists. The Christian symbols range from simple crosses or runic inscriptions carved on loom weights, spoons, and other everyday objects, to tombstones and the numerous crosses and crucifixes found in Norse Greenland graves in both the Eastern and Western Settlements. (Seaver 1996: 96)

Therefore, it is difficult to know what precisely the Church was up to in the area during the Early and High Middle Ages. However, we can be sure that there was a strong Christian presence in the Atlantic.

Just as according to ancient Greek ideas and in the oldest Irish legends, it was only vouchsafed to the chosen of the gods or of fortune to reach Elysium, or the isle of the happy ones, so Leif, who according to tradition was the apostle of Christianity in Greenland, must have been regarded by the Christians of Iceland as the favorite of God or of destiny, to whom it was ordained to see the land of fortune. (Nansen 1911: 380)

At this point, it was clearly the Church's recreation of Leif, and not the genuine history of the man, that was capturing the people's attention. Leif's father, Eirík, on the other hand, never converted to Christianity, even when his own wife refused to share a bed with him after her conversion. We can see that, although there is an entire saga named after him, there is very little said about Eirík himself and even less that is positive. In fact, as is shown later in this paper, Guðríd is a more central figure in *Eiríks saga rauða* than Eirík is. Leif is the great Christian hero the Nordic Church was looking for.

### **2.3 Vínland vs. Vinland:**

"In their natural and wild state in North America, grapes are often found growing among hardwood trees. The vines wind themselves in such a way as to make it look as if the trees are bearing grapes... The hardwood yielded far better lumber than the softwoods and birch of Newfoundland, and the grapes were such a find that the whole area was named Vínland after them" (Ferguson 2002: 142). Helge Ingstad, Magnús Stefánsson, and Eirík Lönnroth assert that the 'i' in Vinland was short, meaning pasture land. However, 'pasture land'

would more likely be a translation not of Vinland but of Vinjaland or Vinjarland. "Even more important, Leif could not have had any great interest in faraway pastures. At this time there was more than enough pasture in the new Greenland settlement [...] Wine, on the other hand, had been held in great esteem in Norse society since the days of the Roman Empire and had been imported into Scandinavia from Germany and France since then" (op. cit.: 142). Many scholars have argued in one direction or the other for the correct translation of the name *Vinland*, and both groups have their valid points. Both abundant wild grain and wild growing wine grapes would have seemed luxurious to Nordic settlers coming from Greenland, although from a poetic standpoint, a land named after wine does sound much more romantic. Especially given the Church's later propagation of Vínland as a paradise, wine does seem much more likely as the root of its name. All one has to do is look back to Greek and Roman mythology and philosophy (something that grew in popularity throughout the Medieval period) to see that wild fruit and flowing wine is an iconography that has been associated with Paradise since the beginning of human civilization.

### **2.3.1 A history of the discussion:**

In ca. 1070, Adam of Bremen wrote of unsown wheat and wine growing in Vínland, so either food could have provided the basis for a place name (passage quoted earlier). Place names including the root 'vin' were common in Scandinavia and could have easily carried over to the North Atlantic settlements. However, it must be observed that this root is in almost every known case the *second* part of a compound, not the first. Brendan's Navigatio refers to a Paradise full of grapevines, although one must be skeptical of using this as proof of "Wine-land" as Brendan was coming from his background as a pious and well-indoctrinated Christian. Isidore of Sevilla, a well-respected etymologist and researcher, described the Insula Fortunatae as spontaneously bearing an abundance of grapes and wine, and even Adam describes the island as a Land of Wine. I would suggest that the specific region in eastern North America was never called Vínland or Vinland at all until the Middle Ages. Rather, I propose that it was the Church that slowly introduced the name Vínland—Wineland—to fall into line with millennia of religious and philosophical thought and assist in the emphasis of Church values and thought. This is not a new proposition; from the beginnings of an evangelical approach to Christianity (go forth and convert), Church policy has borrowed and adopted from every culture it assimilates with the goal of making the entire European world-view a Christian one.

The name Vínland, literally 'Wineland', has caused considerable discussion and speculation. In the sagas, much is made of the discovery of wild grapes... In

both the Scandinavian homelands, and the North Atlantic settlements, this was a costly and highly-prized item that any chief might covet. Furthermore, it was a vital ingredient in the Eucharist, an important element of the Christian religion, now making rapid strides in these areas [...] It may be noted, however, that grapes do not grow in the region of the L'Anse aux Meadows site. This region was almost certainly not 'Vínland', but rather the 'gateway to Vínland', and the archaeological and written evidence points to its use as base camp for exploration. The date of the Norse occupation of L'Anse aux Meadows lies close to the decade before or after A.D. 1000. This date has been arrived at by the use of architecture, artefacts, and radiocarbon dates. This dating accords well with the written evidence for the 'Vínland explorations'. However, it is likely that the Norse occupation of the site lasted no more than a few years. (Ogilvie et al 2002: 182)

This has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, and still refers to the fact that the area known as Vínland was probably not steadily occupied (at least, not for very long), and was used solely as a last resort for goods and materials such as timber.

### **2.3.2 Lönnroth's argument:**

In 1996, Eirík Lönnroth wrote a paper for the Scandinavian Journal of History entitled "The Vinland Problem", which essentially stated that we cannot use the historical and linguistic evidence presented to us from such works as the Vínland Sagas, as they are not reliable. Rather, he suggests that we must base our case for the location of Vínland solely on the discovery of the L'Anse aux Meadows site. From the lack of grapes and grapevines and the abundance of fields in this particular area, we must therefore conclude that the name of Vínland must have referred to these fields and pastures and not to wine. He first addresses Adam of Bremen as the first scholar to attach the name Vínland with wine, and says that, while King Sven of Denmark probably gave Adam correct information through his ecclesiastical connections throughout Europe, Adam also interviewed other Danes who were less concerned about giving him accurate information.

In Adam's imagination Sweden is a big country, extending from west to east; the Riphean mountains mark its ultimate border to the east and are inhabited by the classic monsters of ancient literature: Amazons, cynocephales, Cyclops, skiaspodes and cannibals. To the north of Sweden, Norway is situated [...] Last in the row of islands comes Vínland, a country visited by many, an idea that makes its identity especially interesting. (Lönnroth 1996: 41)

With information like this, how could Adam's statements about Vínland being a land of wine be trustworthy? In fact, it is suggested in the article that Adam's island of wine is merely a vulgarization of the myth in *Navigatio Brendani*.

Most of the statements in the sagas about Vinland have no factual basis. As a consequence, we can free ourselves from having to seek any connections with

the parts of the North American continent where any sort of vine is growing. We have Ari Frodi's brief assertion: a land where the Eskimos have lived. And from there we must turn to the question of archaeological evidence about European activities in the territories in question. (op. cit.: 45)

In fact, what Lönnroth considers as a likely option is that the discoverers of Vinland came directly from Norway or the Scottish isles, perhaps the Norse living in Ireland heard of islands to the west from the Irish monks. The evidence given for this is that the place name prefix Vin-, meaning pasture, is not found anywhere else in the Atlantic and must therefore have come from a source with direct ties to Scandinavia. This phenomenon is discussed below: that 'vin' is only ever used as a suffix in place names.

### **2.3.3 Stefánsson's argument:**

The Icelandic historian Magnús Stefánsson has argued along the same lines as Lönnroth, assuming that King Sven of Denmark mistakenly let Adam of Bremen misinterpret Vinland and Vinland. He suggests that the Medieval concept of Vinland could have come from a combination of the paradise island from the *Navigatio Brendani* and the wild grain and vines in Isidore's description of the Fortunate Isles (Crozier 1998: 47). Another of Stefánsson's arguments is that the name 'Vinland' does not fit the Norse practice of "functional naming" and that the Norse settlers would not have felt at home in a climate mild enough for grapes. However, Alan Crozier asks, would they have refused to call it Vinland on the grounds that vines were alien to their culture (op. cit.: 48)? It seems illogical that they would only have named places they found suitable for settlement. Crozier does acknowledge that writers of Old Icelandic prose show a great affinity for place names that identify features of the land in some way, but does not believe that historical value can be attributed to these explanations (op. cit.: 50). I believe the mistake that Stefánsson and others make is treating "Vinland" as a specific location that can be pinpointed on the map. Vinland could be the entire region of the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, or it could be just a concept that was invented later in the medieval period and that was not used at all by the Norse people in the North Atlantic. Trying to make the concept of Vinland fit perfectly to the settlement site of L'Anse aux Meadows makes no sense. The presence of grass and the absence of grapes directly around the site does not warrant a change in the name Vinland, something that would only be necessary if one identifies that place name specifically with the northern tip of Newfoundland. In addition to this, we must allow for the fact that the landscape would have been much different in the Middle Ages.

The area around L'Anse aux Meadows was, in all likelihood, forested and not conducive to the name 'pasture land' at all.

#### **2.3.4 Crozier's response:**

In 1998, Alan Crozier wrote "The \*Vinland Hypothesis" (the asterisk indicated that this form of the word Vinland is not attested in any historical sources) as a response to both Lönnroth's article and the article mentioned above by Magnús Stefánsson expressing approximately the same point of view. He begins by quoting Wahlgren (1986), saying "The interpretation of a place-name is ultimately a linguistic, not a historical, problem, and it is important that historians should be reminded that few – if any – philologists support a hypothesis that has been dismissed as 'quite untenable'" (Crozier 1998: 37). He argues that it is unjustified to assume that the site excavated by the Ingstads completely rules out the existence of other Norse landfalls to the south of Newfoundland, when the Norsemen could easily have explored other parts of North America, potentially leaving few or no traces behind for modern archaeologists. In fact, Crozier points out several written and archaeological indications that the Norse did sail south of Newfoundland. He cites a passage in Eirík's Saga where Thorhall wants to sail north, but Karlsefni decides to keep going south as he believes that the country would continue to improve the further south they went. In addition, there is the voyage of a Frenchman, Jacques Cartier, who discovered St. Lawrence in 1534 and made special mention of fields of wild grains and abundant grapes. This shows that it is not suspicious for grain and grapes to occur together in an account of the area (op. cit.: 43).

The basis of the argument against Vinland is that vines are only found far to the south of Newfoundland, where L'Anse aux Meadows is placed. However, we have archaeological evidence in the form of butternut remains to show that the settlers did travel some way south for a time. The regions of St. Lawrence and New Brunswick, both with abundant grapevines, are easily accessed by ship from Newfoundland. The three most valuable resources mentioned in the sagas with connections to Vinland are grapes, wild grains, and the special type of wood called masur, and all three are within reach of L'Anse aux Meadows. Crozier cites Wallace (1995), saying "Perhaps the most probably theory is that the grapes were found in New Brunswick and that the name Vinland refers to the entire coastal area around the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Crozier 1998: 61).

Crozier also points to linguistic evidence for the place name Vinland, stating that the only form of the name we know for sure to have existed is with the long /i:/ or í. If the root



‘vin’ had survived in Iceland without showing up in writing, the name should have been Vinja(r)land (op. cit.: 49). In addition, it says in the sagas that the new land received its name because of the vines and grapes that grew there; an association like this would not have been made if the writers pronounced the name Vinland (with the short i). Another argument presented is that, whereas the word *vín* (wine) was common and appears in various compounds, the word *vin* is attested in only one case in the surviving Old Norse literature (op. cit.: 40). Crozier responds to Lönnroth’s concluding sentence with the argument that Lönnroth cannot prove his statement that the land was originally called Vinland with a short i.<sup>9</sup> A native speaker of Old Norse would not have confused the sounds of /i/ and /i:/ any more than a modern Norwegian could confuse the sounds of /a/ and /å/. Therefore, Lönnroth’s suggestion that the name changed over time due to mispronunciation is ridiculous, although Crozier allows for the option that the name could possibly have been deliberately distorted (op. cit.: 45). I agree with Crozier, that the two sounds would not have been confused orally. However, once compositions were being written down, and not always by native speakers of the Nordic tongues, I believe there could have been much more room for error, although it is true that sound quantity was very seldom notated in early manuscripts.

A popular misconception regarding the name L’Anse aux Meadows is that it was named because of the fields around it that have been the source of so much argumentation regarding the proper spelling of Vinland. In fact, the original form contained the French word ‘*méduses*’, give the meaning ‘Jellyfish Cove’ to the site. ‘Meadow Land’ was never inherent in the name and it was only through later mistranslation that the title of the area uses the English word ‘meadows’ (op. cit.: 62). Crozier concludes his argument with a statement of the facts that he believes we can use: the attested name is Vinland, grapes grow in North America, and archaeological evidence shows that the explorers continued south of Newfoundland. The best piece of evidence we could find is grape seeds at L’Anse aux Meadows, but until then we have butternut remains to serve as concrete proof that the Norse explorers sailed at least once as far south as the northern limit of wild grapes (ibid.).

