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Vikings, Vínland and the Discourse of Eurocentrism*

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Over eighty years ago, in an address to the Royal Geographical Society, Fridtjof Nansen presented what may seem a rather tame argument to current literary critical sensibilities. However, at the time it cut sharply against the grain of Norse studies on the issue of the historicity of *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga þáttur*, the “Vínland sagas,” and within the confines of medieval Norse studies, it is still by no means broadly accepted.¹ While in the course of his argument Nansen made clear his conviction that the Norse did in fact explore the North American coast beginning in the late tenth century, he nonetheless maintained that the sagas’ representation of that exploration drew heavily on earlier travel literature and geographical lore of the European and particularly learned Latin tradition. By pointing out the relationship between the sagas’ representation of Vínland and the operative ancient and medieval paradigms of the paradisaical lands of the mythical West, Nansen was attempting to curb—at least for the Vínland texts—the strict empiricism then reigning in the field of saga studies that threatened to turn the texts into nothing more than historical chronicle. His thesis is most succinctly expressed in his conclusion:

The results of these investigations would then be that the Norsemen have discovered America, and have had intercourse with the land and its natives probably during some long period; but the narratives of this discovery and of voyages to Wineland are legendary. The Icelanders and the Greenlanders may have transferred the ideas, especially of the Fortunate Isles, from the legends to the discovered land; and the saga of Wineland the Good has then been gradually formed in the course of time, by putting together feature after feature from old tales and legends, with some such real knowledge of lands in the West (pp. 574–75).

Although his argument was carefully constructed, showed a highly developed sense of nuance to a variety of types of texts, and, significantly,

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1. Fridtjof Nansen, “The Norsemen in America,” *Geographical Journal*, 38 (1911), 557–80.

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also accepted without question the historicity of Norse settlements in North America, it has been quietly all but forgotten. For Halldór Hermannsson (a long-time champion of the “Norse discovery of America”), a quarter-century later, Nansen’s thesis was “so far-fetched and improbable” that the mere statement of the argument was its most effective refutation.² A quarter-century ago, Erik Wahlgren saw fit to mention Nansen’s name only to dismiss without argument—and with no reference to Nansen’s publications—Nansen’s suggestion of the importance of Latin learning and the lore of the Fortunate Isles of the West.³ More recently still, Helge Ingstad, the discoverer and documenter of the Norse settlement in Newfoundland, remarks on the *Grœnlendinga þáttur*, without mentioning Nansen or his argument, although he clearly is addressing it: “The language is plain. There is no indication of learning on the part of the author, we find no traces of European literature.” On the *Eiríks saga*, however, he observes: “From this we may . . . conclude that the author was a man of learning, and that the description cannot represent any original tradition concerning the Vinland voyages”; he also notes that the description of Hóp in *Eiríks saga* is “almost like a fairytale” that was probably “inspired by Isidore’s Fortunate Isles.”⁴

In the myriad publications on these most written about of all the Icelandic sagas,⁵ the single most important topic has, not surprisingly, been the issue of their historicity and their documentation of a Norse “discovery of America” that predates Columbus by half a millennium.⁶ Among hundreds of publications, both scholarly and popular, Hermannsson’s works provide an exemplary scholarly program devoted to proving the explicit historicity of the sagas,⁷ while Wahlgren has provided one of the

2. Halldór Hermannsson, *The Problem of Wineland*, *Islandica*, 25 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1936), p. 55.

3. Erik Wahlgren, “Ordet och begreppet ‘Vinland,’” *Gardar: Årsbok för Samfundet Sverige-Island i Lund-Malmö*, 5 (1974), 16–42. Wahlgren does, however, concede: “[a]tt författaren till ES kände Isidor är emellertid en tämligen säker förmodan” (p. 29) (‘that the author of *Eiríks saga* knew Isidor is, however, a rather likely supposition’). Translations throughout are my own.

4. Helge Ingstad, “The Ancient Sources,” in *The Viking Discovery of America*, ed. Finn Hødnebo and Jónas Kristjánsson, trans. Elizabeth S. Seeberg (Oslo: Stenersens Forlag, 1991), pp. 160, 179, 190.

5. According to Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, in their introduction to their English translation of the sagas, *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 10.

6. The bibliography is vast; see, for the first half of the last century, the bibliographic compilations in *Islandica*, 1 (1908), 2 (1909), 24 (1934), 38 (1957).

7. Halldór Hermannsson, *The Northmen in America (982–c. 1500): A Contribution to the Bibliography of the Subject*, *Islandica* 2 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1909); *The Problem of Wineland*, *Islandica*, 25 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1936); *The Vinland Sagas*, *Islandica*, 30 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1944).

most extensive attempts to sort out which features of the sagas are plausibly historical and which obviously fictional.⁸ A number of scholars have more recently attempted to incorporate the Vínland explorations into a larger framework of European voyages of discovery to the Americas, for both popular and scholarly audiences.⁹ In the context of Old Norse saga studies, which were for decades mired in protracted debates concerning the putative historicity of Icelandic sagas in general, which had significant implications for constructions of (particularly) internal Icelandic history, the Vínland sagas played a peculiar role, for they opened up a potential Norse participation in a much broader historical context.¹⁰ Via the Vínland sagas, Norse participation in the discourse on the “discovery of America” could be legitimized, and contemporary Scandinavians who were so moved could in fact derive some pride from that participation. Without question, then, the most exciting direction in Vínland research in recent decades has grown out of the explorations and archeological finds by Anne and Helge Ingstad in northern Newfoundland, where a Norse community dwelling site was discovered, comprehensively excavated, and studied. The Ingstads’ work has proven even to those most skeptical that the Norse were in fact on the mainland of North America a thousand years ago.¹¹ For the advocates of the Vínland sagas as documents of the explo-

8. Erik Wahlgren, “Fact and Fancy in the Vinland Sagas,” in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology. A Symposium*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 19–80.

9. See in particular, as an example of popular scholarship, Samuel Eliot Morison’s *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages A.D. 500–1600* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), and Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and North America*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); from a more scholarly perspective: Johannes Brøndsted, “Norsemen in North America before Columbus” (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1953), pp. 367–405; Thomas H. McGovern, “The Vinland Adventure: A North Atlantic Perspective,” *North American Archaeologist*, 2/4 (1980–81), 285–308; Leif Løberg, “Norrøne Amerikaferders utstrekning,” *Norsk historisk tidsskrift* (Oslo, 1962); Inge Langenberg, *Die Vinland-Fahrten: Die Entdeckungen Amerikas von Erik dem Roten bis Kolumbus (1000–1492)* (Wien: Böhlau, 1977).

10. The long-standing debate in Norse studies on whether sagas are historical or fictional is, from the perspective of the present essay’s cultural criticism, perhaps less relevant than it might be elsewhere, since we are dealing here with the texts at the level of cultural discourse rather than with their putative historical accuracy, but that debate has been neither pointless nor simple. Among the cross-patterned waves of advocacy during recent decades, I might point to three ideologically distinct and interesting perspectives: Jesse Byock’s socio-literary study, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), E. Paul Durrenberger’s Marxist sociology, *The Dynamics of Medieval Iceland: Political Economy and Literature* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1992), and M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij’s thesis of синкретическая правда, in *Мир Саги* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo ‘Nauka,’ 1971), esp. Chapter 2, “Что такое правда?,” pp. 14–37.

11. The fullest report is by Helge Ingstad, *Vesterveg til Vinland: oppdagelsen av norrøne boplasser i Nord-Amerika* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1965). Further analysis and contextualization in: Thomas H. McGovern, Gerald Bigelow, Thomas Amorosi, and Daniel Russell, “Northern Islands, Human Error, and Environmental Degradation: A View of Social and Ecological

ration, the finds at L'Anse aux Meadows were the ultimate vindication. Since that discovery, articles concerning the Vinland sagas have appeared frequently in both scholarly organs and along the popularizing intellectual fringes of the scholarly world.¹² In this decades-long flurry of legitimate excitement and the careful analysis of the empirical, historical, and archeological finds, as well as their popularization, specifically literary topics concerning the Vinland sagas have, with some few exceptions, continued to be all but neglected. Alexander Krappe's comparative perspective provided a clear understanding of the literary origin of the "intoxicating grapes" motif.¹³ Patricia Conroy made a plausible case for the *Eiríks saga* as, in a significant sense, a female biography, organized around the life, and especially the marriages, of a focal woman.¹⁴ Geraldine Barnes traced the interesting trajectory of the Vinland-motif in later, particularly twentieth-century fiction, even up to Thomas Pynchon and a Prince Valiant comic.¹⁵ Quite recently Kirsten Wolf has suggested that the Freydís of *Eiríks saga* is a character modelled on the legendary figure of the Amazon.¹⁶ The most surprising phenomenon in this small pool of literary and cultural studies of the Vinland sagas is Donnie-Leon Luke's Afrocentric reexamination of Norse sagas, which, while tendentious and misinformed about most every issue pertaining to Norse studies, does at least demonstrate the necessity for the careful consideration of color and racial terminology in medieval texts.¹⁷ His argument consists almost exclusively of a repetitious insistence that all color comments about medieval Scandinavians in the sagas are about race. Specifically, he claims that in addition to the conventional identification of *blámaðr* as racially black, all

Change in the Medieval North Atlantic," *Human Ecology*, 16 (1988), 225–70; Henrik M. Jansen, "A Critical Account of the Written and Archaeological Sources' Evidence Concerning the Norse Settlements in Greenland," *Meddelelser om Grønland*, 182, Nr. 4 (Copenhagen, 1972), 56–57; Birgitta Linderöth Wallace, "The Vikings in North America: Myth and Reality," in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. Ross Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne, 1991), pp. 206–20; also J. R. S. Phillips's chapter on the site in *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988).

12. Most recently, for instance, as one of the primary points of focus in Marc K. Stengel, "The Diffusionists Have Landed," *Atlantic Monthly* (January 2000), 35–48.

13. See Alexander Krappe, "Intoxicating Grapes," *MLN*, 58 (1943), 268–74.

14. See Patricia Conroy, "*Laxdæla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*: Narrative Structure," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 95 (1980), 116–25.

15. Geraldine Barnes, "Reinventing Paradise: Vinland 1000–1992," in *Old Norse Studies in the New World: A Collection of Essays to Celebrate the Jubilee of the Teaching of Old Norse at the University of Sydney 1943–1993*, ed. Geraldine Barnes et al. (Sydney: Department of English, Univ. of Sydney, 1994), pp. 19–32.