### **2.3.5 Holm’s argument:**

In 1997, the renowned Swedish scholar Gösta Holm wrote his own, oft cited, article on this very popular topic, where he explains that the arguments for Vinland, meaning pasture land, are untenable. He does not agree with Lönnroth, that the place name must agree with

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<sup>9</sup> “One simple fact remains: a territory in the west, inhabited by Dorset Eskimos and with a name meaning ‘pasture’” (Lönnroth 1996).

the landscape of L'Anse aux Meadows and that the rejection of the only historically attested form of the name is therefore acceptable, and again states what Crozier says above: that \*vin is not found anywhere in Old Norse literature and that it was obsolete as a place name root long before the Norse sailed to America. Also, if it had survived, it would have been in the form \*Vinja(r)land. Although vines have never grown in Newfoundland, this is not a problem for the argument since the identification of Newfoundland with Vínland is only a hypothesis (Holm 1997: 52), and we have material evidence that the settlers at L'Anse aux Meadows traveled south.

### 2.3.6 Korslund's response:

Holm's article got a response in 2001 from a Norwegian scholar, Frode Korslund, and not a favorable one:

I sin artikkel argumenterer Gösta Holm for at betydningen av navnet Vinland må være 'vinrankland' [...] Det finnes imidlertid en rekke svakheter i hans argumentasjon—og pga språklige og reelle forhold er det mer rimelig å konkludere med at den mest sannsynlig tolkningen av navnet Vinland er 'beitelandet' (og at det sannsynligvis viser til øya Newfoundland. (Korslund 2001: 33)

He also says explicitly that he disagrees with Wallace when she suggests that L'Anse aux Meadows was merely a place in Vínland, and that the grapes growing further south could still have been a part of the Vínland region. His reasoning for this is that the suffix '-land' in the west Atlantic context clearly means a large island, or else why would Irland, Ísland and Grønland all end in the same way. This argument to me is illogical and ill researched. Another point Korslund makes is that the Norse explorers would not have named a region after a finished, manufactured product such as wine, although I think the root *vin* could easily have simply referred to the natural resources available to make wine such as grapes and vines.

Ultimately, I think that the argument for Vínland is the strongest, particularly considering my argument that Vínland is just a combination of Church propaganda and centuries of discussion, both Christian and pagan, regarding Paradise. There are also the passages in the Vínland Sagas, cited below, that specifically associate the name Vínland with the grapes and vines that they find. In addition to this is the linguistic evidence, given above in Crozier's argument, which makes it very unlikely that *-vin* would have been used in such a significant place name, especially as a prefix.

## **Chapter 3: Analysis**

### **3.1 Working with Sagas:**

The Vínland Sagas are compatible with, and considered by some scholars to fit into, the genre of Heroic Sagas, or *fornaldarsögur*: tales from previous ages. Heroic Sagas are differentiated from Sagas of Chivalry in that, while the latter generally is set outside the Scandinavian world, the former is set either in Scandinavia proper or at least with “Scandinavian ambiance” (such as with Vikings traveling in the North Atlantic or to the East). “Sources and studies indicate that the older heroic sagas are largely based on oral narrative [...] it should be observed here that we are dealing with a kind of oral tradition different from that of accounts regarded as literally true... heroic sagas were recited to entertain and to inform before they were ever written” (Jónas Kristjánsson 1997: 342 – 343). If we aim to classify the Vínland Sags in this manner, then we must admit that they are conglomerations of history, folktale, and the individual style of each oral performer. We cannot treat them in the same way we would treat, for example, the Icelandic Family Sagas, which deal with lineage and property ownership. The subdivision of Heroic Sagas that the Vínland Sagas fit into, that of the Viking Age (as opposed to pre- or post-Viking) generally has a setting in the early Viking Period (ninth and tenth centuries) and bears close resemblance to the Family Sagas—the category into which the Vínland Sagas are usually placed (op. cit.: 346).

Viking Age Heroic Sagas are

preponderantly characterized by their subject-matter [...] their themes are seldom tragic as in [those of the pre-Viking age] [...] The Viking, generally of Norwegian or occasionally Danish origin, sails to Sweden, north to the White Sea, west to Iceland. He fights by land and sea, against other Vikings and as often as not against trolls and all kinds of monsters, and has the upper hand in all trials. His career is a series of detached minor incidents, larded with motifs from southern romance. (op. cit.: 356)

“They reflect the Viking experience of travel, naval battles, and the plundering of foreign countries. Finally, they exploit a rich treasure-hoard of myth and folklore” (Tulinius 2005: 448). If we should aim to place the Vínland Sagas at least partially in this category, which I think is a plausible action, then we quickly begin to feel ridiculous for treating them as historical documents. I do not suggest that there are no factual elements in these sagas, but I believe we are in no position to single those elements out with complete certainty.

The purpose of the Icelandic Family Sagas was to record the genealogy of the important families and land on Iceland, and therefore preservation of the facts was very important. Heroic Sagas, on the other hand, began in a cultural environment of oral storytelling more befitting the style of the Vínland Sagas. The grand sea voyages and supernatural events in the Vínland Sagas are characteristic of this latter form of saga. One particular characteristic of the Vínland Sagas that fits in well with the Heroic Saga motif is the preponderance of magical events, especially in Eirík's Saga. The only aspect that would single these sagas out as Icelandic Family Sagas is the lineage of Guðríd, given at the end of both sagas and at the beginning of Eirík's Saga. These small passages give us the sense that someone has hastily tried to reconnect the Vínland Sagas to the Icelandic Family tradition after going off on a great tangent more in line with the Heroic tradition. Perhaps the composers or scribes of the sagas thought that attaching a passage or two about Guðríd's ancestry and descendants would win their creation a place within Nordic and Icelandic history.

I do not believe it is in question that the Vínland Sagas were written by Christian scribes during an age of omnipresent Catholicism, if only because it was almost solely the clergy who were literate. No one questions the impact Christianity was having on the western world during the period that *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga* were being copied down. The real question being asked in this dissertation is how the connection to Christianity can be found within the sagas' content, what motivation the Church might have had for specifically including Christian imagery in the sagas, and how the mixture of historical fact with Church agenda may have convoluted the search for Vínland and modern scholastic interest in the actual events that took place. In the body of this dissertation I shall be looking at any passage from the Vínland Sagas that I believe indicates clear Christian imagery or adaptation from other European biblical anecdotes. This can then be used as evidence that the main purpose of the sagas was not to serve as factual histories, but rather to preserve ideals of a mythic, heroic, Christian past for the Nordic populace.

This may seem like two separate issues: whether early European folktales and mythology were being woven into the sagas, and whether the Church was attempting to insert their own morals and agenda into the plotline of what first appear to be pre-Christian stories. It is true that in this dissertation I am focusing more on the latter than on the former. However, by addressing common plot devices found across Europe for centuries before the sagas were written, and identifying them within the Vínland Sagas, we can show exactly how much artistic license was being taken with these works (supporting the theory that the Church

might have inserted its own ideological framework into the sagas), in addition to arguing for how these stories should not be taken as historical truth. Also, we know that the Church adopted many pagan customs and stories, giving them a Christian twist, to aid the conversion process. An example of this is pagan holidays being given Christian meaning but retaining pagan symbolism, as can be seen with Easter and Christmas. It is logical to assume that the Church was using the same process on popular cultural devices like myths and folktales. Therefore, I believe that where I find evidence of popular folktales and myths, it may have been something utilized by the Church, and vignettes and paradigms used throughout the sagas to further the Christian belief system probably came originally from pagan myths and legends.

### **3.1.1 Exempla:**

In addition to the various types of sagas, two of which have been listed above, we also begin to see a new type of storytelling device during the European Middle Ages: the *exemplum* (Latin ‘example’), a moral anecdote, real or fictitious, used to illustrate a point. This genre of Medieval literature used the lives of famous figures to make a moral point by emphasizing good or bad character traits. *Exempla* could be used during sermons to help illustrate a point of doctrine or to emphasize Church values, and the stories could be taken from folktales or real histories. It is in this category of literature that I believe the passages regarding Freydís and Guðríd fit better than in any group of sagas. The stories of Guðríd could have been used to teach people about how good Christian women behave and the passages about Freydís may have been a device for showing why un-Christian women could be evil. Aesop’s Fables may be one of the best known collections of exempla, in which personified animals illustrate through short stories why the Christian way to do things is the right way and why any other way leads to evil. We know that the Vínland Sagas were written down during the Christian period, even if the composition process may have begun before Christianity became institutionalized in northern Europe, and it is quite possible that there was an intention to use certain stories within these three manuscripts as *exempla* even if it was not to be their sole purpose.

If we are going to use this argument to its fullest potential, we must first determine when we think moral issues were inserted into the storyline. The Vínland Sagas went through many different transformations, most of which we cannot even discover. The oral forms of the sagas are essentially impossible to trace, and we do not know how many forms existed. We can assume that the first oral compositions of these stories appeared before or during the

Christianization of the North Atlantic, so the religious element probably did not appear until later on, possibly during the scribal process. Perhaps there were different versions of the sagas told in different regions and it is only those three written down that we are aware of. However, the first known manuscripts of the sagas did not appear until the fourteenth century, approximately three centuries after the Scandinavian region had widely accepted Christianity, so we must presume that Christian elements had begun to appear within the Vínland Sagas while they were still part of the oral tradition. It was only when the sagas were made permanent by the scribal process that the characters and situations were canonized in a certain context. It is important to remember when reading the sagas that the manuscripts are only one interpretation of a complex oral narrative, and that there was much more to these stories than we can ever know. All we have to work with are the three manuscripts that remain, discussed and contextualized in the next section, which must be treated as three separate works rather than different versions of an older, original text.

### **3.2 The Vínland sagas in context:**

Unfortunately, the information we have about the Vínland Saga manuscripts is rather limited. *Eiríks saga rauða* was preserved in two different manuscripts that we know of, *Hauksbók* from the early fourteenth century (actually a group of various texts compiled by Haukr and others) and *Skálholtsbók* from the fifteenth century. These chronicle Eirík the Red's expulsion from Iceland and his son Leif's later discovery of Vínland. The first of these, *Hauksbók*, contains various versions of Old Norse texts, including the *Voluspá* and *Landnámabók*. It also contains the oldest section on Mathematics in a Scandinavian language. Because Haukr Erlendsson compiled so many different texts, *Skálholtsbók* is generally considered to be more reliable and truer to the original, which is thought to have been written during the thirteenth century. The late nineteenth century publisher, Gustav Storm, considers the difference between *Skálholtsbók* (for this section, **S**) and *Hauksbók* (for this section, **H**) to be the difference between a copy and an independent work, respectively (Jansson 1945: 273).

A scrutiny of careless errors indicates that **S** is a much more careless manuscript than **H** [...] It may be thought that such an observation implies that **S** is in general less reliable than **H**. A closer investigation however rather justifies the conviction that just about the contrary is the case [...] shows that the transcriber of **S** is an unthinking man, who often commits errors which give a sense completely foreign to that in the manuscript he is copying. He creates the impression that he slavishly follows his original without interest in the contents of the text he copies. (Jansson 1945: 275)

In the past, **H** has enjoyed a reputation of being more sound and pristine, because of the way it more lucidly expresses its content. For example, using a name in a place where **S** merely uses a personal pronoun. However, it seems apparent that the obvious deviations between the two principle manuscripts of Eirík's Saga are due to the revision of the text in **H**, and therefore **S** can be assumed to give a version more faithful to the original text (Jansson 1945: 290). Unfortunately, there is very little known about **S**, particularly when compared to what is known about **H**. We know that **S** was written in the Skálholt area, possibly by a wealthy farmer and church-owner by the name of Ólafur Loftsson.<sup>10</sup> It is a compilation of twelve different narratives and sagas, of which only four remain whole in the manuscript (Eirík's Saga is one of these). Beyond that, we have some methodological studies of the writing style, but no real historical context in which to place the manuscript.

I have tried to use one version consistently throughout this dissertation, i.e. the *Skálholtsbók* manuscript of *Eiríks saga rauða*, largely in an attempt to cut out the personal biases of Haukr Erlendsson. However, in some instances where a passage was incomplete in that particular manuscript, but more thorough in *Hauksbók*, I have permitted myself to use the latter source. I do not believe it weakens my argument to switch between the two versions, as my main point is simply to find the Christian connections in the Vinland Sagas. If the inherent meaning of the text differs between the two versions, I shall state my reasons for choosing one over the other when the passage appears in my thesis. If a passage from **H** is quoted with no reason being stated, then it is because the wording is tidier and more normalized in **H** than in **S** and no textual meaning is being lost by my choosing the former text over the latter. My goal is not to determine which manuscript is closer to some lost 'original' form of Eirík's Saga, as I do not believe such a text is possible to obtain, but to look for outside influences on the content of all three Vinland manuscripts.

*Grænlandinga saga* relates approximately the same events as *Eiríks saga rauða*, but with slight anecdotal (but significant) variations, and is preserved in the fourteenth century *Flateyjarbók*, along with most of the sagas found in *Heimskringla*. The Greenlanders' Saga exists as a prologue or companion to *Olafs saga Tryggvassonar*, and mentions the king as a driving force in Leif's actions.<sup>11</sup> The Greenlanders' Saga is clearly more of a narrative storyline, concerned specifically with the voyage across the North Atlantic and the exploration of Vinland, as opposed to Eirík's Saga, which concerns itself much more with

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<sup>10</sup> These claim is supported by various other handwriting comparisons (<http://www.hi.is/pub/sam/exhibition.html>, 14.4.2008).