16. Kirsten Wolf, "Amazons in Vinland," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 95 (1996), 469–85.

17. Donnie-Leon Luke, "Afrocentric Methods and the Retrieval of an Obscured African History: A Reexamination of Old Norse Sagas" (Ph.D. diss., Temple Univ., 1993).

those who are called *svartr* are also to be identified as blacks, and even those identified as *rauðr* 'red', such as Eiríkr inn rauði, are to be understood as of mixed race. Thus in the end the dissertation's only value is its refreshing provocation.

In the drive to make the *Vínland* sagas relevant to the archeological site in Newfoundland, and that site relevant to the sagas, there has been a ubiquitous prime directive: all conceivably factual information from the sagas has been deemed "authentic," while the obvious fictions (unipeds, intoxicating grapes, etc.) are excised as "corruptions." But patiently awaiting the return of scholarly attention has been the obvious fact that the two thirteenth-century sagas were composed as integral texts and were read by their contemporaries as such—within a developing saga tradition in which those modern analytical categories "factual" vs. "fictional" were not operative. Hermannsson, as one of the few scholars to engage Nansen's thesis, and as a champion of the Norse discovery of America prior to the discoveries at L'Anse aux Meadows, was also one of the most vociferous defenders of a Norse culture "uncorrupted" by Christianity and the inroads of European culture, which were perceived as a dilution of the presumed pure Teutonic culture of the Norse. By the time the *Vínland* sagas were composed, however, Christian European literary culture was not just present in Iceland, but in fact the dominant norm, and Nansen's thesis goes far toward explaining important aspects of these sagas as expressions of that Icelandic participation in European literary and cultural traditions. Perhaps it is time to reconsider Nansen's thesis of the *Vínland* sagas as examples of quasi-mythical travel discourse and see where it can take us almost a century later. Based on the work of recent decades in post-colonial studies, and moving beyond Nansen's thesis, it seems almost the inevitable next step to view the discourse of the *Vínland* sagas as a variant on a particular type of colonialist discursive formation, known from both earlier and later texts, and generally now designated "Eurocentric."

Recent decades have witnessed a great number of empirical and theoretical analyses of both the processes—mental, material, and ideological—that led to the European conquest and/or colonization of much of the world during the last five centuries and the textual representation of those processes. The majority of this burgeoning literature positions itself along a broad expanse of the political left, which in itself still offers an interesting array of interpretive possibilities, ranging from—to note only a *very* few important examples—the general humanism of Mary B. Campbell, to Heinz Gollwitzer's moderate "philological" liberalism, to the insistently logocentric liberalism of Tzvetan Todorov, to Stephen Greenblatt's avowedly (moderate) Zionist liberalism, to Noam Chomsky's avowedly (adamant) anti-Zionist moderate anarchism, to the uncompromisingly Marxian

special issue of *Race and Class*, entitled *The Curse of Columbus*, and extending even to an ecologically empirical liberalism in the work of Alfred W. Crosby.¹⁸ Despite the preponderance of analytical perspectives from the near and far left on such topics, other studies—from much farther to the political right—have presented the long and complex process of European conquest as more or less inevitable, due to a presumed innate European superiority—moral, cultural, racial, or otherwise. While this view shares much with the classic Hegelian formulation of teleological Eurocentrism,¹⁹ recent defenders of this position have shifted the focus slightly, such that Euro-American global dominance is now viewed as the inevitable outcome of historical “development,” as opposed to Hegel’s *Weltgeist*.²⁰ Others have sought the causes of the success of European conquest in the specific features of European material culture necessary for successful imperialistic venture during this specific historical period. This last argument has appealed both to some bourgeois defenders of the European “miracle” and to some Marxian critics of European imperialism.²¹ Still others have sought causality in capitalism, as the driving force of European expansion and the development of Eurocentrism since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²² Indeed the term Eurocentrism, which has come to be used most generally (and often quite unspecifically) to designate the European colonializing expansion throughout the world, its attendant cultural, intellectual, religious, political, and economic subjugation of those conquered

18. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988); Gollwitzer, *Europabild und Europagedanke: Beiträge zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck, 1964); Todorov, *La conquête de l’Amérique* (Paris: du Seuil, 1982); Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991); Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (Boston: South End Press, 1993); Special issue of *Race and Class*, 33:3 (Jan.–Mar. 1992); Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

19. Introduced at some length in the “Einleitung” to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, 2nd ed., vol. IX of *Werke*, ed. Karl Hegel (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1840), pp. 3–135.

20. In one of its more extreme but predictable forms, some representatives of this position also view the present post-Stalinist “triumph” as the vindication of Western Civilization and the culmination of world history, and consequently the best of all possible worlds. See particularly the essay by Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989), 3–18. The ensuing media discussion was in many senses global. A useful discussion has been provided by Perry Anderson, “The Ends of History,” in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 279–375.

21. A prime recent example of the thesis of European superiority is E. L. Jones, *The European Miracle* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981). Jones’s thesis and method are extensively critiqued by J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), pp. 70–71, 86–87, 91–93, 104–8, 131–33.

22. See in particular the exhaustive Marxian study by Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974–89).

peoples, and especially its self-representation as the naturalized norm of all cultural activity, has generally been applied to (and had its applicability explicitly restricted to) the post-Columbian era, for it is only then—in the age of European colonial imperialism in Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas—that a unified European cultural identity, in direct opposition to non-Europeans, came to be defined, systematized, and “applied.”²³ Thus, while most analysts of Eurocentrism focus on the period of modern European imperialism, which has come to define Eurocentric praxis in a broad sense, the goals of the present essay are rather different. First, its focus is on a much earlier period, and second, it suggests that the *discursive* praxis that is deployed by modern Eurocentrism is much older than the situation-dependent praxis that seeks legitimation in that discourse, which has itself developed to represent the recurring confrontations between Europeans and non-Europeans over the course of the two thousand years *prior to Columbus*. Those concrete political and military situations are necessarily different in each case, for they are obviously determined by specific historical circumstances. The discourse tradition used to represent those discrete situations over the course of time is, however, despite local variations, a unified one, and not accidentally so. As in any coherent literary tradition, specific modes of discourse within the tradition remain relatively intact over the course of time, and grow even more normative the more often and more widely they are deployed. As Edith Hall has demonstrated in her detailed study of the first extant European drama, Aeschylus’s Πέρσαι, there existed already in 471 B.C.E. a discourse fully formed and available for use in representing the denigrated Asian Other.²⁴ Once that discourse had been established, for instance, by Greek playwrights and historians, then Roman historians and poets who represent Carthaginians (and later Huns), medieval historians and poets who represent Muslims,²⁵ or conquistador chroniclers who represent Native

23. On the development of a unified concept of European identity, see particularly, *The History of the Idea of Europe*, ed. Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Dussen, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1993); Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1957); Carlo Curcio, *Europa—storia di un’idea*, Collana storica 63, 2 vols. (Milan: Vallecchi Editore, 1958); *Europa: Begriff und Idee. Historische Streiflichter*, ed. Hans Hecker (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991). Still the best general introduction to and discussion of the term *Eurocentrism* is Samir Amin’s monograph, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988); see also Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*; J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988).

24. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), esp. Chapter 2, pp. 56–100. “[I]t represents the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism, the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualizing its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel, and always as dangerous” (p. 99).

25. See in particular on the representation of Islam in medieval Christian literature, P.

Americans, had an available and pointedly relevant discourse, and one that they generally already knew well because they—as the culture’s poets and historians—had themselves been schooled in precisely that central tradition of texts.²⁶ Once established, this discourse provided a ready-made paradigm (with myriad applicable details) for the representation of the “Other,” and thus it spawned further examples of itself, which spawned further examples of themselves, and so on. Here is clearly the point at which to acknowledge explicitly the Foucauldian theoretical basis on which the present essay in large part operates, for, as Edward Said has pointed out, Foucault’s notion of discursive formations accounts for precisely that kind of *productive* discursive tradition just suggested:

There is a complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers’ experiences. . . . A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual . . . is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge, but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.²⁷

There has been no comprehensive study of the participation of the *Vínland sagas* in the political and ideological discourse of Eurocentrism and/or colonialism.²⁸ A number of political theorists have, however, not-

Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 2 vols. (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1960); and for the specifically Eurocentric articulation, see my “Race, Representation and Metamorphosis in Middle High German Literature,” *Nowele* 31–32 (1997), 119–33.

26. This holds true even if there is a break between some more distant components of the tradition, as was the case, for instance, between the ancient Greeks and the practically Greekless medieval West, since the discourse was pervasive in the linguistically accessible Latin tradition.

27. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 93–94. Elsewhere in the book, Said makes a similar point: “My whole point is to say that we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were productive, not unilaterally inhibiting” (p. 14). The foundational studies are by Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), esp. Chapters 7 (pp. 229–61) and 10 (pp. 335–98); and *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). Said acknowledges that his study, *Orientalism*, is to a large degree based on the method elaborated by Foucault.

28. The few pointedly relevant observations by Norse scholars will be noted in the course of the argument. Here, already, however, one may point to Barnes, for instance, who notes: “Leifr’s *Vínland* is apparently virgin territory in both *GS* and *ES*, but the voyages of his

ed what they perceive as the oblique relevance of the sagas to their work. In his *The Invention of America*, Edmundo O’Gorman notes in passing the presence of the Norse in North America in the context of his examination of the European refashioning of America to conform to its preconceived image and needs, but ultimately denies that they participate in that project.²⁹ Eviatar Zerubavel, on the other hand, in his *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America*, insists on the relevance of the Norse explorations in America for the long-term process of European exploration and particularly European intellectual appropriation of the Americas.³⁰ In his *Imagining the World*, O. R. Dathorne analyzes the confrontations between the Norse and the indigenous inhabitants of the North American coastland in terms of a typically European assumption of the normalcy of the (European) Center/Self and the abnormality of the non-European Other, with concomitant exploitation of the Other by the European.³¹ In his article, “Eurocentrismo versus americanismo,” Antonio Núñez Jiménez positions the Norse Vínland explorations in the historical and political context of the innumerable “discoveries” of the Americas over the course of a score of millennia, which then from an insistently Eurocentric perspective makes it eligible to be claimed as one of those that constitutes actual “discovery.”³²

As is clear from even so brief and peripheral an engagement with such studies, the larger issue of the origin, development, and content of the Eurocentric discursive tradition is intricately complex, and thus it, along with the multiplicity of Eurocentric political practices already differred,

successors to the lands west of Greenland are filled with incidents of cross-cultural confrontation which prefigure the pattern of first-hand accounts of later European voyages to the New World . . .” (p. 20); and to William Sayers, who observes that “the family sagas display a cool xenophobia toward non-Norse cultures, as evidenced in *Eiríks saga rauða*” and “. . . that the author of the sagas was as much ideologue as chronicler in preserving information on Amerindian culture and that it is recorded through Norse perceptions and affected by its preconceptions . . .” (“Psychological Warfare in Vinland: *Eiríks saga rauða*,” in *Studies in Honor of Jaan Puhvel*, Part II: *Mythology and Religion*, ed. John Greppin and Edgar C. Polomé [Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man, 1997], pp. 250, 254).

29. Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1961), p. 32.

30. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 15, 26–27, 113.

31. O. R. Dathorne, *Imagining the World: Mythical Belief versus Reality in Global Encounters* (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1994), esp. pp. 44, 102–5.

32. Antonio Núñez Jiménez, “Eurocentrismo versus americanismo: Consideraciones en torno al V Centenario del Descubrimiento de América—Encuentro de dos mundos,” *Islas* [Cuba], 86 (1987), 16–28. He responds to Gwyn Jones’s claim that Vikings were the “first discoverers” of America: “por ser europeos los normandos, lo considera el primero! Europa, siempre Europa!” (p. 24) (‘since the Norse were European, they were considered the first! Europe, always Europe!’).

must remain beyond the scope of this essay. Here, I wish only to articulate some few salient patterns of that traditional Eurocentric discursive praxis with similar usages in the *Vínland sagas*, and thus set them within the necessarily larger context of the issue of Eurocentrism. In order to demonstrate that these sagas participate in this discursive tradition, it will be necessary first to establish the intellectual and ideological context of the representation of the Norse exploration and likewise the audience expectations with respect to the subject of exploration across the Atlantic, before proceeding to an examination of the typical thematic features of such descriptions of the Outland: specifically the idealized, quasi-utopian landscape; putatively pre-existent Christian communities; and exotic and anomalous flora, fauna, humans, and quasi-humans.

What we have in *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grœnlendinga þáttur*, and other *Vínland* documents is not, or not just, a record of Norse encounters with the American³³ landmasses and some few of their late tenth-century inhabitants, but also more importantly for the present purposes, a representation of such an encounter that is a clearly coded version of Northern European Eurocentrism current in thirteenth-century Iceland where the sagas—in their extant literary forms—were composed. A brief synopsis of the “facts” of the quasi-historical and the literary cases might be useful here: around 985 C.E., according to the *Grœnlendinga þáttur*, the merchant Bjarni Herjólfsson sighted the American coast after having been blown off course while en route from Iceland to Greenland; fifteen years later Leifr Eiríksson explored the land, built houses (booths) there, and named it *Vínland*; there are three further attempts to colonize *Vínland* (the *Eiríks saga* reduces the number of voyages).

Of the two sagas that represent these events, the *Grœnlendinga þáttur* was composed early in the thirteenth century, while later in the century the *Eiríks saga* reworked that earlier saga. Iceland was by then thoroughly Christianized and, no matter what pre-Christian literary and cultural survivals might have remained, effective literacy had come to Iceland (as it had to the rest of Germanic Europe) as the handmaid of Christianity and

33. The terms “America”/“American” are employed here not as the common pseudo-synonyms for the United States and their inhabitants, but rather designate the continents of the western hemisphere as “the Americas” and their inhabitants “Americans,” with reference to the tenth-century texts herein treated, despite the fact that Amerigo Vespucci, by whose name most have now agreed to designate the landmasses, was not to coast the two continents for another five centuries. The commonly employed terminological alternatives, particularly for the indigenous inhabitants—‘natives,’ ‘Indians,’ ‘Eskimos,’ ‘skraelings’ = ‘wretches,’ ‘Thule-peoples’—are inadequate and in most instances offensive. Attempts at specific tribal identification across a millennium (Inuit, Beothuk) and based on the scanty and pseudo-empirical data of the sagas seems no more adequate, if not so directly offensive. Thus I opt for one of the available discomfiting terms at the expense of the others, in order to call attention at every use to the inevitably political nature of naming.

its intellectual culture, and it continued—with some rather important Icelandic qualifications—to function as such. While Icelandic literacy is more bilingually complex than many other pre-literate European cultures in the period immediately after their conversion to Christianity, literacy in the native language did not really blossom until the thirteenth century, the great age of saga composition. Up until that time, and to a great extent even during that period, those (still not too numerous) Icelanders who had a thorough literary education had by and large attained that education via the Church (or along the margins of ecclesiastical pedagogy) and its tradition of Latin literature, and thus they were imbued with the “great books” of medieval pan-European Christian intellectual culture. Ursula Dronke and Margaret Schlauch have suggested some of the dimensions of the pervasive presence and influence of Latin learning (via both Latin texts and Icelandic translations) in Icelandic literature.³⁴ As Jónas Kristjánsson has demonstrated more recently, many of the early Icelandic churchmen had studied abroad in the great centers of Christian learning on the Rhine, in Paris, and in England.³⁵ The thirteenth-century version of Eurocentric discourse that the European literary canon made available differs little in broad outline from the versions we know from both earlier and later reflexes of the tradition. Additionally, since specifically medieval European practices of colonial expansion generally resulted in the establishment of Christian colonies (e.g., the medieval crusader states of the eastern Mediterranean), the Norse expansion across the North Atlantic seems initially to fit clearly into the general pattern. Even so, since the colonization of the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland all took place before the Norse were themselves converted to Christianity, an interesting “local” complication arises in construing this particular colonial trajectory as Eurocentric. The fact that the *pre*-conversion colonization does not attain its literary representation until two centuries *post*-conversion nonetheless enables the expected deployment of Eurocentric discourse that in fact reconfirms the paradigm. Thus even the pre-conversion events are easily and automatically incorporated into this particular modality of Eurocentric discourse.

By the period when the two *Vínland* sagas were composed, Iceland had already participated in the tradition of learned European literate culture

34. See Ursula Dronke, “Classical Influence on Early Norse Literature,” rpt. in *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 143–49; and Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1934), esp. Chapter 3, “The Classical Tradition,” pp. 42–68.

35. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature*, trans. Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1992), esp. Chapter 5, “An Age of Learning,” pp. 115–35.

for several generations,³⁶ and its literate elite knew the ancient and medieval traditions of lands beyond the immediately perceptible limits of European culture, particularly of the mythical lands of the West: Atlantis, Brasilia, and Antillia.³⁷ Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Vínland* sagas in the present context is their rather surprising conformity to a representational pattern common not just to European colonization and conquest narratives, but also to the larger genre of Eurocentric representations of the Outland or Other World, as we find in a wide variety of types of travelogue cum proto-ethnographic literature, represented by texts as widely placed as Herodotus's *Ἱστορίη*, Marco Polo's *Il Milione*, and Columbus's *Diario*.³⁸ While none of these texts was available to the authors of the *Vínland* sagas, there were other pertinent texts to which they did have access and which supplied similar information. In order to gain a sense of what texts and content were in fact available to thirteenth-century Icelanders, let us remind ourselves of several facts concerning relevant extant texts at the time. Of the important medieval encyclopedic works, only the *Elucidarius* had been translated as a whole into Icelandic, but most of the others were known in Latin, and most were translated and paraphrased piecemeal in Icelandic encyclopedic compendia. The ubiquitous *Etymologiae* of Isidor of Seville was among the untranslated texts, but was nonetheless one of the most commonly used Latin sources in Icelandic compilations of many kinds, especially in geographical, natural science, and historical compendia. The Icelandic translation of the *Physiologus* (AM 673a I 4to, ca. 1200) derived from the Anglo-Saxon textual tradition and is counted among the oldest comprehensively illustrated Icelandic manuscripts. The manuscript includes several pages with contemporary color drawings of the typical "monstrous creatures" of the European tradition of the Outland: cyclops, enotokoitai (whose ears are large enough to serve as shelter when they sleep), cynocephali (dog-headed humans), a uniped (one-footed human).³⁹ In order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of Latin learning, it might serve best simply to list the contents of the *Hauksbók*, the manuscript compendium in which the earliest copy of the *Eiríks*

36. On the broad-based Icelandic reverence for learning and lore from beyond Iceland, and the common multilingualism of the Icelandic romance hero, see Marianne Kalinke, "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance," *Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 850–61.

37. The fact that the names of these mythical lands are familiar to us as current geographical names indicates the power of such myths to impose ideological preconceptions onto existent geography.

38. In general on this phenomenon, see Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970).

39. All of the pages illustrating the creatures are included in facsimile in the edition of the Icelandic *Physiologus*, ed. Verner Dahlerup (Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1889).

saga is transmitted. The manuscript is in a sense the *Handbibliothek* of a scholar, Haukr Erlendsson, the *lögmaðr*, who copied part of it himself. It includes scientific texts (*Heimslýsing*, a geographical treatise and description of the world, including “marvelous races” based on Isidor; *Rímbegla*, a computistical work based directly on the Latin treatises by Bede, Jerome, Gerlandus, John of Sacrobosco), historical texts (*Landnámabók*, *Kristni saga*), and literary texts (*Völuspá*), in addition to translations of Latin texts (the encyclopedic *Elucidarius*, *Trójumanna saga*, *Breta saga*, *Merlínusspá*).

We need also note that by this period it is possible to witness the Icelandic participation in the long European tradition of populating the unknown world with monsters, which is hardly surprising, since the Icelanders themselves lived on the edge of the world as known (and quasi-known) by Europeans, in what was (and is), from a European perspective, a radically alien landscape. Thus they themselves viewed landscapes beyond the pale as alien. As Ian McDougall points out:

Medieval Icelandic and Norwegian writers, for their part, show a certain fascination with (and routinely paint a monstrous portrait of) the Finns and Wends and other strange nations who inhabit *Svíþjóð in mikla*, a country which appears to take in much of Eastern Europe and parts of Asia and which shows definite affinities with greater Scythia and even parts of Africa—in short, the frontiers of ‘barbary.’ Accounts of this vast and mysterious region in, for instance, *Stjórn* (1862, 78–9), *Hauksbók* (1892–96, 165–7) and the geographical treatise in AM 194 8vo (22r–v, *ÁÍ* 36) concur in populating these lands with giants of all description, man-eaters, blood-drinkers, cyclopes, headless mouthless monsters with one leg or sometimes none at all, amazons, hermaphrodites, satyrs, centaurs, troglodites, horned men and dwarves. Snorri Sturluson’s description of this *terra incognita* in the first chapter of *Ynglinga saga* is typical. In summing up the exotic nature of the region, he describes it as a land of ‘marvelous races of many kinds’ (*ÍF* XXVI 9–10).⁴⁰

The thirteenth-century Icelander schooled in this tradition recognized his own special relationship to the subset of this discourse that represented a mythical West, insofar as he inhabited what was for most of those (albeit few) Europeans who gave the matter any thought *ultima tula* (Iceland), itself so far west that it too was all but mythical. Any exploration still farther to the west would necessarily have been seen in the context of the earlier learned traditions concerning the mythical western lands. In such texts, which differ quite radically in the details of their representations, there is nonetheless a certain commonality in the patterns of representing the distant landscape and its inhabitants, which might be variously designated as “exotic peoples in exotic lands,” or the utopic or promised land motif. These texts resemble in this respect the Greco-Roman concep-

40. Ian McDougall, “Foreigners and Foreign Languages in Medieval Iceland,” *Saga Book*, 22 (1987–1988), 210.

tions of both Atlantis as a political quasi-utopia and the Fortunate Isles as lying to the west of Europe, and the Biblical tale of Eden which, coupled with the Greco-Roman tradition, gave rise to the medieval conception of the continued existence of Eden in the far *East*. The ideal landscape is generally represented as little short of miraculous in its beauty, fertility and climatic benevolence, while its inhabitants are most often conceived as “primitives” incapable of truly enjoying the natural wonders of the landscape or even of appreciating its bounties. These ideas contribute to the common (especially in the late medieval period) European conception that some paradisaical land was to be found to the west across the ocean.⁴¹ When Columbus returned to Spain with his tales of lush islands with primitive, naked inhabitants (among them, enticing females); limitless goldfields; the Caribbean homeland of the Amazons; mermaids in the Atlantic; the Garden of Eden on the coast of Venezuela; exotic, quasi-human cannibals most everywhere; and eternal summer in an ideal landscape, it mattered little whether his own myopic claim that these lands were in East Asia was countenanced or not, for his official descriptions of the islands conformed (while the actual islands generally did not) to that which was expected west of Europe: the fortunate isles, the blessed isles, the mythical *Brasilia* and *Antillia*, and the earthly paradise.⁴²

This pattern of expectation, description, and construction of territories explored by Europeans in the wake of Columbus’s voyages continued, over the course of the next two centuries, not due to his own claims, for they too were simply part of a larger pattern of traditional categories of thought. Fernando Ainsa remarks on the long-term context of such categories of expectation and the potential for explanation of new discoveries:

It is obvious that geography, history and literature all contributed over the centuries to the forging of a hybrid view of the American actuality whose

41. One of the most focussed discussions of the relevant texts is found in Nansen’s essay, pp. 565–70.

42. The word *cannibal* originated in Columbus’s corruption of the name of the tribe of Caribs > ‘cannib’ so that they might seem related to their putative ruler, the ‘Can’/‘Kan’/‘Khan’ in Cathay; cf. the *Diario* entry for 11 December 1492: “Caniba no es otra cosa sino la gente del Gran Can que deve ser aquí muy vezino” (*Diario del primer viaje*, in Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos: Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales*, ed. Consuelo Varela [Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982], p. 216.) (‘Caniba is nothing other than the people of the Great Khan, who must be very close to here’). On the “muy lindos cuerpos” of the naked Arawak women, see the entry for 21 December 1492 in Columbus’s *Diario* (p. 91); on Amazons: “la isla a donde no avia sino solas mugeres” (p. 109) (‘the isle where only women live’); see the *Diario* entries for 6, 15, and 16 January 1493 where the island is specified as Matinino (Martinica?) and the mating and child-rearing practices precisely mirror those of the Greco-Roman myths (*Diario*, pp. 109, 117–19); on the putative asymmetrical geophysical “bulge” on the earth’s surface at the top of which the earthly paradise is located (*Paraíso Terrenal*, off the coast of Venezuela), cf. Columbus’s first letter narrating his third voyage, the *Relación del tercer viaje*, in *Textos y documentos*, pp. 215–21.

delimitation through discipline is not foreign to the complexity of the resulting cultural identity. In the perspective of the present article we must keep in mind the importance of the *imaginary* that preceded the discovery; the *inventive* prefiguration in which the later identification of the American *être* was objectivized and confirmed, a root that predetermines an image of an America nourished with myths, dreams and archetypes. This image plays a fundamental role in the utopian concept which later identifies and structures it. . . . Under the shock of the new reality [i.e., the discovery of the Americas], the myths and legends [of paradise in the East, now accessible in the West], far from being refuted, were actualized. . . . The myth, instead of disappearing because of the discovery, grew and was transformed. At times it changed scenes and was generalized (it became Eldorado, the Amazons, the Fountain of Youth) and at times it was reexamined and reinterpreted in the perspective of the New World, like Atlantis in the *Critias* of Plato.

The discovery of America did not stop the *invention* which had peopled the maps from antiquity to the Middle Ages with the imagination of the West. On the contrary, it acted as a stimulus and seemed to furnish it with tangible proof that justified the search for an *ideal space*. The invention is not refuted but reinforced by the discovery. The proof is provided by the number of expeditions organized by the Spanish and Portuguese but also by the English, Germans, Dutch and French, in quest of what to us today seem chimeras: the Fountain of Youth, the kingdom of Prester John, the Seven Cities, the Sierra de Plata, the Pais de la Canela, the city of the Caesars, Eldorado or the Amazons. A large part of the discoveries and explorations of vast territories of North and South America were made in the name of myths that were held to be true. The story of the disappointments and frustrations that followed each expedition is that of the foundation of the Spanish Empire. . . . A conscious effort was made to *explain* the New World through known categories and make it intelligible to others without infringing on the principles of the invention that preceded it.⁴³

Similarly, O. R. Dathorne comments: "Europeans did not merely 'discover' the so-called New World—they invented it. . . . When Europe encountered another world, it simply passed on its own beliefs." His statement of general thesis is also relevant here:

Such a concept of the world assumed normality at its European center. Only outside of this locus was the "abnormal" to be observed and even expected. Descriptions in these proto-fantasies occurred at the levels of landscape, people, and object. What was observed tended most often to be the opposite of European "normality"—hence, the landscape is large, ominous, at times evil. The objects within such an environment were either odd, like giant ants, or desirable, like gold, spices, and lascivious women. Non-European males were considered peculiar, in that they did not recognize the importance

43. Fernando Ainsa, [trans. Jeanne Ferguson] "The Invention of America: Imaginary Signs of the Discovery and Construction of Utopia," *Diogenes* (Italy), 145 (1989), pp. 102–6. On the influence of the imaginary on the conception of that which is "discovered," see also Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, esp. Chapter 2; and Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992).

of objects desired by Europeans (gold, spices, women). Moreover, because such men existed in an odd environment, they tended to behave and act in a non-European and hence abnormal manner. This could explain their “otherness,” their distance, their departure from a human norm, and their total separation from the ordinary (Dathorne, pp. 44, 1).

Those traditions whose fantastic fruits we see so unashamedly displayed by the European explorers of the Americas and Asia during the early modern period, in their full-scale and deadly earnest searches for the chimeras noted by Ainsa, were already present and important for the composers of *Eiríks saga* and *Grænlandinga þáttur*. The *Vínland sagas* also represent the typical signs of the quasi-paradisical lands of the West: an idealized landscape where winters were so mild that livestock could overwinter outdoors, where pasturage was lush year-round, where the dew on the grass was the sweetest thing they had ever tasted, where timber abounded, where grapes not only grew wild but were immediately intoxicating direct from the vine, where wheat grew wild, and salmon all but clogged the rivers.

[A]t döggr var á grasinu, ok varð þeim þat fyrir, at þeir tóku hönndum sínum í döggrina ok brugðu í munn sér ok þóttusk ekki jafnsætt kennt hafa sem þat var Hvárki skorti þar lax í ánni né í vatninu, ok stærri lax en þeir hefði fyrr sét. Þar var svá góðr landskostur, at því er þeim sýndisk, at þar mundi engi fénaðr fóðr þurfa á vetrum. Þar kómu engi frost á vetrum, ok lít rénuðu þar grös. (*Grænlandinga þáttur*, III, p. 50)

[‘There was dew on the grass, and the first thing that they did was to take some into their hands and put it in their mouths, and it seemed to them that they had never tasted anything as sweet There was no lack of salmon in the river or lake, bigger than they had ever seen. The land was so favorable that it seemed to them that no livestock would need fodder for the winter. There was no frost in the winter, and the grass hardly withered.’]

Þeir fundu þar á landi sjálfsána hveitiakra, þar sem lægðir váru, en vínið allt þar sem holta vissi. Hverr lækr þar fullr af fiskum. . . . Nú váru þeir þar þann vetr. Þar kom enginn snjór, ok allt gekk fé þeira sjálfala fram. (*Eiríks saga*, cap. X, pp. 24–25)

[There they found wild wheat growing in the lowlands and grapes on the highlands. All the streams were full of fish. . . . Now they overwintered there. There was no snow, and all their livestock foraged for themselves.]⁴⁴

44. Cf. also *Eiríks saga*, V, p. 13. The texts are cited from *The Vinland Sagas*, ed. Hermannsson, pp. 50, 25. Further references to these texts will be made by the abbreviation *ES* or *GS* and the chapter and page number from this edition. Other editions consulted are: *Eiríks saga rauða*. *Texti Skálholtsbókar AM 557 4to*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, *Íslensk fornrit*, IV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985), and “*Eiríks saga rauða*,” “*Grænlandinga saga*,” and “*Grænlandinga þáttur*,” ed. Matthías Þórðarson, in *Eyrbyggja Saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslensk fornrit*, IV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935; rpt. 1985), with an excellent “*Formáli*,” pp. lxvii–xcvi; and the manuscript facsimiles in *Höðnebb* and *Kristjánsson*, pp. 43–50 (*Flateyjarbók*) and pp. 63–82 (*Skálholtsbók*).