<sup>11</sup> It was quite common for large sagas, such as Olav Tryggvasson's Saga, to have smaller sagas set in. These are called þættir.

strange and magical vignettes that sometimes seem out of place within the Vínland plot sequence. It should be noted that, unlike Eirík's Saga which claims no written or verbal authority, the Greenlanders' Saga derives its account of the Vínland voyages directly from Thorfinn Karlsefni: "*Ok hefir Karlsefni gørst sagt allra manna atburði um farar þessar allar, er nú er nökkut orði á komit*" (*Grænendinga Saga*: 269).<sup>12</sup>

Although very little of either of these sagas can be taken as an objective factual account (as most historians will tell you is the case with any literary source), we can use them to understand the Medieval mindset regarding the concept of Vínland: what was believed to be across the ocean to the west, how the Church used the idea of a western paradise to enforce its rule and value system, and how this idea was "sold" to the populace of Scandinavia and Iceland as propaganda. We can also gain an understanding as to what the accepted roles of women such as Freydís and Guðríd were, and how the role may have changed from the pagan to the Christian period. I am particularly interested in looking at how the sagas may have been used as tools to influence the implementation of religion during the medieval period. If these stories were, in fact, popular forms of entertainment, then a small Christian touch here and there could easily have helped to spread the Christian mindset across Scandinavia.

In addition to the two Vínland sagas, there are brief mentions of Vínland in the *Íslendingabók* and in Snorri's *Olafs saga Tryggvassonar*, and some of the first chapters from the sagas are actually taken from *Landnámabók*. We also have the records of Adam of Bremen, who mentioned Vínland in his work ca. 1070 *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis*. This is the specific chapter regarding the 'northern islands' from his larger historical work on the history of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. As mentioned in the first section, it is from the *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis* that we have the earliest historical mention of North America in a geographical treatise, and the further description of Vínland as an island (Olson and Bourne 1906: 67). Adam's text is significant for several reasons, mentioned above in my summary of primary sources, but one of them is that the possible Nordic concept of Vínland, which may have simply been a navigational device for crews sailing west, was recorded in a Latin text: the language of the Christian Church. Adam reported information received from the king of Denmark, about an island named Vínland where both grapes and wild wheat grew (Fitzhugh and Ward 2000: 218).

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<sup>12</sup> I shall be using 'ö' instead of 'o' with a hook during the saga quotations, due to font constrictions.



About the same time as Adam of Bremen was seeking information about the north from King Sven of Denmark there was born in Iceland, in 1067, a man called Ari Thorgilsson, Iceland's first historian in the vernacular [...] To the lore of the pagan past, in which he had been steeped from boyhood, Ari applied a mind carefully trained in the new learning of the Christian cultural world. (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 25 – 26)

This statement directly suggests that it was common for writers of the day to combine Christian ideas with pagan folklore. If Ari Thorgilsson was blatantly altering pagan lore to fit with the 'Christian cultural world', it is obvious that we should assume that the scribes of *Hauksbók*, *Skálholtsbók*, and *Flateyjarbók* were doing the same.

As far as the sagas are concerned, there is one key problem and that is the fusing of the fantastical and realistic elements into a single narrative, which makes it difficult to determine where the factual elements lie, if there even are any factual elements to be found. Of course, there are also the broader problems that have to be dealt with any time textual sources are used as evidence. The motives of the author or compiler have to be discussed, as well as the intended audience being written for. For example, as a cleric, Adam was writing his histories specifically for the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. On top of this, the inaccuracy of copies must always be dealt with when not working with an original document.

### 3.2.1 Haukr Erlendsson:

Out of the three Vínland manuscripts, we have the most information about *Hauksbók*. Haukr Erlendsson's age is unknown, but he is first mentioned in 1294 when he reaches the office of Lawman in Iceland, later traveling to Norway to fulfill the same duty in both Bergen and Oslo. This office, normally reserved for Norwegians, was given to Haukr by King Hákon Magnusson. Haukr died in 1334, probably in Bergen, but it is unclear how many of his years he spent in Iceland as opposed to Norway. Norwegian influence on *Hauksbók* (**H**) can be confirmed throughout the entire manuscript, so it was probably written after he was settled in Norway. In addition to Haukr, several other scribes wrote parts of **H** throughout the fourteenth century. As not all of them were Icelandic, we cannot refer to **H** as a purely Icelandic document (Jón Helgason 1960: vi). We know Haukr was knighted, although we are not sure precisely when. However, he does refer to himself as 'herra Hauk' during the ending genealogies in Eirík's Saga (op. cit.: xx – xxi).

In Haukr's edition of *Landnámabók* (**L**), he deliberately shortened and omitted certain material, and occasionally left things out inadvertently. "Many examples could be mentioned which show that his interest in history was greater than his scholarly accuracy"

and he appears to be an adapter and editor rather than an independent author (op. cit.: xii). In several places in *L* he wrote an account of his own family, connecting the families in the story to himself or his wife. He does the same at the end of *Eirík's Saga*, tracing his mother's mother's family back eight generations to Guðríd and Karlsefni.

There were in him two tendencies [...] one was a desire to collect as much matter as possible... the other was a marked inclination to shorten; in this, if we are so disposed, we can see another instance of the economy which is revealed in the use of damaged parchment and the increasingly severe compression of the writing [...] The abridgements too are not always successful, but as against this they have often involved tightening of the style and omission of less essential matters. (op. cit.: xviii)

What we can learn from this information about Haukr Erlendsson is that he was writing out of a desire to preserve history, although he may not have been as concerned with preserving the facts as with maintaining a source of genealogy and personal pride for his homeland. His editing of *Eirík's Saga*, although it may not have always been historically wise, seems to have been done in an attempt to create a document that could uphold the feelings he had for his country and its proud past.

### **3.3 Saga Analysis**

#### **3.3.1 Summary of section:**

As my thesis is dependant on information gained from the *Vínland sagas* themselves, this section will undoubtedly be the most crucial to my argument. However, it will consist for the most part of my conclusions and connections made between the sagas and other sources, and less of summaries of secondary sources. Where possible, I have cited other modern research done on this topic, but as there is not much to choose from at the moment (aside from the few works mentioned in the historiography section) I will work mostly with the original manuscripts and draw my own conclusion. At certain points in the following section I have referred to the Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson's translation of the *Vínland Sagas*. I do not rely on them for their translations, but rather for assistance with use of the English language in certain passages.

The primary purpose of my thesis is to fill in some of the factual gaps within the sagas by examining the Christian "infiltration" of the Nordic concept of *Vínland* and its transformation into a mythic landscape that resembled the Eden or Heaven of the Christian tradition, while paying special attention to the roles of Freyðis and Guðríd as an example of the ideas and expectations regarding women after the conversion period. It is difficult to

understand how anyone could take the *Vínland Sagas* as historical documents. Just when a passage in the sagas seems to be historically possible, a sailor sights the land of one-legged men or Gudríd helps a prophetess perform witchcraft while protesting heavily that she is a Christian woman, which throws the entire historical probability of the *Vínland Sagas* into heavy doubt. However, I believe that in these instances, it is easy to trace the themes to other European folktales or Church manipulation, as I will show in the following sections. After all, most of the Scandinavian population would not or could not have traveled to the Northwest Atlantic to determine which of these things were true, so why not make these heroic histories into a good story with Christian morals?

### 3.3.2 Freydís:

One aspect of this portrayal of the land across the ocean as a mythic location is the persona of Freydís Eiríksdóttir. Although her character is limited to only one major scene in each saga, she is one reason that it is so difficult to tell fact from fiction in the textual sources regarding *Vínland*. She seems to be directly related to known historical figures such as Leif Eiríksson, but the part she plays in the stories was clearly created to fill a specific role in the Christian narrative paradigm. Freydís appears in both *Vínland sagas*, the *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, but as a slightly different character in both. However, it is clear in both of these sagas that she is filling the narrative role of a trouble-making woman who soils paradise, parallel to Eve or Pandora.<sup>13</sup> She is not as inherently ‘evil’ in Eirík’s Saga, but it is obvious in both that she is not a pious or modest woman, and that she becomes the Eve that helps to drive the men away from their newfound Garden of Eden. In *Grænlandinga saga* she is categorized as a very arrogant and overbearing woman, with a feeble husband who could not control her properly—not acceptable in a Christian woman: *Hon var svarri mikill, en Þorvardr var lítilmenni; var hon mjök gefin til fjár.* (*Grænlandinga saga*: 245). The word *lítilmenni*, used to describe Thorvard, has two definitions. It can refer to a small mean person, or to one with low social standing. As is stated above, Freydís married him for his money, so if it is the latter definition then it is unclear how he came by his wealth. However, later in the text, when they have reached *Vínland*, she accuses her husband directly of being a *vesall maðr*, which can mean a wretched or miserable man. This would seem to point to the first definition of *lítilmenni*, and paints Thorvard as an unfortunate and insecure man who is too weak to refuse the demands of his cruel wife. In fact, as he is not mentioned again in *Grænlandinga saga*, we

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<sup>13</sup> The mythology of these two famous female characters will be discussed much more later on.

can make the assumption that his purpose in the narrative was merely to assist in the personification of Freydís Eiríksdóttir as an evil troublemaker. The extent to which Freydís was actually a historical figure who went with the longships on these voyages to the west can never be completely known, but it is clear what role she was meant to fill in the telling of the stories. Whether or not she was a historical figure, she was just what the Church needed as a perfect example of how a Christian woman should not act.

The Skraeling attack is probably the best known of Freydís' scenes in the *Vínland Sagas*. As the Norse men are running away from the attack, Freydís berates them for not standing and fighting, saying that she could fight better than any of them had she a weapon. She tried to keep up with the men, but was too slow because she was pregnant, so she picked up the sword of a dead man and turned to defend herself. When the Skraelings were upon her, she bared her breast and slapped it with the sword and yelled, which terrified the natives and they ran away:

Freydís kom ut ok sa at þeir karlsefni helldu vndan ok kalladi [...] ef ek hefda vapn þotti mer sem ek skilldi betr beríast en einnhuerr ydarr. þeir gafu engan gaum hennar or ordum Freydís uildi fylgia þeim ok uard seinni. þuiat hun uar eige heil gekk hun þo eptir þeim. i skoginn. En skrelingar sekia at henni. hun fann firir ser mann daudan. þar uar þorbrandr snorra son. ok stod hellustein i hofdi honum. suerdit la bert i hia honum. tok hun þat upp ok byz at veria sik. þa komu skrelingar at henni. hun dro þa ut briostit undan kledunum. ok slettir a beru suerdinu. uid þetta ottast skrelingar ok liopu undan a skíp sin ok reru i brott. þeir karlsefni finna hana ok lofa happ hennar. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 72 – 73, Hauksbók<sup>14</sup>)

After this, Karlsefni and the men praised her courage and good luck, but this was definitely not expected behavior for a Christian woman. Rather, her actions draw more parallels to stories of pagan warrior women such as the Amazons, discussed in further detail later in this thesis, who are famous for being wild powerful women who cut off their right breast so they could better draw a bow, and who used men only as a means of procreation. This passage stands out clearly as one modeled on the Heroic Saga tradition, and could have painted Freydís in a positive and commendable light prior to the Christian period. The Church may have hoped that passages such as this one would illustrate how unacceptable the old pagan ways had been, and that the new Christian behavior, especially for women, was much more dignified and acceptable.

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<sup>14</sup> Here is the first instance where I have chosen to use *Hauksbók* for no other reason than that the language is in line with Old Norse, whereas the *Skálholt* text uses a language more similar to medieval Icelandic. I found no difference in meaning between this manuscript and the *Skálholtsbók* version, only grammatical and spelling differences.

While her vignette in Eirík's Saga does not explicitly set her apart as evil and conniving, there is no doubt in the Greenlanders' Saga that she is a bad woman. In her largest scene amongst all the sagas, Freydís tricks two brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, into giving her use of their ship and sailing with her to Vínland, with the promise that they would all share Leif's houses there. However, when they arrive, Freydís informs them that only she shall use the houses and they must make their own camp. To this they reply: "We brothers could never be a match for you in wickedness."<sup>15</sup> After a time there, she goes to Finnbogi and asks to trade ships, for his was larger than hers, and he agrees to this. Then she went to her husband, Thorvard, and said that the brothers had struck her and treated her badly and refused to trade ships with her even though she asked politely, and that Thorvard should avenge her or she would divorce him:

"Ek var gengin," segir hon, "til þeira bræðra at fala skip at þeim, ok vilda ek kaupa meira skip; en þeir urðu við þat svá illa, at þeir börðu mik ok léku sárliga; en þú vesall maðr, munt hvárki vilja reka minnar skammar né þinnar ok mun ek þat nú finna, at ek em í brottu af Grænlandi, ok mun ek gera skilnað við þik, útan þú hefnir þessa."<sup>16</sup> (*Grænlandinga saga*: 266)

He had the men killed, but neither he nor his men could bring themselves to kill the women. Then, in one of the saga's most famous scenes, Freydís took up an axe and killed the women herself, ordering no one to speak of the event when they returned to Greenland.<sup>17</sup> Because of this scene, she has come to be regarded as one of the most evil characters in the Vínland Sagas. The character of Freydís in this saga in particular is one of a greedy, plotting woman, who orders men around and has no sense of humility. While the men around her, especially her brother Leif, are good and pious, Freydís' actions shame them and make them look weak. Leif refuses to punish her, but predicts that her descendants would not prosper and her family would always be badly thought of.