This idealized construction of a quasi-paradise through rather clearly (though not exclusively) Northern eyes—eyes of those whose lands do not yield wheat, whether wild or cultivated,⁴⁵ and little enough barley, do not produce grapes, have precious little timber, and even little enough soil that pasturage and hay are so precious as to be the source of the endless feuds represented in the Icelandic family sagas—conforms rather astonishingly to both earlier conceptions of the mythical western lands, and *later* explorers' constructions of the Americas as those actual lands.⁴⁶ Walter Baumgartner even posits parallels between the book of Genesis and the Vínland sagas and suggests that the sagas constitute an allegory of the biblical paradise, complete with sin and expulsion. J. R. S. Phillips maintains, however, that no matter how wondrous Vínland appears in the sagas, or how much it resembles the islands visited by St. Brendan, it was “also a very real land, as the descriptions of the native inhabitants and of their hostility make clear, it was certainly no Garden of Eden.”⁴⁷

Most striking among the features that indicate the bounty of Vínland are the wild grapes and self-sown wheat, which had been an integral part of Vínland lore since the first textual mention of Vínland in Adam of Bremen's history (*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificium*, ca. 1075), although the two are unnoted in *Icelandic* texts until the Vínland sagas themselves; it is the grapes indeed that provide the impetus for naming the land.⁴⁸ Grapes and wheat are also among the most important *topoi* in the broad European discursive tradition of the idealized landscape. Even

45. Kirsten Hastrup comments: “Even at its best Icelandic grain cultivation was not sufficient to meet the requirements of the population, and we know that grain played an important part in commerce on the North Atlantic,” *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 163.

46. Barnes remarks that *Eiríks saga* “is contextualized within the conventions of medieval romance” (p. 20).

47. Walter Baumgartner, “Freydís in Vinland oder Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies,” *Skandinavistik*, 23 (1993), esp. p. 23; Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, p. 172.

48. Adam of Bremen, *Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificium*, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hannover: Hahn, 1846). Attempts by numerous scholars, especially Helge Ingstad in his defense of L'Anse aux Meadows as the Leifsbuðir (of *GS*, V, VII, VIII), to interpret Vínland as Vínland (vowel length was unmarked in early manuscripts), and in *Oícel*. *vin* = ‘grass’/‘meadow’, have the advantage of questioning the strict credence given the grape/wine/*vin* motif as *empirical* fact, but the disadvantage of simply replacing the one positivistic dictum with another; see Ingstad, *Vesterveg til Vinland*. Wahlgren's argument for *vin* ‘grapevine’ is obstructed by his misrepresentation of the argument for *vin* ‘grass/meadow’ as insisting that the sagas' grapes are *solely* legendary and derived from the Latin learned (he imprecisely restricts it to a *klassisk* tradition (“Ordet och begreppet,” p. 29). In recent years the topic has resurfaced, with historians defending Ingstad's thesis. Alan Crozier (“The *Vínland Hypothesis: a reply to the historians,” *Gardar: Årsbok för Samfundet Sverige-Island i Lund-Malmö*, 29 [1998], 37–64) and Gösta Holm (“Vínland: Vínrankornas land,” *Gardar: Årsbok för Samfundet Sverige-Island i Lund-Malmö*, 28 [1997], 47–53) have, it seems to me, refuted that linguistically implausible thesis in adequate detail.

in antiquity, the motif of uncultivated grapes and grain growing in a distant and unknown western land immediately signified a mythical land of plenty. The earliest example known to me is found in one of Odysseus's many pseudo-autobiographies offered up to his multiple hosts; this land of plenty is in the extreme West: "There is an island called Syrie . . . on the other side of Ortygie, where the sun turns around in its course. Not too many people are there, but the land is fertile and good for cattle and sheep and yields excellent crops of grapes and grain. Famine is not known there, and the people do not suffer from serious diseases . . ."49 While the thirteenth-century Norse certainly had as little knowledge of Homer as did the rest of Western Europe, the tradition of grapes and wheat as signs of a land of abundance was widespread through the length and breadth of the Latin literary tradition, one of the more influential passages being the appearance of the Fortunate Isles in Horace's *Epodes*, XVI, 39ff.⁵⁰ The connection to Christian myth here is also clear in the parallel of both the Garden of Eden and the promised land to the isles of the blessed. The salient features of Isidor of Seville's seventh-century characterization of the Isles of the Blessed were also wild vines and grain fields.⁵¹

In the context of this dominant tradition, Nansen even argues that the entire conception of *Vínland* (including its name) was borrowed by Icelanders—although he does *not* herewith deny the Norse presence in North America. As one might imagine, it was this claim that earned him the ire of generations of *Vínland* scholars. He notes that the *Navigatio Sancti Brandani* mentions a western *insula uvarum*, which in Old Icelandic would probably have been translated *Vínland*, that one of the identifying phrases, *Vínland hit góða*, could have hardly been the equivalent of anything else but 'fortunate lands' or 'fortunate islands' (p. 569), and that the epithet *hit góða* was otherwise used only in place names that formerly designated fairy lands (*huldrelände*, p. 568). Nansen concludes that "the Icelanders may have taken their description (of the icy seas and the Fortunate Isles/*Vínland*) directly from Isidorus Hispalensis," whose texts were well known

49. *Odysseia*, in *Poesie Homérique*, ed. Victor Bérard, vol. II (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1924), 214. The translation is mine.

50. Horace, *Horatius, Opera*, ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1985), p. 160; cf. Nansen, p. 565.

51. Likewise, in Isidor, as in Adam of Bremen, the sea beyond the Fortunate Isles and *Vínland* is said to be dark and icy. In the second Icelandic mention of *Vínland* (*Landnámabók*), we find the continuation of these ancient legends of the dark, icy, congealed sea as forming the boundary of the world, especially in the North and West, and there is the additional comment that "in its immediate neighborhood were the Fortunate Isles" (cf. Nansen, p. 563). The first mention was in 1130 by Ari inn fróði, where the land's inhabitants are identified as *Skrælingar*. Cf. Nansen, p. 563. Both texts from *Vínland Sagas*, ed. Hermannsson, pp. 66–67. Rudolf Wittkower notes Adam's wholesale transfer of the ancient traditions of fabulous races to northern Europe, in "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), 170.

in medieval Iceland in Latin and in translation (p. 566); and suggests wittily: “Since we then have the choice, it may be more reasonable to assume that the Icelanders got their wine from Isidore, or from the same vats that he drew his from, than that they fetched it from America” (p. 569). Not so surprisingly, the *topos* of grapes/wheat = “land of plenty” still functions for Columbus, who otherwise inexplicably insists that he found both grapes and wheat near Isabela on Hispaniola,⁵² and also for Jacques Cartier, who reports wild grain and grapes (along with silk and brazilwood) in *Vínland*-adjacent Nova Scotia.⁵³

It is particularly interesting in this context that neither of the plants in question—wheat (genus *triticum*) and the Old World grape (*vitis vinifera*)—is native to the Americas, and it is unlikely that either had been introduced prior to the tenth-century Norse arrival. If the Norse actually found grain and grapes in *Vínland*, then it must have been some variety of grain-like grass—Helge Ingstad suggests sand-wort (*elymus arenarius*), which is common over large areas of Newfoundland and can look like wheat fields [p. 77]—and the native American grape (*vitis labrusca*),⁵⁴ recognizably distinct from the species of the Eastern Hemisphere, though visibly still clearly a type of grape, which grows along the eastern seaboard of the mid-Atlantic to New England. The *Eiríks saga* makes only brief mention of the existence of these examples of *Vínland*’s wealth both during Leif’s expedition (“Váru þar hveitiakrar sjálfsáinir ok vinvíðr vaxinn” [ES, V, p. 13] [‘self-sown wheat and grapes grew there’] and later when Karlsefni is in *Vínland* (“hafði annat í hendi vínberjakongul, en annat hveitíax nýsát [sic]” [ES, VIII, p. 22] [‘one of them was carrying grapes, and the other had wild wheat’]). In the *Grœnlendinga þáttur* the claim that wild grapes grow in *Vínland* is rather cleverly authenticated by means of the identity of their discoverer: Tyrkir, the *suðrmaðr*, which most scholars have taken to mean ‘German’ and thus (not unproblematically) automatically capable of recognizing grapes and knowledgeable about wine from personal experience in his homeland. Even so, the—for the Norsemen—unfamiliar and even exotic nature of grapes and wine is attested by at least one bizarre feature of the story:⁵⁵ in the *Grœnlendinga þáttur*,

52. Reported by his son, Fernando Colon, *Historia Del Almirante De Las Indias Don Cristóbal Colón*, ed. Manuel Serran y Sanz (1892; rpt. Buenos Aires: Editorial Bajel, 1944), cap. 52, p. 139.

53. Cf. Nansen’s tongue-in-cheek response to an opponent after his address: “. . . discoverers very often found that which they considered specially valuable, or at least things resembling it” (p. 579).

54. Or other so-called “fox grapes”: *v. aestivalis*, *v. cordifolia*, or *v. vulpina*.

55. On the exotic nature of wine in Iceland, Erik Wahlgren, referring to A. LeRoy Andrews, notes that “*vín* was an expensive, imported, foreign drink to the Scandinavians, and anything made of native berries would probably not even have been thought of as wine” (“Ordet och begreppet,” p. 35); Andrews, “Philological Aspects of the Plants of Wineland the Good,” *Rhodora: Journal of the New England Botanical Club*, XV/170 (February 1913), 28–35.

grapes and vines are gathered as cargo for the ship *during their overwintering* in Vínland, first by Leifr (*GS*, IV), then by Þorvaldr,⁵⁶ and finally by Karlsefni (*GS*, VII); they return with this cargo in the spring. Such a harvest schedule and storage of the grapes (and *vines!*) could only be imagined by someone who knew nothing of grapes, their growing season, or effective techniques of harvest, storage, and use. A second unusual characteristic of the grapes seems rather a feature of the discourse of the idealized landscape than an indicator of Norse ignorance of the nature of grapes: when Tyrkir returns from his jaunt on which the grapes are found, he is said to be *skapgott* (*GS*, IV, p. 51) ('cheerful'/'in good spirits'), which, as scholars have long noted, *may* in context also indicate intoxication, particularly in light of his slightly bizarre behavior. While grapes from the vine are of course not intoxicating, A. H. Krappe has demonstrated that there exists a long European tradition (from the Middle Ages *up to the eighteenth century*) concerning the magical effects (including intoxication) of fresh grapes from wondrous and distant lands, including the Americas,⁵⁷ and here Vínland is made to participate in that tradition. Thus just as Eiríkr had engaged in blatant and acknowledged propagandistic boosterism in naming *Green-land* (*GS*, I, p. 46), so did Leifr in naming *Vín-land* (albeit, perhaps with less exaggeration, depending on where Vínland actually was), and what better vehicles of such propaganda than wild grapes and self-sown wheat, that is, a life of plenty without cultivation, a return to the paradise so consistently constructed in representations of the idealized landscape of the West.