A central argument throughout this entire paper is that the Freydís character was created by the Church in order to help emphasize Christianity within the Scandinavian population and to make the imported religion (by this point circa three hundred years old) easier to stomach by subtly melding the old and the new: proud Viking tradition with Christian sensibilities. Freydís Eiríksdóttir does not emerge much in the reading of the sagas, but her

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<sup>15</sup> "Þrjóta mun okkr bræðr illsku við þik." (*Grænlandinga saga*: 265)

<sup>16</sup> Here we see the naming of Thorvard as *vesall maðr*, a wretched man, as I have already discussed.

<sup>17</sup> Þá mælti Freydís: "Fái mér øxi í hönd." Svá uar gört. Síðan veqr hon at konum þeim fimm, er þar váru ok gekk af þeim dauðum [...] "Ef oss verðr auðit at koma til Grænlands," segir hon, "þá skal ek þann mann ráða af lífi, er segir frá þessum atburðum. (*Grænlandinga saga*: 266 – 267)

scenes are some of the most memorable. Great emphasis is placed on her wickedness and how she fooled the men she was with for her own evil gains in *Grænlandinga saga*. I find it unlikely that this would have been a focus of any story written or composed during Viking times by the Nordic peoples. If her character had been one created and developed during the Viking Age, I suggest that there would have been little or no focus on her as a villain and her role would possibly have revolved more around her warrior status and the low integrity of the men who surrounded her, if she was even singled out for special mention at all other than to name her father, husband, and sons. There are very few female characters in the sagas, so it is significant that one of the main women behaves so strongly against the Christian ideal, while the other, Guðríd, who will be discussed below, so perfectly fits how the new Christian regime thought women should act.

### 3.3.3 Guðríd:

Guðríd, especially when contrasted with Freyðís, can clearly be seen as the perfect Christian woman: pious, self-sacrificing, eager to let the men in her life make important decisions for her, mother to numerous bishops, a paradigm for the holy mother figure in the Bible, the exact opposite of Freyðís. If Freyðís is Eve, then Guðríd is Mary, creating the perfect dichotomy of Christian women as characters in what are frequently considered to be ‘pagan’ texts. Guðríd is the ideal woman as far as the Church could be concerned. She allowed Leif to decide who she should marry, she refused to perform magic rituals to benefit the community because of her strong Christian beliefs, and is generally incredibly pious in the scenes that feature her character. At the end of her stay in the West, Guðríd even goes on pilgrimage to Rome – quite a significant distance in that time, especially for a female – and goes so far as to become a nun after she returns from Rome.<sup>18</sup> Her piety is carried on in her family line, as all of her named grandsons then become bishops. If Freyðís represents the enemy of the Church, then Guðríd was everything that they could possibly want in a female character.

The first chapter of *Eiríks saga rauða* is devoted entirely to the ancestry of Guðríd up until her father, significantly, although unofficially, naming her as the most important matron in the saga. We do not find out until later on in the saga that the lineage being discussed in the first is the one that would lead to Guðríd’s birth. The first chapter ends by stating that Vífil had two sons: Thorbjorn and Thorgeir. We find out the first time Guðríd is

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<sup>18</sup> This act says much for possible Christian interference with the narrative. Guðríd becoming a nun in early eleventh century Iceland does not make sense—how would she even have known what a nun was?

mentioned by name (in the third chapter) that Thorbjorn Vifilsson had a daughter called Gudríd, who was very beautiful and a most exceptional woman in every respect.<sup>19</sup> In both sagas we find out in several instances what a good and pious Christian woman she is, connecting the importance of recording Icelandic family lineages directly with a sense of Christian values. One of Gudríd's most prominent scenes in Eirík's Saga is when a prophetess, named Thorbjorg, appears at the farm of a man named Thorkel and asks Gudríd's assistance in performing a pagan ceremony, to which Gudríd replies that she is a Christian woman and wants nothing to do with witchcraft. She says that she is neither a witch, nor a prophetess, but was taught special 'warlock songs' by her foster mother. She consents to help only after Thorkel put pressure on her to do so, allowing the men around her to make the decisions

Þa. svarar. Gvdridr. huerki er ek fiolkvnnig ne visennda kona. enn þo kenndi halldis fostra min. mer a. islannði. þat frædi er hun kalladi vard lokr. Þorbiorg. svaradi. þa ertu frodari enn ek ætladi. Gvdridr. s. þetta er þesskonar frædi ok at ferli. at ek ætla i avngum at beina at vera. þviat ek er kona kristin.þorbiorn. suarar. svo mætti uerda at þu yrdir mavnnum at lidi. her vm enn værir kona at verri enn vid. þorkel met ek at fa þa hluti her til er þarf. þorkell herdir nu at gvrdridi. enn hun kuezst mundv giora sem hann villdi. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 42, Skálholtsbók)<sup>20</sup>

This is an essential passage, as it shows that the only way Gudríd would perform an actions against her Christian upbringing was if one of the men in her family thought it was necessary. It must be noted that Thorbjorn refused to stay in the house during the performance, because of their pagan nature.<sup>21</sup> "Pious as Gudríd is depicted to be in both sagas, it is telling that her father, also Christian, has refused to stay in the farmhouse while such heathen practices [...] are being performed" (Quinn 2005: 533). Does this reflect badly on Gudríd's character? Even pious women can make mistakes—perhaps hers was neglecting to ask her father's permission to perform the ritual. It certainly suggests that women must remain under the watchful eye of the men around them.

After the ritual is completed, Thorbjorg the prophetess says to Gudríd:

Enn. þier. Gvdridr. skal ek launa i havnd lid sinni þat sem oss hafir af stadi. þviat þin forlavg eru mer nu aull glaugg sæ þat muntu gíaf ord fa hier. aa grænlanndi.

<sup>19</sup> Gudríd. het .d. þorbiarnar hon var kvemma vænzst ok hinn mesti skavrungr i aullv at hæfi sinu (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 33, Skálholtsbók)

<sup>20</sup> Here we have an important difference between the two Eirík's Saga manuscripts. Skálholtsbók says that it is Thorbjorn who says that Gudríd will not be a bad woman if she performs the ceremony, but Hauksbók states that this is said by Thorbjorg the prophetess. In one version, Gudríd has the permission of her father to perform the pagan songs, but in the other she does so without consulting him.

<sup>21</sup> var. sennt. eptir. þorbirmi þui at hann uilldi eigi heima vera medan slik heidni var framan. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 44, Skálholtsbók)

er sæmiligazt er til þó at þier verdi þat eigi til langædar. þviat uegir þinir liggia vt til islanndz. ok mvn þar koma fra þier ætt bogi bædi mikill ok godr ok yfir þinvm ætt kvislvm mvn skina biartr geisli. ennda far nu uel ok heil. dottir min. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 43, Skálholtsbók)

”You, Guðríd, shall I reward for the help you have given us, as I can see your destiny clearly now. You will make a good marriage here in Greenland. It will not last long, for your paths lead to Iceland. There you will begin a great and good family line, and over your descendants will shine a bright light. Farewell, my daughter.” The key phrase in this section regards how she will begin a grand family line over whom shall shine a bright light. Considering how at least three bishops are attributed to Guðríd’s direct family line, this passage can be read in quite a biblical sense. From the beginning of Christianity as an organized religion, the imagery of the single bright star shining down over the newborn Jesus has been used as a popular symbol of his godliness and holiness. Does this passage indicate that Guðríd is to give birth to a long line of godly people? It should also be noted, with reference to the above discussion about Guðríd’s willingness to perform the ritual, that in the Hauksbók manuscript, Thorbjorg states that the radiance of Guðríd’s descendants will exceed her own powers of vision. Perhaps this indicates that where Guðríd still has faults, her offspring will be perfect models of Christianity. Of course, another interpretation could be that, given that Haukr lists himself as one of Guðríd’s descendants, he wanted to make himself look impressive. Perhaps the most intriguing interpretation is that the radiance that Thorbjorg cannot see past is Christianity itself, indicating that Guðríd’s offspring will be Christian. In *Hyndlulíod*, the Song of Hyndla, there is a short prophesy by a prophetess where it is said that:

Then will come another, even mightier,  
though I do not dare to name his name;  
few can now see further than when  
Odin has to meet the wolf. (Larrington 1996: 259)

It is thought that the first two lines in this stanza refer to Christ, who will come after *Ragnarok*, the final battle of the Norse deities, and that those with the gift of prophesy do not have the power to see past Odin’s death. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, this reference could have been an allusion to the Christianity that would come after Guðríd’s time, although the chronology is slightly confused if Guðríd is meant to have already been a Christian woman and have become a nun.

In the last passage of Eirík’s Saga, Karlsefni brings Guðríd home to his mother, who felt that her son had married beneath him and refused to live in the same house as his wife until



she “realized what an exceptional woman Gudríd was” and then they lived together and got on well.

Modr hanns þotti sem hann hefði. lítt til kostar. tekit ok var hun. eigi heima. þar hinn fýsta vetr ok er. hun reynndi at. Gvdridr. uar skaurungr mikill. for. hun. heim ok voru samfædr þeira godar. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 80, Skálholtsbók)

The saga then ends by listing all the bishops descended from Thorfinn and Gudríd: this passage is even extended an entire paragraph in the *Hauksbók* version. Throughout the entire saga, Gudríd can do no wrong, and even the reluctant mother in law cannot deny that Gudríd is a kind and humble woman. The prominence of scenes that point to her Christian faith set her apart from the other characters as a good, female, Christian role-model.

In the *Greenlanders’ Saga*, Gudríd is portrayed in a very similar fashion. She was “a woman of striking appearance; she was very intelligent and knew well how to conduct herself amongst strangers.”<sup>22</sup> When her husband Thorstein Eiríksson is invited to the house of Thorstein the Black, he says that he must first consult his wife, but she leaves the decision to him as would be expected of a dutiful Christian wife.<sup>23</sup> When the former Thorstein dies soon after, he comes back long enough to tell his wife that she will marry an Icelander, go on a pilgrimage to Rome, return to Iceland and have a church built, and become a nun until her death. This part of the saga does not seem to fit well with either the *Heroic Sagas* or the *Icelandic Family Sagas*, and perhaps speaks more of a new clerical tradition of story telling—and an entertaining way to teach people about the Church and its values:

þú munt gipt vera íslenzskum manni, ok munu langar vera samfarar ykkrar, ok mart manna mun frá ykkr koma, þroskasamt, bjart ok ágætt, sætt ok ilmat vel. Munu þit fara af Grœnlandi til Nóregs ok þadan til Íslands ok gera bú á Íslandi; þar munu þit lengi búa ok muntu honum lengr lifa. þú munt útan fara ok ganga suðr ok koma út apr til Íslands til bús þíns ok þá mun þar kirkja reist vera, ok muntu þar vera ok taka nunnu-vígslu ok þar muntu andask. (*Grœnlendinga saga*: 260)

She later does these things, obedient wife that she was. However, when she does meet the Icelander, Thorfinn Karlsefni, she must first ask Leif’s permission to marry him as would have been expected of a dutiful and humble woman.<sup>24</sup> It should also be noted that the same

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<sup>22</sup> Guðríðr var skörlig kona at sjá ok vitr kona ok kunni vel vera með ókunnum mönnum. (*Grœnlendinga Saga*: 258)

<sup>23</sup> Þorsteinn kvezk vilja hafa umræði konu sinnar, en hon bað hann ráða. (*Grœnlendinga Saga*: 258)

<sup>24</sup> Brátt felldi hann hug til Guðríðar ok bað hennar, en hon veik til Leifs svörum fyrir sik. (*Grœnlendinga saga*: 261)

disease that kills Thorstein first kills a woman named Grimhild, wife of another Thorstein.<sup>25</sup> It says in the text that she was large and as strong as any man but that the sickness took her anyway (*hon var ákafliga mikil ok sterk sem karlar, en þó kom sóttin henni undir. Grænendinga saga: 258*). The question that must be asked here is whether this passage says good or bad things about Grimhild; it can be read either way. One way to look at it is with the Christian perspective: that she did not know her proper place as a woman and was not feminine enough and was therefore punished. However, it could just as easily be read from a pre-Christian point of view, with the saga speaking highly of this woman to help indicate just how terrible this disease was.

*Grænendinga saga* ends by speaking of the prosperity of Guðríd and her family. She went on her pilgrimage to Rome, a difficult and pious feat for a woman in that era, and became an abbess for the rest of her life.

þá fór Guðríð útan ok gekk suðr ok kom út aptr til bús Snorra, sonar síns, ok hafði hann þá látit gera kirkju í Glaumbæ. Síðan varð Guðríð nunna ok einsetukona ok var þar, meðan hon lifði. (*Grænendinga saga: 269*)

At least three bishops are named as being descended from Guðríd and Karlsefni in the ending stanza, which details the continuation of their family line. This part of the saga is the most like traditional Icelandic Family Sagas and is an appropriate way to end a tale of heroic adventures. However, as I have mentioned in a previous footnote, the plotline has clearly been tampered with to add Christian values, as Icelanders during the tenth and eleventh centuries would not have known what a convent was (although if she did in fact manage to complete a pilgrimage to the south, it is possible she could have learned of it there).

### 3.3.4 Thorgunna:

Who is Thorgunna and what part does she play in *Eiríks saga rauða*? She does not appear anywhere else in the sagas, but clearly has quite a significant role and must therefore be mentioned in conjunction with Freydís and Guðríd. Leif falls in love with her while he is in the Hebrides, but does not approve of her coming to Greenland with him. She then informs him that she is pregnant with his child and that she intends to send the child to Greenland when he is grown to be with Leif. The boy, whose name is Thorgils, eventually travels to Greenland and is acknowledged by Leif.

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<sup>25</sup> Grimhild is called Sigrid in Eirík's Saga, and there is an important scene involving her, to be discussed later.

Leifr lagdi hug aa. konv þa er þorgunna. het. hun var kona ætt stor. þat sa leifr at. hun mundi kvnna fleira enn fatt eitt enn er leifr sigldi. aa burt beiddizt. þorgunna. at fara med havnm. leifr spurdi hvort. Þat. væri navckut vili frænnda henna hun kuezst ecki þvi fara. leifr kuezst eigi kunna at giora hertekna. svo stor ættada konv i o kvnnv. lanndi enn ver lid fair. Þorgvonna. mællti. eigi er uist at þeir þicki þvi betr raadit. aa. þat mun ek hætta sagdi leifr. þa segi ek þeir sagdi þorgvonna at ek fer eigi ein saman. ok mun ek vera med barni ok segi ek þat af þinum vaulldvum [...] þa mvn ek vpp fæda sveininn ok þeir sennda til grænlandz [...] þessi sveinn kom til grænlanndz ok nefndizt þorgils. (*Eiriks saga rauða*: 45 – 47, Skálholtsbók)

This one scene could challenge the role that I have cut out for Guðríd as the Mary figure. Thorgunna gives birth under somewhat mysterious circumstances to the illegitimate child of one of the greatest heroes in Norse history. However, the entire character of Thorgunna is a bit convoluted, as she appears under different circumstances in another saga. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, supernatural events are said to be performed by a Hebridean woman named Thorgunna skilled in magic who traveled to Snæfellsness. The area was haunted after her death until an exorcism was performed. Events included her waking from the dead to prepare a meal for those sent to bury her, other dead people coming back to visit the farm, and a seal emerging from the hearth (*selshöfuð kom upp ór eldgrófinni. Eyrbyggja saga*: 147). It was only after her belongings were burned and a mass was said that the hauntings stopped. In this saga, Thorgunna is said to be quite old, making the story incompatible with the vignette in *Eiriks saga rauða* (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 85).<sup>26</sup> Everything else aside, Thorgunna is obviously not a Christian woman in any sense, and clearly not set out as an especially positive female force in the saga. There could be many interesting interpretations regarding the purpose she serves as a character, but I do not think it is as the Virgin Mary in any case. Could it be as Mary Magdalene? A promiscuous woman who is the consort of one of the discoverers of Vínland? Or is she genuinely just an intriguing character in an adventure story? It is certainly a relationship worth examining further, although it is difficult to attach a specific agenda to the creation of her character. Perhaps she genuinely was a historical figure, although in this case it is strange that the two instances in which she is mentioned in Nordic sagas are so incompatible. However, if both storylines, that of Thorgunna and that of the discovery of Vínland, have their roots in oral tradition, then it is not unthinkable that the two accounts would not match perfectly in their written forms.

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<sup>26</sup> Þat var áhugi manna, at Þórgunna myndi sótt hafa inn séttu tög, ok var hon þó kona i ernasta (*Eyrbyggja saga*: 139).

### 3.3.5 Men in the sagas:

It is important to mention the men in the sagas as well, especially with relation to the two main female characters, how they behaved around the women, and whether it was realistic of the time and location or yet another fabrication by a later, more romantic, society. Leif's reactions and style of speech, both when chastising Freyðis and when counseling Gudríd can be searched for Church influence, or that of other European heroic tales, which I shall do. The actions of the men fooled by Freyðis, for example the weakness of her husband Thorvard in the Greenlanders' Saga, as well as the behavior of Gudríd's husband Thorfinn Karlsefni, shall also be analyzed to some extent in this paper where it is appropriate, as the significance of the women's actions hold more meaning when compared to the actions and traits of those around them. The entire context of these scenes must be taken into account, not only the sole actions of the characters in question.

According to *Eiríks saga rauða*, Leif was sent by Olaf Tryggvasson to preach Christianity to the Greenlanders. He showed how great and good he was by bringing Christianity to the country, and began preaching Christianity and the Catholic faith throughout the country. He revealed King Olaf Tryggvasson's message to the people, telling them what excellence and what glory there was in this new faith. This is clearly the composition of a cleric, and certainly the wording and sentence structure of medieval Christianity, even in the original text:

Leifr tok. lannd i. eireks .firdi. ok for heim i bratta hlid. toku menn uel vid havnum. hann bodadi bratt kristni vm lanndit ok allmenniliga trv ok syndi mavnnum ord senndingar olafs. konungs .trygua .s. ok segir huersu maurg agæti ok mikil dyrd þessum sid. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 48 – 49, Skálholtsbók)

According to this passage, Eirík the Red did not want to abandon the old religion, even though his wife had adopted Christianity at once. She had a church built close by and it was named after her, Thjodhild. She even refused to live together with Eirík after he would not be converted:

Eirekr tok því maali seint. at lata sid sinn. Enn. þiodhilldr geck skiott vnndir ok let giora. kirkiv eign all nærr husvm uar þat. hus. kallat þiodhilldar kirkia. hafdi hun. þar fram bænir sinar ok þeir menn sem vid kristni toku. enn þeir voru marger. þiodhilldr villdi ecki hallda samfarer. uid Eirek. Sidan er hun tok tru enn havnum var þat miok i moti skapi. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 49, Skálholtsbók)<sup>27</sup>

Thorstein, husband to Gudríd, is a good example of a kind and pious man. In one of Gudríd's vignettes, Thorstein dies and his corpse requests an audience with his widow.

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<sup>27</sup> Again, everybody seems to already know what a church is—strange in this early period.

Gudríd says that she will speak with her late husband, because she has faith in God's mercy and that God will protect her. Thorstein tells Gudríd that it has become a bad custom in Greenland to bury people in unconsecrated ground without Christian funeral rites, and that this must change. He asks to be buried on Church ground and for his money to be given to the Church and the poor. In both of the above passages, Leif's and Thorstein's men are good and pious agents of the Church agenda, working to help convert the populace of Scandinavia and the North Atlantic.

A further example of Church agenda expressed in the male characters appears towards the end of Eirík's Saga. Thorfinn Karlsefni and Bjarni Grimolfsson, along with their men, had slaughtered and cooked a beached whale and could not understand why it made them ill. Then Thorhall the Hunter walked over and said, 'has not Redbeard [Thor] turned out to be more successful than your Christ? This was my reward for the poem I composed in honour of my patron, Thor; he has seldom failed me.' When the others realized that they had been eating meat sent by a pagan god, they threw it over a cliff and hoped for God's mercy. Once they did this, they had great luck fishing and had no lack of provisions.

litlu sidar kom þat hvalr ok drifv menn til ok skaaru hann. enn þo kenndu menn eigi huat hual þat. var. karl kunni mikla skyn a hualnum ok kenndi hann þo eigi. þenna hval sudu matsveinar ok atu af ok vard þo aullum illt af. þa gengr, þorhallr at ok mællti. var eigi svo at hinn raud skeggiadi vard driugarr enn kristr. yduar þetta. hafða ek nu firir skalld skap minn er ek a orta um þor fulltruan. sialldan hefir hann mer brygdizt ok er menn uissu þetta villdv avnguir nyta ok kaustudu firir biavrg ofan ok sneru sinv maali til guds miskunnar. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 66, Skálholtsbók)<sup>28</sup>

I find it unlikely that a group of people, who had until recently had a strictly pagan background and no knowledge of Christianity, would have been so disturbed by a pagan act and so quick to throw away that much good meat if they were hungry and in foreign territory. This kind of unrealistic action I believe signals clear clerical intent in this written composition and a twisting of certain events to better suit Christian ideology. Towards the end of the same saga, Thorfinn Karlsefni captures two young Skraeling boys and teaches them their language and baptizes them.<sup>29</sup> Would an Icelandic merchant and explorer, so far away from home, have taken the time to do this? Would the rest of the Skraelings not have retaliated against this action violently, or at least have tried to get their sons back? Can we

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<sup>28</sup> The only different between the two different manuscripts here is that, while *Skálholtsbók* mentions that Karlsefni has a great knowledge of whales, but does not know what type of whale this particular animal is, *Hauksbók* leaves this information out of the scene. The rest of the text is the same in both versions of Eirík's Saga.

<sup>29</sup> enn sveinana haufðu þeir med ser ok kenndu þeim maal ok voru skirdir. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 77, Skálholtsbók) The *Hauksbók* manuscript corroborates this.

ever know the answer for sure? Regardless, these several Christian events in the sagas would have been illogical in a realistic context, and suggests that they were fabricated with an intent to educate people about Christianity.

Another male character who, while he does not have a major role within the saga narratives, is shown to be important to Iceland family histories, is Snorri Karlsefnisson, the son of Guðríd and Thorfinn Karlsefni. During the stories that take place in the three Vínland manuscripts he is given only brief mentions here and there, but is shown in both sagas to have been born in Vínland (*Í þann tíma fæddi Guðríðr sveinbarn, kona Karlsefnis, ok hét sá sveinn Snorri. Grænlandinga saga: 262; þar kom til hid fysta haust. Snorri .s. karls ok var þar þann er þeir foru a. brvtt. Eiríks saga rauða: 76, Skálholtsbók; þar kom til hit fysta haust snorri .s. karlsefnis. ok uar hann þa þriuetr er þeir foru brott. Eiríks saga rauða: 76, Hauksbók*). In a strange scene in *Grænlandinga saga*, discussed below in a comparison of the two sagas, Guðríd sees a *fylgja*, an apparition of herself, while sitting by the side of Snorri's cradle. As soon as the ghost disappears, a Skræling is killed for trying to steal weapons from the settlement. In the conclusion of this saga, Snorri takes over the family farm after Karlsefni's death, and it is only after Snorri marries that Guðríd goes on her pilgrimage to the south. It is then through Snorri that several bishops are descended. This last passage is reiterated in *Eiríks saga rauða*, although it is only in *Skálholtsbók* that the young Snorri is said to have gone back to Karlsefni's farm at Reynisness with his parents. In *Hauksbók* this is not mentioned at all—only that Snorri would eventually have many descendants.

### **3.4 Other Christian imagery in the texts**

#### **3.4.1 *Grænlandinga saga*:**

*Mínar biðk at munka reyni  
Meinalausan farar beina,  
Heiðis haldi hárar foldar  
Hallar dróttinn yfir mér stalli.  
(Grænlandinga saga: 245)*

This refrain, which can be roughly translated to "I beseech the lord of monks to steer my journeys; may the lord of high Heaven hold his strong hand over me", appears out of place in a Viking saga. However, it is most certainly not out of place in clerical composition written during the High Middle Ages. In *Grænlandinga saga*, the poem, *Hafgerðinga drápa*, is written by a Christian from the Hebrides who accompanies Herjólfur Bárðarson, father of Bjarni, on the journey from Norway to Greenland. We also learn in the same

chapter that Greenland was still a heathen country at this time (*Heiðit var folk á Grænlandi í þann tíma. Grœnlendinga saga: 245*). This is corroborated in *Skálholtsbók*, where King Olaf sends Leif to preach Christianity in Greenland. In the next chapter of the Greenlanders' Saga, Leif and Bjarni leave to explore North America. We have all heard of the three lands they came to: Helluland, Markland, and finally Vínland. However, I believe it is worth looking again at the ways in which Vínland is described particularly in a Christian light. First, it should be noted that in *Grœnlendinga saga* it is only Helluland and Markland that are named during the first exploration. It is not until the end of the following chapter that Leif declared the third location Vínland. This would seem to throw off balance the penchant for trinities and patterns that are so commonly found in sagas and folktales from Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The unnamed land is described in this way:

[...] ok gengu þar upp ok sásk um í góðu veðri ok fundu þat, at döggr var á grasinu, ok varð þeim þat fyrir, at þeir tóku höndum sínum í döggrina ok brugðu í munn sér ok þóttusk ekki jafnsoett kennt hafa, sem þat var. (*Grœnlendinga saga: 250*)

Hvárki skorti þar lax í ánni né í vatninu, ok stoerra lax en þeir hefði fyrr sét. Þar var svá góðr landskostr, at því er þeim sýndisk, at þar myndi engi fénadr fóðr þurfa á vetrum; þar kómu engi frost á vetrum, ok lítt rénuðu þar grös. (op. cit.: 251)

Essentially, they had good weather during the entire period they were there, and the dew on the grass was the sweetest thing they had ever tasted. There was plenty of salmon in the water, the biggest salmon they had ever seen. It seemed that they would need no winter fodder for livestock, because there was no frost during the winter and the grass hardly withered at all. This is a good example of a passage where Christian creative influence and historical probability are both represented. The words used to describe the location are those standard in references to paradise (everlasting food and no winter). However, they are also aspects of the natural environment that the Nordic explorers would have been sure to record and tell others about since they were not used to it. To those coming from the Arctic Circle, a land with little or no frost during the winter and abundant fish and flora could have seemed quite exciting, although the climate and environment of eastern Canada cannot be said to be so drastically different from that of Norway or even southern coastal Greenland. They would have needed to go south of Newfoundland, to the St. Lawrence region or even what is now the state of Maine, in order to find conditions similar to "Paradise".