Amid this idealized bounty of Vínland is found at least a hint of yet another stock feature of the exotic lands of European traditions: the legend of Prester John, although there is no more than an oblique link here, and thus much caution is necessary.⁵⁸ While there was no evidence that

56. "[O]k bjuggu þar þann vetr ok fengu sér vínber ok vínvið til skipsins" (*GS*, V, p. 54) ('They spent the winter there and gathered grapes and vines for the ship').

57. The motif is found in the literature of Ireland, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, and the Sindbad tales, among others. Krappe comments: "What should be noted is that this is only one out of many features in a larger conception, that of North America as a land of plenty, a sort of 'pays de Coccagne,' a conception prevalent in the writings of the Jesuits of the seventeenth century. . . . The apparent absurdity of these accounts finds its explanation in the assumption that the Oriental theme lived on in Europe down to the end of the eighteenth century, to be utilized by romancing travellers of Washington's time in much the same manner in which it had been used, some 600 years previously, by Scandinavian sagamen" (p. 274). Hermannsson also notes that this motif indicates the "Story-tellers' ignorance of the nature of grapes, in the same way as the vines were considered trees with which Leif loaded his ship in the spring before returning to Greenland" (*Vínland Sagas*, notes, p. 63).

58. On the Prester John phenomenon in general, see Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1959); and the text collection in *Der Priester Johannes*, 2 vols., ed. Friedrich Zarncke (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1876–79). Most recently see

there was ever a Prester John in “India,” “Ethiopia,” Central Asia, or in any other of his posited kingdoms, that fact did not prevent impostors from petitioning the Pope or writing a letter to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus, nor did it obstruct the invention of legends concerning him over the course of more than half a millennium. Marco Polo claimed to have met him (or rather one of his like-named descendents) in Central Asia (*Il Milione*, cap. lxivff.);⁵⁹ and sixteenth-century European explorers searched for him in Asia and the Americas.⁶⁰ He was ever the great hope of Christendom against “the heathen,” however defined, for he might open a second front against Islam from behind, or provide protection for Asian trade caravans, or guide explorers to wealth and fame. The Vinland case is, however, not strictly a matter of the Prester John legend, for he is nowhere mentioned in these texts. Rather, a quasi-Prester John-phenomenon or -motif or -function appears here as *Hvíttramannaland*, as told to the Vikings by the two American boys kidnapped and newly baptized by the Norse: “Þeir sögðu þar liggja land öðrum megin gagnvart sínu landi, er þeir menn byggðu, er váru í hvítum klæðum ok báru stangir fyrir sér, ok váru festar við flíkr, ok ceptu hátt, ok ætla menn, at þat hafi verit Hvíttramannaland eða Írland it mikla” (*ES*, XII, p. 29) (“They said that another country lay on the other side, across from their own land, where men lived who wore white clothing and bore poles before them with flaps attached, and shouted loudly, and it was thought that this must be Hvíttramannaland or Ireland the Great”). The interpretation of *Hvíttramannaland* is as vexed as any other problem in the Vinland sagas.⁶¹ Some scholars have connected it with Ireland, where a region colonized by the fair-haired and -complexed Norse (*finghoill* ‘light foreigners’) was so designated. Others have pointed rather to the *Tír na-Fer Finn* ‘white men’s land’ of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Irish texts, the inhabitants of which are understood to be identical to the *albati* of *terra albatorum*, the

Bettina Wagner, *Die “Epistola presbiteri Johannis” lateinisch und deutsch* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000). On the legend in early Icelandic tradition, see Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, pp. 52–53.

59. On Marco Polo’s representation of the episode, see John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), p. 86. Polo also represents Kubilai Khan as a potential convert to Christianity, who, as a Christian Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, would likely have outdone all other conceptions of the Prester John legend. Beyond Polo’s suggestion, however, there is no evidence that Kubilai Khan ever contemplated conversion.

60. Francis M. Roger, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1962).

61. On Hvíttramannaland, see also *Eiríks saga rauða*. *Texti Skálholtsbókar AM 557 4to*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, pp. 364–65. Hermannsson offers a summary note on interpretations, *Vinland Sagas*, p. 41.

land of the baptized dressed in white, of earlier Irish literature. The *Landnámabók* notes that *Hvíttramannaland* is called by some “Írland it mikla” and is located near *Vínland* (ed. Hermannsson, p. 66). While this *might* suggest a contemporary belief that there was a European populace, specifically a white-robed Christian populace, resident somewhere near the Atlantic coast of North America, there is of course no evidence that there were Christian settlements in North America prior to the sixteenth century (and north of Spanish *La Florida*, not until the seventeenth century). Even so, according to the *Annálar og nafnaskrá*, in 1121, a Bishop Eiríkr Gnupsson (Upsi ‘coal-fish’) went in search of *Vínland*.⁶² The specific object of his voyage is unclear. He has sometimes been called the bishop of Greenland, although there was no see established on the island until 1124. Paul Schach thus maintains that Bishop Eiríkr must have been a missionary bishop.⁶³ In any case, the description of these “white men,” wearing robes and marching in columns carrying banners is open to the interpretation that they are Christians of some religious order, who then—according to an interpretative mode relevant to a “Prester John function”—logically might need the aid of Europeans, or, conversely, be able to offer aid to other Europeans, particularly colonists.⁶⁴ Or, more significantly, if they were not, or were not all, Europeans, then the very fact of their Christian faith would demonstrate that the Americans were open to conversion. Whatever the actual origin of this motif, and whatever its ultimate significance, interpretive possibilities directly parallel occasional *functions* of the Prester John motif as it appears elsewhere.

Perhaps the most strikingly fantastic incident in the *Vínland* material, and the one most characteristic of the Otherworld motifs, is the brief

62. *leita* = ‘to search for something undetermined or lost’, as opposed to not yet known; the text is reprinted from Gustav Storm’s 1888 edition in *Vínland Sagas*, ed. Hermannsson, p. 69.

63. Paul Schach, *Icelandic Sagas* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), p. 186. Hermannsson has also suggested that he was a missionary bishop, specifically charged to convert the Americans in *Vínland* (pp. 76–77). He also notes that Richard Hennig’s denial that that could have been possible—since no bishop is sent where there is not already a Christian community—is just another part of Hennig’s argument for there already being Irish or Norse Christians in America. And, as the history of the conversion of northern Europe demonstrates recurrently, missionary bishops were not uncommon in Christianizing missions of the Middle Ages.

64. An intriguing episode near the end of *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. V. Ásmundarson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1895), cap. 64, pp. 165–69) presents the encounter of a certain Guðleifr, who was blown off course en route to Iceland and arrived on the shores of an unknown land, where he and his crew were taken captive by the inhabitants who themselves seemed to speak Irish (*enn helzt þótti þeim, sem þeim mælti írsku*). They were ultimately freed by a Norseman who may or may not have been the actual ruler, but obviously had significant power in the society. The Norseman approaches the captives riding a horse with a banner preceding him. There is, however, no indication that this land is to be identified as *Vínland*, and the inhabitants are certainly not identified as Americans. Could it represent a (North American) colony of Irish Christians, who have grudgingly accepted the rule of a Norse strongman? No positive answer to such a question seems likely.

appearance in *Eiríks saga* of a uniped, who shoots Þorvaldr in the groin:⁶⁵ “Þat var einn morgin, er þeir Karlsefni sá fyrir ofan rjóðrið flekk nokkurn, sem glitraði við þeim, ok æptu þeir á þat. Þat hrærðisk ok var þat einfœtingr, ok skauzk ofan á þann árbakkann, sem þeir lágu við. Þorvaldr Eiríksson rauða sat við stýri ok skaut einfœtingr ør í smáþarma honum” (*ES*, XII, p. 28) (‘One morning it happened that Karlsefni and his men saw some kind of spot above the clearing which glittered in their direction, and they shouted at it. It moved, and it was a uniped [*einfœtingr*], and it hopped down to the riverbank where the ship lay. Þorvaldr, Eirík’s son, was sitting at the rudder, and the uniped shot an arrow into his groin’). The uniped then escapes to the north, despite the Norsemen’s pursuit; later they nonetheless catch a glimpse of *Einfœtingaland*, the ‘Land of the Unipeds.’ The inclusion of unipeds in the menagerie of the Other World was a venerable one. In antiquity, Alcman mentions sciapodic unipeds (fr. 148) who can shade themselves from the sun by lying on their backs and using their oversized foot as a parasol;⁶⁶ Pliny mentions a one-legged people called *monocoli* (*Hist. Nat.*, 7.2.23),⁶⁷ as does Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae*, 9.4.9).⁶⁸ In the early seventh century, Isidor of Seville also notes the existence of unipeds and maintains that they live in Africa.⁶⁹ According to Icelandic geographical treatises of the high Middle Ages, Vínland was an extension of continental Africa, and thus the idea that “uniped-land” was near Vínland is no more than to be expected.⁷⁰ Directly relevant to the Norse material, and the Vínland Sagas specifically, is the fact that a drawing of a

65. In *Grœnlendinga þátr* it is a “conventional” American who kills him. Wahlgren calls the version with the uniped the “fancier account” (“Fact and Fancy,” p. 67). Barnes remarks on the significance of this feature in the general conception of the saga: “Vínland becomes something of a geographic Holy Grail and Markland the gateway to encyclopedic marvels such as *Einfœtingaland*” (p. 20). Morison notes, “More than five centuries later, Jacques Cartier reported Unipeds in the mythical Kingdom of Saguenay” (*The European Discovery of America*, p. 56). See also *The Finding of Wineland the Good: The History of the Icelandic Discovery of America*, ed. and trans. Arthur Middleton Reeves (London: Frowde, 1890) p. 177. On the typical European and Eurocentric monsters of foreign lands, as they appear in early Icelandic texts, see Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, pp. 44–45.

66. *Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. Denys Page (Oxford 1962).

67. *C. Plini Secundi naturalis historiae, libri xxxvii*, ed. Ludwig Janus (Leipzig: Teubner, 1856), II, 5.

68. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1927), p. 166.

69. Cf. also: “Einfœtingur þessi er ættaður frá Isidor frá Sevilla, kominn ásamt öðrum kynjaverum eftir einhverjum krókaleiðum úr riti hans, *Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, sjá Liber 11.3.23, í bækur lærðra manna á Íslandi, t.d. Physiologus í *AM 673a I 4to* frá því um 1200, og kafla um risaþjóðir í alfræðihandritum” (Halldórsson, *Eiríks saga rauða*, pp. 362–63).