Now we reach the scene of the naming of Vínland. Leif's foster-father Tyrkir had gone missing and when he was found he was rolling his eyes about and speaking unintelligibly. When he finally begins speaking Icelandic he says "*ek fann vínvið ok vínber*", literally "I

found vines and wine berries (grapes)”. This makes Tyrkir one of the most important figures in the sagas, even though he is only mentioned a handful of times, because it is he who finds the grapes and the grapevines and shows them to the rest of the crew! How Leif responds is quite significant to the interpretation of the text. He says:

“Nú skal hafa tvennar sýslur fram, ok skal sinn dag hvárt, lesa vínber eða höggva vínvið ok fella mörkina, svá at þat verði farmr til skips míns” [...] ok gaf Leifr nafn landinu eptir landkostum ok kallaði Vínland. (Grœnlendinga saga: 253)

”We have two tasks before us. We shall every other day gather grapes and cut grapevines, and fell trees for cargo for my ship... Leif called the land after its natural qualities: Vínland.” In other words, the timber was just as important a resource as the grapes and grapevines. It is quite possible, then, that the reason the crew sailed in that direction was to gather timber to take back with them, and they just happened to come across wine grapes by lucky chance. We can also see from this passage that Vínland, with an accent over the ‘i’, is the more sensible version of the name.

The next person to explore Vínland is Thorvald, after his brother Leif loans him his ship. They found the land beautiful and bountiful and Thorvald says “*Hér er fagrt, ok hér vilda ek bæ minn reisa*” (here will I make my home). However, he is soon wounded by a Skræling arrow and before he dies, asks to be buried there with crosses at his head and feet. Here in the text is a rather out-of-place statement: *Grænland var þá kristnat, en þó andaðisk Eiríkr rauði fyrir kristni* (Grœnlendinga saga: 256) (Greenland was Christian at that time, although Eirík the Red died before the conversion). Why is this stated here? It may simply be to justify Thorvald’s dying request. However, we could assume from the request itself that at least some of Greenland was Christianized, and it is not relevant to the story line for us to learn at this point that Eirík the Red (Thorvald’s father) died without being converted. Clearly it was important to those composing the text to make it clear the Christianity had come to Greenland at last, but that Eirík, poor man, had missed his chance to go to Heaven. It also suggests that Leif is successful in his task to bring Christianity to Greenland, as he is instructed to do in Eirík’s Saga.

The next to travel to Vínland was Thorfinn Karlsefni, second husband to Leif’s sister-in-law Gudríd. He borrowed Leif’s houses there and had plenty of food when a whale washed ashore, and made use of the plentiful resources: grapes, game and other produce. *Þeir höfðu öll gæði af landkostum, þeim er þar váru, bæði af vínberjum ok alls konar veiðum ok gæðum* (op. cit.: 261). Later, while Karlsefni was back in Norway, he met a stranger who wanted to buy the carved gable-head off his ship. He did not want to sell it, but was offered quite a bit of money and so changed his mind. The saga then states that Karlsefni had not



been aware of what kind of wood the gable-head was made from, but that it was maple wood and came from Vínland: [...] *Karlsefni vissi eigi, hvat tré var; en þat var mösurr* [usually translated as maple; Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 71], *kominn af Vínlandi* (op. cit.: 268). This is quite an odd passage and seems to indicate that Vínland wood was worth quite a bit of money (half a gold mark in this case).

### 3.4.2 *Eiríks saga rauða*:

One character obviously meant to convey Church thought and values by invoking a negative image is Thorhall the Hunter. He is described by the use of several unflattering adjectives, and was not very popular, although he and Eirík had been friends for a long time. In addition to this, “he had not had much to do with Christianity since it had come to Greenland” (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 61, Skálholtsbók). In the description, his bad temper, trouble making, and uncouth habits are brought to a head in this statement that he had almost nothing to do with Christianity, blatantly suggesting that a good personality and Christian moral go hand in hand, although much of this description is cut out in the *Hauksbók* version.<sup>30</sup>

Þorhallr var mikill uexti svartr ok þussligr hann var helldr við alldr. u dæll í skapi. hlíodlynnðr famalugr hversdagliga unndir favrull ok þó at mæla samr. ok fystizt iafnan hinns verra. Hann hafði litt við. trv blannðazt síðan hun kom. aa. grænnland. Þorhallr var litt vinsældvm horfínn. enn þa hafði. Eirekr. leigni tal af havnum hallditt. (ibid)

It is this same man who claims the whale meat washed ashore is a gift from his patron god Thor, and prompts all the other men to throw the meat away and beg God’s forgiveness. He is exactly the sort of man the Church would utilize to convince others of the wickedness of non-Christians, and a popular saga is a perfect way to transmit these ideals. Soon after this, Thorhall wanted to travel north to search for Vínland, but Karlsefni wanted to go further south. Nine agreed to travel with Thorhall and the rest went with Karlsefni. The latter drank some water he was carrying as they were preparing to leave, and it prompted him to recite a poem:

Hafa kvaðv mik meðar malmþings er ek kom hingat mer samir land fyrí lyðvm lasta dryckin bazta billdz hattar verðr bvtv beði tyr at styra helldr er sva at ek kryp at kelldv komað vin a gron mina [...] Forvm aftr þar er orir erv sandhimins landan latvm kenni val kanna knarar skeið en breiðv meðan bil stygvir bygia

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<sup>30</sup> The *Hauksbók* citation simply states “*hann var illa kristen*”, perhaps for the sake of creating a tidier and more concise text (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 61, *Hauksbók*).

bellendr ok hval vella lavfa veðrs þeir er leyfa lond a fvrðv strondvm. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 67, Hauksbók)

Essentially, “These warriors lured me to this land with promises of fine drinks. Now I could curse this country, for I, a warrior, must grovel at a spring and hold a water pail. No wine has touched my lips... Let us turn back home, let our ships explore the sea, while the swordsmen who love this land settle in Furdustrands and boil up whales.” In conclusion, Thorhall and his crew are enslaved on Ireland and die there. A fitting end to such a vile, pagan man, the Medieval Christian audience must have thought.

In the same chapter where we are introduced to Thorhall, we learn that Leif has been given a gift by Olaf Tryggvasson in exchange for Leif preaching Christianity in Greenland: a Scottish couple, Haki and Hekja, who could run faster than deer.

Þat var þa er leifr var med olafi. konvngi trygva. syni ok hann bad hann boda kristni. aa. grænlanndi ok þa gaf konvngr havnum tuo menn skotzka. het. karlmadrinn haki enn. konan hækia. konvngr. bad Leif taka til þessarra manna ef hann þyrfti skioleiks. vid. þviat. þav voru dyrrum skiotari. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 63, Skálholtsbók<sup>31</sup>)

The fact that the couple was a gift to Leif could imply that they were not free people, and that their ability to run fast was being harnessed by Christians to further a just cause. They were then turned over to Thorfinn Karlsefni to help him explore Vínland, also a just cause, but the deeper implications of this scene are difficult to discern. In addition, the *Hauksbók* manuscript does not say that Leif had been sent to Greenland to introduce Christianity to the inhabitants. It states only that Olaf gave the aforementioned Scottish couple to Leif for their abilities as fast runners. However, the Skálholts manuscript agrees with the Greenlanders’ Saga, which states that Greenland was still a heathen country, but was eventually converted during the lifetime of Eirík the Red.

When Karlsefni finds Vínland, we are given much the same description as is given during Leif and Bjarni’s exploration:

sigldv þeir. karl þa til aar osins ok kaullvdr i hopi lanndit þar fundu þeir sialf sana hveiti akra þar sem. lægdir voru enn vin uin uidr allt þar sem hollta kenndi. huer lækr var þar fvllr af fiskum þeir giordu þar grafir sem lanndit mættizt ok flodit geck eptz ok er vt fell uorv helgir fiskar i gravfunvm þar uar mikill fioldi dyra a skogi med avllv moti. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 68 – 69, Skálholtsbók)

This can be roughly translated that Karlsefni and his men named the estuary Hop (which was a common Icelandic name for any location characterized by a tidal lake). They found

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<sup>31</sup> This passage is cut down in Hauksbók to simply say that Olaf gave Leif the couple and that they could run fast. There is no mention of a Christian mission to Greenland.

wild wheat and grapes growing. Every stream was full of fish. They dug trenches at high tide, and when the tide went out there were fish trapped in the trenches. And in the woods there were animals of all kinds. It is unclear where the modern location could be, as Hop is a fairly vague place name.

### **3.5 A Comparison of the Three Manuscripts:**

Thus far, the two sagas in question have been treated as completely separate works, only being used together because they have certain characters and locations in common.

However, some of the events within the sagas do refer to each other and even have some overlap when it comes to historical events. The contradictions expressed between the two works have led to some of the most interesting discussions about the historical validity of the *Vínland Sagas*. For example, the actual finding of *Vínland* (the location) was performed by completely different characters depending on which saga you use. In addition, there are many smaller differences between the two versions of *Eirík's Saga*, and I have already argued how I believe the two versions should be treated as two completely different pieces of literature. However, this is not the main point of my thesis. Rather I shall compare the three different manuscripts in order to draw out any significant similarities or differences that are relevant to the idea that the Church in Scandinavia was adapting Old Norse myths and legends to serve their own ends.

#### **3.5.1 Freydís:**

There is quite a large difference between the two sagas in how Freydís Eiríksdóttir is portrayed. While she exists in *Eirík's Saga* as a rather forceful woman who is not inherently evil, she is explicitly referred to as an evil woman in the *Greenlanders' Saga* (see quotes from the above section on Freydís). "[...] a woman of treacherous deceit emerges in one telling, and a woman of spirited initiative emerges in the other. There seems to be little doubt that the two women are one and the same, though there are important differences in their backgrounds as well as in their behavior that might owe as much to inconsistent oral traditions as to ideological moulding by saga writers" (Quinn 2005: 531). We are not sure why there are such large discrepancies in the characterization of Freydís; it could be as simple as personality differences between the two transcribers of the sagas. There was certainly an oral tradition in the Nordic regions prior to the advent of writing, and it is quite common knowledge that oral information can change quite drastically over the course of centuries, or even decades. We can assume that the writers of *Eirík's Saga* and the writers of

the Greenlanders' Saga were not hearing these stories from the same source. There are many more magical events in Eirík's Saga; does that mean it is the more pagan of the two sagas? Unlikely, as Eirík's Saga is the one in which Gudríd most clearly stands forward as a Mary figure and a good Christian woman. However, it is unmistakably the Greenlanders' Saga in which Freydís is a much stronger "Eve" character, although I believe she is meant as a negative figure in both sagas. I do not agree with Quinn, who seems to suggest that Freydís is, in fact, a positive character in Eirík's Saga; she may not be a criminal, but she is certainly not a meek, proper, Christian woman.

There is one similarity in the character of Freydís between the two sagas; one that lends itself well to my hypothesis that she can be compared to an Eve figure and that this may have even been an intentionally created likeness. In both sagas Freydís is described as an overbearing woman who, when shown Paradise, tries to control it and the men around her to her own demise. The story in the Greenlanders' Saga is the more violent of the two. She is mentioned only twice, and both times are negative references. First she is introduced as *svarri mikill* and marrying people for their money, and then in her main scene she uses trickery and lies in an attempt to gain more wealth for herself. When she fails at this, she has all involved murdered, and even commits some of the murders herself. Her role in Eirík's Saga is much more subtle and can be seen in two different ways. To begin with, she is only mentioned by name in the *Hauksbók* manuscript during the introductory passage. When Karlsefni is making ready to set sail for Vinland, Thorvard is mentioned briefly. However, while in the Skálholt manuscript he is only referred to as the son-in-law of Eirík the Red (*Madr. het. Þorvalldr hann uar maagr. Eireks. Rauda.*), *Hauksbók* states that he is married to Freydís, the illegitimate daughter of Eirík, and traveled with Karlsefni to Vinland: *Maðr het þorvarðr hann atti Freydísi dottvr eiríks ravða lavngetna hann for ok með þeim...* (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 60; *Skálholtsbók, Hauksbók*). We do not even find out that Freydís accompanied them until chapter eleven, where she fights off the Skraelings. We have to ask ourselves why it was only Haukr who mentioned Freydís by name in the first passage, whereas *Skálholtsbók* only indicates her presence by naming Thorvard as son-in-law to Eirík the Red. We know that Haukr was an administrator, and that he was preoccupied with the preservation of family lines. Perhaps he wanted to make it quite clear who was related to whom, in order to give more weight to the assertion that he was related directly to Gudríd and Karlsefni.

Later in Eirík's Saga, as the Norsemen are being attacked by the Skraelings, Freydís is the only person brave enough to stand and face the antagonists, pregnant and bare-breasted.

Taken from a pre-Christian perspective, she appears to be a positive character, fearless and concerned about the well-being of her countrymen, potentially comparable to the Amazons of Greek mythology (discussed in more detail below). From a Christian point of view however, this cannot have been praise-worthy behavior for a woman of her social standing (the sister of Leif Eiríkson and daughter, albeit an illegitimate daughter, of Eirík the Red). If this vignette was meant at some point to be a positive depiction of Freydis, I suggest that it would have been adapted by the Church in the medieval period to represent a woman tempted by Paradise who dooms the men around her to strife, just as Eve does in the book of Genesis or Pandora does in Greek mythology. In both *Vínland Sagas* she is a violent and intimidating character; while in one saga it is to the demise of the men around her, and in the other it is to their advantage.

### **3.5.2 Gudríd:**

Both of the *Vínland Sagas* are very clear in their treatment of Gudríd. She is the perfect woman who can do no wrong. She is a good Christian who lets the men in her life tell her what to do. She bears bishops and parents of bishops, and according to one account travels on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and returns to Iceland to become a nun, despite this chronological contradiction. While the stories that refer to Gudríd are different in each saga, they describe her in the same way. In *Eirík's Saga* she is reluctant to perform a pagan ceremony when asked because she is a Christian woman, but acquiesces when the men of the house tell her to. In the *Greenlanders' Saga* her dead husband returns to tell her what she must do in the future and she follows what he says to the letter. Gudríd does not contribute to the action in the stories, but is the kind and honorable observer who only wants to make the men around her happy and live as a pious follower of the Christian religion. Because of this, I think it is quite easy to compare this character with the Virgin Mary from the Bible. She is the embodiment of a humble and holy woman, she gives birth to holy men who serve the Church, and she finishes her life as an abbess in a convent.

The way in which Gudríd is introduced is very different in both sagas. In *Grænlandinga saga* she was the victim of a shipwreck, rescued along with her Norwegian husband and several others by Leif and his men. At this point, *Vínland* had already been discovered by the Greenlanders. Thorir the Norwegian quickly dies of a disease and Gudríd becomes a widow. She then marries Thorstein Eiríksson and we begin to find out more about her character (*Guðríð var skörulig kona at sjá ok vitr kona ok kunní vel vera með ókunnum mönnum. Grænlandinga saga: 258*). In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Gudríd is, in fact, the

granddaughter of a freed slave. Her father was Thorbjorn Vifilsson, who stayed with her on the farm of Thorkel where Gudríd later meets the prophetess. Thorbjorn was the son of Vifil, a British noble who had been taken prisoner and made a slave. It is with regard to him that we come across Aud the Deep-Minded, a Norwegian woman who we meet only in a strange prologue to Eirík's Saga.<sup>32</sup> Aud was married to a warrior king and had a son called Thorstein the Red. After her son's death, she set out to Iceland with a crew of free and unfree men. There she lived with her brother and had crosses erected, as she had been baptized and was a devout Christian (although if she is the same age as Gudríd's grandfather, that would put Aud's baptism potentially in the early tenth century—long before Christianity came to Scandinavia. However, this plot device does function in showing that Gudríd is descended from a long line of Christians). One of the slaves that came to Iceland with Aud was Vifil, and she gave him his freedom:

[...] hann feck avdar diupaugv. dottr. ketils flatnefs. [...] avdr var þa . a kata nesi. er hun spvrði fall. Þosteins hun lætr þa giora. [...] audr kom til islanndz [...] hun hafði bæna halld i kross holvm þar let hun reisa krossa. þviat hun. var skird ok uel truud. [...] Einn af. þeim. het. vifill. hann uar ætt storr. madr. ok hafði verit hertekinn fyrir uestan haf. ok var kalladr. anaudgr. adr audr. leysti hann. (*Eiríks saga rauða*:26 – 28, Skálholtsbók)

It should be noted that this story exists in the same form in both Eirík's Saga manuscripts; the only noticeable differences are in the spelling and grammar as the language developed. It is difficult, however, to attempt to pinpoint Gudríd as a historical figure when the stories about her origins are so different. Although she marries Thorstein Eiríksson in both of the Vínland Sagas, in one case it is after she has been to the West and in another, she has not yet left Iceland. I believe that these points were not important to her role in the narrative. What was important was that she was a Christian woman with a Christian background

There is no question that a majority of the text in Eirík's Saga revolves around the story of Gudríd. It could almost be called Gudríd's Saga. If the best evidence we have for Freydís as a negative female figure comes from the Greenlanders' Saga, then the best evidence for Gudríd as Mary comes from Eirík's Saga. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that Haukr was preoccupied with merging his own family line with that of Gudríd and Karlsefni, and was simply attempting to show off his family's great past.<sup>33</sup> However, *Skálholtsbók* does not treat Gudríd any differently and we do not really know the context in which that

<sup>32</sup> Aud is named as one of the first settlers of Iceland in several Icelandic sagas.

<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that, while we do not have any firm evidence to show that Freydís was a historical figure, she is directly related to several characters who were. As the illegitimate daughter of Eirík the Red, she was Leif Eiríksson's sister. In addition to this, she was sister-in-law to Gudríd herself, whose first husband was another son of Eirík.

manuscript was written. In both sagas, she is introduced in a positive manner. In the Greenlanders' Saga she is intelligent and knows well how to conduct herself amongst strangers, and in both of the Eirík's Saga manuscripts she is a beautiful and exceptional woman (both of these passages have been quoted in section 3.3.3). Given the difference in narrative between the two Vinland Sagas, it is also significant that all three manuscripts detail a confrontation between Gudríd and her dead husband Thorstein Eiríksson. In the Greenlanders' Saga it is the dead Thorstein who tells Gudríd her future, rather than the prophetess from Eirík's Saga, and he instructs her to go on a pilgrimage and then return to Iceland to be a nun, telling her that her future children will be good and prosperous. In Eirík's Saga the death of Thorstein happens after Gudríd has already been told her future by the seeress. He then comes back to speak to Gudríd only because he wishes to be buried on Church ground and have his money given to the Church and the poor. The only thing he says regarding her future is that she would prosper, but that she should avoid marrying a Greenlander. His message is different in each of the two sagas, but in both he is a messenger of Christian values.

One of the strangest vignettes involving Gudríd does not appear to have any direct correlation to Biblical or Christian imagery, but nonetheless appears to have some interesting connotations for my thesis, particularly when comparing the two sagas. Gudríd is sitting in the doorway by her son Snorri's cradle when a striking looking woman appears and says that her name is also Gudríd. This is probably a *fylgja*, a ghostly apparition of Gudríd. Just as Karlsefni's wife asks the stranger to come and sit beside her, there is a crash and the woman disappears. In that same instant a Skräling is killed by one of Karlsefni's men. No one besides Gudríd had seen the woman (*Engi maðr hafði konu þessa sét, útan Gudríðr ein. Grænlandinga saga: 263*). Despite the lack of obvious Christian connections, this story does have a very formulaic feel that points to origins elsewhere, perhaps from an older saga or other Nordic tradition or from somewhere else in Europe altogether. It could be a coincidence that both Freydís and Gudríd have scenes in which a Skräling dies, or it could be another instance emphasizing their duality. We do not know if Gudríd herself is responsible for the death of the native in the same way that Freydís was directly involved with the killing of the Skrälings in Eirík's Saga, but it is certainly an interesting parallel. There are Skräling deaths in each of the sagas; one for each of the women considered in this paper. And while the scene in which Freydís helps to defeat the Skrälings is violent in a way that we have come to expect in any scene involving Freydís, the scene with Gudríd

involves the same mystic quality that we can expect to see in most of the scenes regarding Gudríd.

There is also another comparison that can be made regarding this scene, and another of Gudríd's scenes in Eirík's Saga. There are very few ghosts and apparitions in either of the sagas, especially when we take into account the high number of other supernatural or mythical events taking place. The first is when Gudríd is visited, in both sagas, by a dead Thorstein. Another, which I would like to compare to the scene in which Gudríd sees the *fylgja*, is a scene where Sigrid (referred to as Grimhild in the Greenlander's Saga) sees the ghosts of all those who had died from an illness. Sigrid, the wife of the co-owner of Thorstein Eiríksson's farm, went outside the house with Gudríd on a cold day to use the privy. Gudríd wanted to go back inside, but Sigrid refused, saying "*eigi fer ek at suo bunv her er lidit allt uid dauda firir dyrunum ok þar i sveit kenni ek þorstein bonda þinn ok kenni ek mik ok er slikt havrmong at sia*" (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 53, Skálholtsbók). "All the dead are lined up outside the house, and I can see your husband Thorstein and myself among them." Sigrid was dead by morning. Gudríd is a character in all of the above scenes involving ghosts and apparitions, showing her natural inclination towards mystical events and characters.

### **3.5.3 Men in the sagas:**

There seem to be many more specific references to men in religious settings, particularly those linked to the women in my analysis, in Eirík's Saga. The Greenlanders' Saga deals much more with Vínland as a location, the logistics of exploration, and the characters of Freydís and Gudríd. The former saga deals much more with the fact that Leif was sent to Greenland by Olaf Tryggvasson to preach Christianity to the people living there (although the descriptions of Leif are slightly more generous and flowery in *Skálholtsbók*), as well as with the personification of Gudríd's husband Thorstein as a good and pious man. The general narratives of each of the two sagas are slightly different in any case, with the Greenlanders' Saga dealing with Leif, Bjarni, and Karlsefni's explorations of Vínland from Greenland, and Eirík's Saga dealing more with the descendants of Gudríd and her life in Greenland and Vínland. There are also many more passages regarding the nature of Vínland and what was found there in the Greenlanders' Saga. In both versions of Eirík's Saga, the description of Vínland is kept to only one significant passage.

The saga of Eric is written in the Skalholt book and later strongly revised in the Hauksbók [...] The tale is logical and consequential: Eric the Red, the first land occupant of Greenland, plays an important part in it, but the principle character



without comparison is Gudríd Thorbjörnsdaughter, whose second husband was Thorstein, son of Eric the Red, and whose third husband was Thorfinn Karlsevne, described as the real explorer of Vínland. (Lönnroth 1996: 43)<sup>34</sup>

In addition, it is Eirík's Saga that contains more of the strange supernatural occurrences that give the Vínland Sagas their reputation and controversy. Perhaps this is because Eirík's Saga has undergone more adaptations, whereas the Greenlanders' Saga has been more isolated in one single version: *Flateyjarbók*.

Other differences between the male characters within the sagas are mainly isolated to insignificant variances in how they are described. For example, Thorhall the Hunter has a much lengthier negative description in *Skálholtsbók*, whereas this passage in *Hauksbók* is almost an entire paragraph shorter. Later, when Thorhall is found staring at the sky, pinching himself and muttering, there are again small variances between the two manuscripts in the adjectives used. When compared to the Greenlanders' Saga, I believe there are some parallels that can be found between this scene with Thorhall and the scene where Tyrkir finds the wine grapes, although the former character is meant to be disliked whereas Tyrkir is a foster-father to Leif. Although neither have many appearances in the Vínland Sagas, both contribute significantly to the narrative and are memorable. Also, both appear to go somewhat mad in conjunction with bountiful food being found: Thorhall's patron deity provides the men with a whale, and Tyrkir discovers grapes. However, this is not a plot device I believe to be unusual or to have special meaning assigned to it; it is purely an interesting parallel.

### **3.5.4 Other Christian Imagery:**

The same pattern is shown in this category as in the one mentioned above, that the Greenlanders' Saga deal mainly with the finding of Vínland itself. It is in this saga that we have the grand descriptions of Vínland as a beautiful Paradise, comparable to the Garden of Eden: the green meadows and fields of grain, the abundance of fish and wine grapes, and the mild weather. However, it is in Eirík's Saga that we find the majority of supernatural occurrences: the evil whale meat blessed by a pagan god, the countryside populated by one-legged men, the gift to Leif from Olaf Tryggvasson of the enchanted Scottish couple. As I have suggested above, I think it is most likely that this is a result of the fact that Eirík's Saga has been adapted more times by more people, whereas the Greenlanders' Saga has been largely confined to the version inscribed in *Flateyjarbók*. However, I do think that a clear

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<sup>34</sup> Here Erik Lönnroth has made a mistake with chronology, as *Hauksbók* was assembled prior to *Skálholtsbók*.