70. On Vínland as an extension of Africa, see Schach (p. 150) and Rudolf Simek, who notes that *Alfrædi íslenzk* claims that Vínland is held by some people to be an extension of Africa (*Alfrædi íslenzk*, ed. Kr. Kaalund [Copenhagen, 1908], I, 12; Simek, “Elusive Elysia or Which Way to Glæsisvellir: On the Geography of the North in Icelandic Legendary Fiction,” *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, ed. Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen [Wien: Böhlau, 1986], p. 247).

uniped was included in the Icelandic *Physiologus*; a description of a sciapod is found in the *Rymbegla*; and the *Hauksbók* claims that they are as swift as animals.⁷¹ As Jones comments on the *einfaetingr* in *Vínland*: “What more natural than to find one of them there, or what more proper than to supply one in his absence?”⁷²

Thus far, the discussion has focussed on the sagas’ representation of *Vínland* as an idealized landscape via three motifs characteristic of the Eurocentric discursive tradition: as earthly paradise, as already converted or potentially immediately to be Christianized (the quasi–Prester John–motif), as a land of anomalous humans and/or wondrous beasts found in mythic lands. *Vínland* is, however, also populated by human communities, and Eurocentric discourse had a traditional, paradigmatic mode of representing “native inhabitants,” to which the Norse material directly conforms, although, as might be expected in any given corpus of evidence, in differing proportion and differing degree from that found in earlier and later examples of this discourse.⁷³ A cardinal principle of Eurocentric discourse is that European culture is assumed superior to non-European cultures in most respects: economics and material culture, the physiology of the population, intellectual life, religion, and morality. Since it

71. The relevant Icelandic treatises are edited and translated with extensive and pertinent commentary by E. A. Mel’nikova, *Древне-Скандинавские Географические Сочинения. Тексты, Перевод, Комментарий* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), esp. pp. 72–84. A photograph of the drawing of the uniped from the Icelandic *Physiologus* (ca. 1200) is reproduced in Hødnebo and Kristjánsson, p. 25; the entire page is reproduced in Kristjánsson, p. 131; and Dahlerup’s edition reproduces all pages of the fantastic creatures in facsimile (the uniped is on facs. p. iiiii). Wittkower includes illustrations from eleventh-century manuscripts that show the uniped of ancient and medieval tradition (Solinus and Hrabanus, plates 42 a + b). John Block Friedman includes plates of a sciapod from a thirteenth-century bestiary (Westminster Abbey Library MS 22, fol. lv, p. 113), a sciapod in stone relief on the church at Anzy-le-Duc, Burgundy, from 1150 (p. 136), and a sciapod in a thirteenth-century psalter of Leonardo d’Fieschi (now Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery MS 45, fol. 92, Northern France, p. 138); see *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981). Olaus Magnus includes several pages of monsters in his *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (1555), including an Ethiopian uniped of the sciapod variety, which uses his single oversized foot as a parasol for protection from the presumed intolerable African heat (the illustration is reproduced in Hødnebo and Kristjánsson, p. 196).

72. Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga*, p. 285. For those scholars who wish to view the sagas as strictly historical, the uniped episode has presented a serious problem, and there has been a variety of attempts to explain it away: an eskimo dancing on one foot, an eskimo woman in traditional long clothing, an amputee, a limping Beothuk; see, for instance, Hermannsson, *The Problem*, pp. 23–24. But, as Gwyn Jones points out, according to twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic *fræðimenn* (scholars), the *einfaetingr* was precisely what the text said, a one-legged, one-footed creature or monster (p. 285).

73. Dathorne suggests indeed that the *Vínland* sagas represent the “Skraelings” not so much as human inhabitants of the Outland but rather as Otherworldly creatures and thus *not* of an analytical class different from, for instance, the uniped: “In appearance and behavior, the Skraelings fit the pattern of medieval monstrosities, incapable of the ordinary attributes of human appearance” (p. 105).

is precisely through its representation of non-Europeans that Eurocentric discourse is most blatantly obvious, the Norse material must be carefully examined.

With respect to the tenth-century peoples inhabiting the northeastern American seaboard, it might well be maintained that their material culture was in some respects objectively inferior to that of the Norse invaders: the Norse represented a literate, mercantile, ocean-crossing, metal-working, stock-raising, and farming culture, while the Americans represented an illiterate, stone-age, coastal-sailing, hunter-gatherer culture.⁷⁴ The point at issue is, however, not necessarily one of historically ascertainable “fact,” but again one of the discourse of representation, and here the ideological tendencies in the representation of the empirical facts of the case are unmistakable. While (many of) the fellow Icelanders of the thirteenth-century saga authors were literate, those depicted in the sagas were not (or at least literacy never plays any role in the saga), although the power that derives from the representational ability speaks clearly through the narratives.⁷⁵ When the Americans approach the Norse to trade, it becomes clear that despite their initiative in the exchange, they have no developed sense of trade as a commercial enterprise: no coinage, no profit motive, no ability to judge the potential value of the Norse goods, no sense of need vs. ability to pay. Thus in the *Grœnlendinga þáttur* the Americans trade furs for milk (VII, p. 57), or, in the *Eiríks saga* (XI, p. 25), one unidentified grey pelt per span (nine inch width) of red cloth until the Norse supply begins to run short and the widths are narrowed until it is only a finger’s breadth, while the Americans continue to pay the same price in furs as for the larger swatches. Such systematic defrauding of the “natives” is a scene all too familiar to us from later explorer narratives.⁷⁶

74. As pointed out by Helge Ingstad, “[The Norse] methods of hunting and trapping, and the primitive equipment at their disposal—bow and arrow, spear and traps—did not, however, differ much from those of the Eskimos”; in “The Norse Community in Greenland,” in *The Viking Discovery of America*, p. 109.

75. Historical telescoping may play a role here, for the thirteenth-century texts are obviously literary. An interesting perspective on the presumed “superiority” of medieval Norse *qua* European culture is provided by the fascinating observations recorded in the log of the highly cultured Arabic diplomat from the court of the Caliph in Baghdad, Ibn Fadlan, about his brief sojourn during the late tenth-century at an encampment of Norsemen on the Volga; see A. Zeki Validi Togan, *Ibn Fadlān’s* [sic] *Reisebericht* (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1939), ¶ 80–93, with German translation pp. 82–98 and notes pp. 226–56. While these two encounters—between the Norse and the Americans in the extreme West, and the Norse and the Arabs in the East—provide evidence from the two geographical extremes of Norse expansion, and have no connection except the approximate simultaneity of the two depicted encounters, they do offer a multi-tiered structure of cultural prejudice, with the Norse occupying differing positions in the two separate discourse archives.

76. On the defrauding of the Americans, Wahlgren comments: “The clever shyster trick in *GS* of trading the natives drinks of milk for precious furs is paralleled in *ES* by something

An obviously significant feature of material culture directly related to trading is sea travel. Here, despite the clear superiority of, for instance, the Norse *knorr* for open ocean voyages, the Norse boats as represented in the *Vínland sagas* are not demonstrably superior to those of the Americans. In any case, the American culture was certainly capable of the same kind of island-hopping trans-oceanic voyaging as were the Norse, as they had demonstrated in their gradual move to the East from Asia across the islands of the Arctic and subarctic, which at this point resulted in their meeting representatives of the corresponding Norse movement to the West. Metal-working is of especial interest in this context, because one of the more interesting features of the excavated Norse site in Newfoundland is a bog-iron smelting forge, apparently used for the manufacture of nails for ship repair. Most significantly in the context of the sagas, a Norse iron-bladed axe also plays a prominent role in the *Grœnlendinga þáttur*. The Americans are represented as childish in their (mis)use of the Europeans' metal axe, which is thus clearly recognized by the composer of the saga as a feature that distinguishes Norse material culture from that of the pre-metal-working Americans (*GS*, VII, p. 58). One American "tests" a Norse axe which he had picked up by swinging it almost "incidentally" at another of the Americans, who is instantly killed. The man perceived by the Norse to be the chief then throws the axe far out into the water, and thus, in what was apparently to be taken as a moral judgment of the object itself as "evil," loses one of the weapons otherwise highly sought after by the Americans. Similarly in *Eiríks saga*, when the Americans find that a Norse axe cuts wood well but breaks when used on stone, they simply discard the tool, because "þá þótti þeim engu nýt" (*ES*, XI, p. 27) ('it seemed worthless to them'). The Americans thus are represented as incapable of valuing Norse material culture: the axe, a variously practical tool and weapon when "used" on trees and enemies, is discarded as useless or perhaps even evil, since it also kills friends and breaks on rocks. Finally, the Norse possession of livestock is represented as advantageous to them in

more dignified and sophisticated: red cloth strips of ever diminishing width are given to the Skraelings" ("Some Further Remarks," *Scandinavian Studies* 40 [1968], p. 33). Actually they are sold, not given, to them, and at the same price as for larger strips. Dathorne (p. 103) designates it *exploitation*. Magnusson and Pálsson also note this feature of the saga: "But the most familiar aspect of the Skraeling episodes is surely the way these first European colonists treated the natives they met. In their early trading encounters, they exploited the natives mercilessly, gaining all manner of pelts and furs in exchange for measures of milk or tiny strips of red cloth" (*The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*, pp. 27–28). I am pleased to thank Professor Dan Birkholz for pointing out that my initial insistence that the Norse exploited the Americans in these trading episodes is explicitly based on modern anti-imperialistic perceptions and values, while it may well have been the case that *both* parties to the textually represented transactions thought that they had profited (private communication).

this environment only insofar as its exotic nature may be deployed in a common Eurocentric move to infantilize the non-European, in this case in depicting the Americans' panic at the bellowing of the bull (*GS*, VII, p. 57; see also below), and insofar as the presence of the livestock makes possible a stronger version of the "fortunate isles" motif via the praise of year-round pasturage.