Christian influence can be found in the imagery from both of these oft-analyzed sagas. The descriptions of Vínland in the Greenlanders' Saga do present a very clear picture of the stereotypical Christian Paradise, and there are several instances in both of the sagas where it is shown that it is through the faults of man (or woman) that they are forced to leave this Paradise (for example, through Freydís' treachery or due to attacks from the native—and heathen—population).

### 3.5.5 Connections to other myths and folktales:

There can be no question that connections to the Vínland Sagas can be found from as early as the time of Pytheas and the voyages of St. Brendan of Ireland, and particularly when one examines the written works of Adam of Bremen. Many of the passages in the Vínland Sagas contain plot devices taken from earlier myths, folktales, and tales of heroic voyages to new lands. The character of Freydís in particular can be compared to such tales of evil women as Pandora or Eve, as I have said before. Gudríd, as the perfect pious woman who bears bishops, could be seen as a Holy Mary figure in the stories (however, Gudríd's position in the text as a paradigm of Mary is confused slightly by the appearance of Thorgunna, who is pregnant with Leif's child). This section will be an analysis of the places in the sagas I believe correlate directly or indirectly to other written works throughout the European Middle Ages, indicating that the sagas were meant more for entertainment and the preservation of a common, Christian identity than for recording a completely accurate history.

An example of this is the instance involving Gudríd, at the beginning of the passage in Eirík's Saga where the prophetess asks Gudríd to help her perform the pagan ritual (see pp. 44 – 45). The text states about the prophetess that "*hun. hafði aatt ser. niv. syst. ok var hun. ein eptir. aa lifí*" (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 39, Skálholtsbók<sup>35</sup>), "she [the prophetess] had nine sisters and was the only one left alive." Of all European myths and folktales, including those from earlier pagan traditions, it is the number three, and its multiple of nine, that is the most significant. We can see this being adopted by Christianity in many ways, most notably the Holy Trinity. I find it difficult to believe that the use of the number nine in this mystical way was based in historical fact rather than its being used to aid the narrative and give it the magical flair of myths and legends. Another magical passage involving Gudríd, which does not appear to have any Christian connotations whatsoever, also appears in Eirík's Saga. This is the vignette in which Sigríð, the wife of Thorstein the Black, goes outside with Gudríd,

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<sup>35</sup> *Hauksbók* states the same, but uses the Roman numeric representation of nine: ix.

sees all the dead lined up along with Gudríd's dead husband and an apparition of herself, and is dead by morning. There are two ways to interpret this scene. Either it was added to the saga for pure entertainment value, as many events in sagas seem to be, and should not be assumed to have any deeper meaning, or it is in some way a religious commentary that, if discerned, could aid my argument in this thesis. I am reluctant to over-interpret anything in so vague a text, and for the moment will treat it as just another Old Norse omen scene, something that is not a rare occurrence in the Icelandic sagas.

One of the most quoted and fantastical segments of the *Vínland Sagas* is the discovery of the Unipeds in *Eiríks saga rauða*.

This incongruous reference to the Unipeds is symptomatic of the author's fondness for medieval learning. It is interesting to note that the Unipeds feature in an Icelandic translation of a medieval geographical treatise (ultimately based on the works of the seventh-century scholar Isidore of Seville); the Icelandic version, which is considerably older than *Eirík's Saga*, is contained in *Hauksbók*. Unipeds were said to live in Africa. (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 101)

What was the original composer thinking when this scene was created? Was it simply added for entertainment value and comic effect? Or did the Norse explorers of North America genuinely see something they mistook for a small, one-legged man? The idea of a one-legged person certainly is not a new one; it is even suggested in the above quote that they were mentioned in scholastic works prior to the writing down of the *Vínland Sagas*. The scene with the Unipeds is the same in both manuscripts of *Eirík's Saga*, so it must have been a well-known story. In the saga, a Uniped is responsible for the death of Thorvald Eiríksson and is chased by Karlsefni and his men. Eventually they lose sight of it and turn back, and one of the men recites a short verse that tells of the chase. They sail north and believe that they can see Uniped Land, but decide it would be too dangerous to explore it:

Þa. kuat einn madr kúidling þenna. Elltu seggir. all satt var þat. einn ein fæting.  
ofan til strannar. enn kynnligr madr. kostadi rásar. hart of stopi. heyrdu karls  
efni: þeir foru þa i brutt ok norðr aptr ok þottuzt sia ein fætinga. lannd villdu þeir  
þa eigi leingr hætta lidi sinu. (*Eiríks saga rauða*: 76, *Skálholtsbók*)

This entire vignette is so absurd that it cannot possibly be read as having been written with any other intent than to entertain. This is an example of the folktale element being used in what many consider a historical document. Spanish explorers to America during the sixteenth century found Native American myths about Unipeds to be quite common, according to accounts from Francisco de Escobar. This gives us three potential options. One is that the European explorers brought the myths back to Europe with them, although the dates of Escobar's expedition put it too late to have had an effect on the *Vínland Sagas*. The

second option is that Native American myths regarding Unipeds extended across the continent and the Norsemen heard about them from the natives with whom they were in contact. A third option is that the Uniped myth had already existed in Europe for several centuries, and was used as a mechanism by the Nordic explorers returning to Scandinavia as a way to make their stories seem more amazing.

At the end of this chapter, we are confronted with the term *Hvítramannaland*, explained to Karlsefni by the two *Skræling* boys he takes into his care. The name means Land of the White Men and is referred to by a second name, Great Ireland, in *Hauksbók*.

The concept of a country of white men occurs in the Icelandic versions of medieval European works of learning and was associated with Asia, somewhere to the north of India. In *Landnámabók*, however, there is a reference to a *Hvítramannaland* which is said to lie six days' sail west of Ireland. There may well be a connection [sic] between this reference and the *Tír na bhFear bhFionn* (Land of the White Men) of Irish Legend [...] (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 103)

Here we can see a direct association between an instance in the *Vínland Sagas* and a previously existing myth from a completely separate location of origin. We can see an Irish connection to the *Vínland Sagas*, not only with this Land of the White Men concept, but also with the voyages of St. Brendan and the similarities of that voyage to the ones undertaken by the Norse people, and it is likely that these geographically close regions shared myths and story-telling devices across borders.

And what of Freydis, one of the most intriguing characters within the *Vínland Sagas*? I have continually mentioned this paradigm of a woman spoiling Paradise, and compared Freydis to Eve or Pandora. What are the connections there? The connection to Eve is an easy one, with the Garden of Eden being perhaps the best known version of Paradise in the western world. Man was content and prosperous in the fruitful garden, until Woman tempted him with forbidden fruit and forced them both to leave Paradise.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat [...] Therefore the lord God sent them forth from the Garden of Eden [...] and he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:6, 3:23 – 24).

When Woman is brought to Paradise, misfortune befalls mankind, as is shown in the *Greenlanders' Saga*. But even before the Bible was composed, the Greeks had a similar myth: that of Pandora's box:

Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, Pandora brings death into the world. She is the instigator of mortality for humans, and she also is the first mortal. Before her presence, all humans were male and immortal [...] Pandora is created as punishment to Prometheus. Zeus says, '[...] I will give them an evil, and all men shall fondle this, their evil, close to their hears, and take delight in it.' This evil would be Pandora, Woman. (Young-Eisendrath 1997: 64 – 65)

Before Pandora appeared, the world was a Paradise free from disease and laborious work. However, her curiosity led her to dig up and open an old, buried jar that she had been forbidden to touch. When she took off the lid, death, disease, and adversity entered the world. “Pandora is an anima figure—a man’s dream lover who humiliates him with her beauty and manipulates him with her lies. If a man falls for such a creature, he must be wary of her power over him” (op. cit.: 66). Such is the behavior of Freydís: manipulating men to get what she wants, and bringing strife to the Norsemen in what was supposedly one of the most wonderful places on earth. In a way, the story of Freydís in Vinland paraphrases a number of creation myths from around the world. In the beginning, the world was a Paradise and everyone was happy; then a trickster, usually a woman, makes an ignorant or malicious decision of some kind that causes Paradise to deteriorate and people to suffer.

*Grænlandinga saga* may provide the best evidence for Freydís as the Christian model of an evil woman, but in *Eiríks saga rauða* we can still see influence from previous cultural traditions. According to tradition, the Amazons of sixth and fifth century B.C. Greek culture had their right breast cut off in order to use a bow and throw spears without limitation or obstruction of movement. In fact, one possible meaning of the word amazon comes from 'a-mazos': without breast (Hardwick 1990: 22). In Eirík's Saga we see the symbolism of the breast and the warrior woman repeated when Freydís shows one of her breasts and slaps it with a sword to frighten away the Skrælings. Perhaps this imagery was inserted by clerics in an attempt to display how greatly Freydís had overstepped her proper female boundaries and how badly she represented the meek Christian woman. However, it is also possible that this scene was influenced by pre-Christian folklore and tradition, and that the composers of the sagas used Amazon-like imagery as a way to create an exciting plot narrative

## **Chapter 4: Church Agenda and Conclusions**

Christianity was introduced [to Greenland] from Iceland shortly after the year 1000 (the year in which Iceland itself adopted Christianity by parliamentary decree), although there seems to be no basis of historical fact for the statement in Eirik's Saga, Chapter 5, that Eirik's son, Leif the Lucky, was the evangelizing agent working on the behest of King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway. For the first century the Church seems to have been rather haphazardly organized; Greenland was probably visited by missionary bishops from Iceland until the Greenland bishopric was established in 1126 (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1965: 19).

King Olaf is still known for his mass conversion of the people to Christianity, by force as much as by persuasion, and his importance as the founder of the Church in Scandinavia explains his interest in ecclesiastically trained writers during his reign (op. cit. 1965: 32).

From everything discussed previously in this thesis, I believe a clear Church agenda can be seen in the Vínland sagas; one does not have to look hard. The “good” characters are good in a Christian way and the “bad” characters are bad according to Church definition. There is also little doubt that it was the influence of the Christian Church, which had gained a foothold in Scandinavia only two or three hundred years prior to the period that Adam of Bremen was writing, that helped prompt the concept of Vínland as more than just a fertile western territory but rather a paradise on Earth with green fields and flowing wine. As I have discussed, it appears that the portrayal and significance of Vínland made noticeable changes from the Viking Period to the High Middle Ages in Scandinavia. It seems that the various names of locations to the west may have only been for ease of maritime navigation during the Viking Age, and that the name “Vínland” may not have even been in common use. However, this would have changed during and after the conversion to Christianity in Scandinavia, when the idea of a western paradise became a tool for the Church. The people who composed and wrote down the Vínland Sagas were able to use the façade of pagan characters, myths, and genealogies to promote Christian ideology, and the concept of Vínland fit perfectly into this recently created framework. In 1968, Haraldur Bessason remarked that the author of *Grœnlendinga saga* ‘may have wished to endow his book with certain moral-social overtones’ (Barnes 2001: 1). Here we come back to the already discussed concept of the medieval *exemplum*. The Vínland Sagas would have been perfect vehicles for the transmission of Christian values and ideas in the Middle Ages, because they combined elements and plot devices already familiar to the Scandinavian populace. Heroic

tales from a glorious and adventurous past were infiltrated by Christian undertones to teach ecclesiastical lessons. Of course, in addition to this, it is likely that people in the Middle Ages were just as eager for a good story as they are now, and that composers would have catered to this.

The role of Freydís Eiríksdóttir, though not a particularly prominent one where the various vignettes of the Nordic sagas are concerned, I believe is a very significant one. Freydís perfectly fills the role the Church created for women: creators of Original Sin, temptation to lure men away from God, and general troublemakers who disturb the peace. It has been seen in a number of myths and religious stories from patriarchal societies with a developed sense of religion: Eve from the Old Testament, Pandora from Greek mythology, and so forth. I maintain that the character of Freydís was created or modeled by the Catholic Church during the High Middle Ages to reinforce the ideas in the minds of the newly-converted populace of Scandinavia. Throughout the sagas, this persona is contrasted perfectly with that of Guðríd, the good Christian wife who was married to a good Christian man and began a long line of bishops in the family.

The last chapter of *Grænlandinga saga* juxtaposes the positive example of the life of Guðríðr to the negative example of Freydís. Freydís's unholy voyage to Vínland, her subsequent disgrace back in Greenland, and accursed succeeding generations are countered by Guðríðr's pilgrimage to Rome; her model widowhood in Iceland as nun and anchoress in the church built by her Vínland-born son, Snorri; and her distinguished clerical descendants (Barnes 2001: 24 – 25).

The clear influence throughout the Vínland Sagas of Christian and pagan myths from a period of more than a millennium suggests that they cannot possibly be historical accounts. While there are no doubt truthful elements within them, it makes no sense to attempt to use the sagas as maps to Vínland or proof of certain events or locations. Too many elements in the sagas point to traditions hundreds of years old, whether it is the Pandora myth from ancient Greece or the tale of St. Brendan's journey across the ocean. In particular, the characters of Freydís and Guðríd I believe I have shown were clearly used as plot devices to further the Christian ideal, as a form of *exemplum* (discussed previously). However, while we cannot extract a timeline of factual events or a map to Paradise from the Vínland Sagas, we can use them as literary sources which help us to better understand the social and ideological conditions of the period in which they were written down.

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