Paradigmatically in Eurocentric discourse, the physical nature of the non-Europeans is represented as inferior: they are of smaller size, strength, and beauty; have abnormal physical features; eat unacceptable food; and engage in unacceptable sexual practices. In the *Vínland* sagas a sufficient number of such features is present to suggest and confirm the pattern. The Americans are, for instance, said to be small, weak, and remarkably ugly: "Þeir vǫru svartir [variant in *AM* 557: *smáir*] menn ok illiligir ok höfðu illt hár á höfði" ("They were dark (small), ugly, and had ugly hair on their heads"; *ESX*, p. 25). While they also eat blood—"Þeir höfðu með sér stokka ok í dýramerg dreyra blandinn" (*ES*, XI, p. 27) ('They had with them wooden cases in which there was animal marrow mixed with blood')—the passage specifies that it is animal blood, probably in fact pemmican. It does not thus offer any evidence for the paradigmatically Eurocentric insistence on non-European cannibalism that is rampant in European explorer narratives worldwide, and for which, we might note, recent anthropology has found almost no conclusive evidence anywhere in the world.⁷⁷

Eurocentric discourse is quite concerned with the intellectual culture of non-Europeans, who are paradigmatically represented as ruled solely by animal instincts and thus incapable of rational and analytical thought, philosophy, and, in some constructions, even of speech. Thus since the actions of non-Europeans are represented as simple, direct, and instinctive, they must necessarily be immediately transparent to the rational and analytical, that is, European, mind. Europeans are then often represented as generally capable of immediately understanding non-Europeans, their motives, attitudes, customs, social values, etc., with or without a mutual language. Thus Karlsefni recognizes the American chief because he is tall and handsome (the others being short and ugly); this assumption is then immediately confirmed when the "chief" judges and then disposes of the offending axe (*GS*, VII, p. 58). Specifically with respect to language, the *Vínland* sagas offer an interestingly contradictory view. On the one hand, it is claimed that the two American children who have been kidnapped must first be taught to speak, before they can communicate

77. See especially W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford 1979); Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

with the Norse, implying that the Norse do not acknowledge American speech as (legitimate) language. A few lines later, however, in noting that they and the Norse have no common language (“Hvárígir skilðu annars mál”) (*GS*, VII, p. 57) (‘neither could understand the other’s language’), it is acknowledged that the Americans have a language of their own; some examples of American proper names are even given in the *Eiríks saga* (XII, p. 29).⁷⁸ In context, this contradiction seems particularly strange, since one of the results of the children’s acquisition of (Norse) language is to provide information about their native language.⁷⁹

Perhaps the most important of the categories of putative cultural superiority in the history of Christian Eurocentrism has to do with the spiritual culture or religion, that is, in very practical terms with the conversion of non-Europeans to Christianity. Most often this scenario involves several common motifs: the non-Europeans are represented as worshipping natural or crafted objects or forces of nature, none of which is conceived by Christians as a legitimate or even possible object of worship, which often leads to the European claim that the non-Europeans are simply without religion. A spiritual void is thus imagined, which could then easily be filled by Christianity.⁸⁰ In the *Vínland sagas* Christianity plays as prominent a role as it does anywhere else in the Icelandic saga tradition, with the excep-

78. Columbus also acknowledges that he has no language in common with the Arawaks: “y tambien no se la lengua y la gente destas terras no me entienden ni yo ni otro que yo tenga a ellos / y estos yndios que yo traygo muchas vezes le entiendo vna cosa por otra al contrario” (Tuesday, 27 November) (‘And also I do not know the language, and the people of this country do not understand me, nor do I nor does anyone I have with me understand them. And frequently I understand something that is said by these Indios for its opposite’). In a common Eurocentric move, however, he generally imagines that he understands the Americans even without language: “vno dllos se adelanto . . . y hizo vna grande platica quel almirante no entendia. . . pensava el almirante que lo aseguravan y que les plazia dsu venida (3 December) (‘one of them came out . . . and made a great speech that the Admiral did not understand. . . The Admiral thought that he was reassuring him and that they were pleased by his coming’). He could not have been more wrong, since the Americans were in fact about to attack. See also the entries for 18 and 22 December and 15 January.

79. This conception on the part of European explorers that non-Europeans have no language is also found in almost exactly the same form in Columbus’s logbook, where it is sporadically simply denied that the Arawaks had language, and thus Columbus opined that one of the advantages for those whom he kidnapped and took to Spain was that they could *learn to speak* (*Diario*, p. 31). Dathorne remarks: “The concept of indigenous people as simple ‘children of nature’ belongs to a later epoch, but it is intriguing to see the first glimmerings of savagery and nobility in the sagas” (pp. 104–5). Of course the historical “first glimmerings” had taken place at least as early as the Greek designation of non-Greek speech as “baba” and thus its speakers as *barbarians*; see Hall, p. 4; E. Weidner, “βάρβαρος,” *Glotta*, 4 (1913), 303–4.

80. So it was expressed by Columbus recurrently in his logbook of the first voyage; e.g. the entry for 27 November: “porque ellos no tienē secta ninguna ni son Idolatras” (‘for they have no false religion and are not idolaters’); for 16 December: “y de muy dulce conversacion sin secta” (‘of very sweet speech and without false religion’).

tion of those texts that focus specifically on national conversion. Schach comments in general on the issue:

Numerous passages in the sagas reveal that the advent of Christianity in Iceland loomed quite as large and momentous in the minds of thirteenth-century saga writers as did the colonization of their country. . . . The years immediately preceding and following the conversion seem to have been especially intriguing to saga writers. To judge from the fanciful dreams and visions they attributed to their characters, not a few of them must have regarded these years as a period of spiritual turmoil, a time of conflict between the claims of the new faith and loyalty to ancient family traditions. And some of these authors never tired of alluding—whether ironically or apologetically—to the unwillingness of the recently converted to renounce deeply ingrained heathen superstitions or to abandon long-established pagan practices (p. 186).

Specifically, as Dathorne points out: “Like the conquistadors, the Vikings arrive as Christian propagandists” (p. 103). For, as one might expect, based on the Christian reflex of Eurocentrism, and the simultaneity or even identity of colonization and Christianization in historical and narrative accounts of, for instance, the fifteenth- through twentieth-century European conquest of the Americas, the tenth-century Norse also convert the indigenous inhabitants in at least one highly significant and paradigmatic episode. The treatment of this issue in the *Vínland* sagas is quite interesting, for while the common Eurocentric confrontation between the classic opponents—Christians and non-Christians—is pervasive here too, the surrounding context is rather more complex than that usually found in the colonializing-conversion narratives, for here the entire project takes place in the context of the conversion of the Icelanders, Greenlanders, and would-be *Vínlanders* themselves. Thus we must situate this episode in the larger Norse context before proceeding to the representation of the Americans in this scenario.

This larger project—the conversion of western Scandinavia and the Atlantic colonies—was executed with ruthless efficiency by Óláfr Tryggvason first in Norway, then in the Faroes, Iceland, and thence Greenland. The peculiar and propagandistic twist of the *Eiríks saga* is to link the discovery of *Vínland* and the conversion of Greenland in the agent, Leifr Eiríksson. In his voyage from Norway to Greenland, Leifr is literally on a divine mission, as assigned by King Ólafr: “Ek get, at þat mun vel vera, ok skaltu þangat [sc. Grœnland] fara með ørendum mínum ok boða þar kristni” (*ES*, V, p. 13) (‘I think that it will be a good thing, and you shall go there [sc. Greenland] with a mission from me and preach Christianity there’). Thus contextualized, Leifr’s finding the promised land/fortunate isles/Wine-land along the way is no more than a plausibly concomitant feature of the traditional genre of saintly conversion narratives, and after

his arrival in Greenland, his mission is fulfilled: “Sýndi hann í því hina mestu stórmennsku ok drengskap sem mǫrgu oðru, er hann kom kristni á landit. . . . Hann boðaði brátt kristni um landit ok almenniliga trú ok sýndi mǫnnum orðsending Óláfs konungs Tryggvasonar ok sagði, hversu mǫrg ágæti ok mikil dýrð fylgði þessum sið“ (*ES*, V, p. 14) (‘He showed much greatness and highmindedness in this as in much else, when he brought Christianity to the country. . . . Soon he preached Christianity and the Catholic faith throughout the country and revealed to the people King Óláfr Tryggvason’s message and said how much excellence and glory followed this religion’). It is not without significance that Leif’s Christianizing mission to Greenland, during which he lands in Vínland coincides with the official conversion of Iceland in the year 1000.

Other aspects of the two tales are consistent with this determinative and pervasive ideological basis. Persistent paganism in the face of the opportunity to convert to Christianity is directly and demonstratively punished:⁸¹ Eirík’s reluctance to convert is immediately responsible for his wife Þjóðhild’s refusal to have any further sexual relations with him.⁸² Þórhallr too is a prime example of the persistent pagan: he is initially described as a “mikill maðr ok sterkr ok svartr ok þursligr, hljóðlyndr ok illorðr. . . . Hann var illa kristinn” (*ES*, VIII, pp. 21–22) (‘he was a big, strong man, swarthy and demon-like, taciturn, abusive. . . . he was a bad Christian’). Facing a lack of provisions and the impending slaughter of their breeding stock for food, the Christians pray, while Þórhallr apparently engages in conjuring his patron, Þórr, who then, according to the terms of the narrative, provides a beached whale of unknown type for the company to eat, which, since of diabolical origin, causes illness among the whole company of Christians, who are thus punished for their impatience with providence.

81. Schach designates this the “reluctant Christian” motif: “The variation on the theme of the reluctant Christian is widely and variously treated in the sagas” (p. 199). He comments: “It has often been asserted that the *Íslendingasögur* are essentially pagan-heroic and that the Christian element in them is a superficial excrescence or accretion. A careful reading of the sagas does not support this assertion. Strong antipagan sentiment prevails throughout the corpus. Heathen witchcraft is the source of much of the evil and suffering in saga literature. Vikings and berserkers, caricatures of the pagan-heroic spirit, are almost without exception villains with no redeeming virtues. By contrast, heroes in pre-Christian times are frequently portrayed as “noble heathens,” that is, as pagans who somehow anticipate and demonstrate Christian ethics in their behavior” (pp. 202–3). As Jenny M. Jochens has shown (“The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 6 [1980], 377–92), “. . . The long-enduring fascination of saga writers and readers with the figure and the theme of the reluctant Christian is further evidence of the prevailing antipagan sentiment of the *Íslendingasögur* and of the curiosity of Christian Icelanders about the beliefs and superstitions of their pagan forbears” (pp. 202–3).

82. “Þjóðhildr vildi ekki samræði við Eirík síðan hún tók trú, en honum var þat mjök móti skapi” (*ES*, V, p. 14) (‘Þjóðhildr refused to have sex with Eirík after she had taken the faith, which aggravated him very much’).

Þórhallr himself, however, triumphs in his god's superior powers: "Drjúgari varð inn rauðskeggaði nú en Krístr yðvarr" (*ES*, VIII, p. 23) ('Red Beard has proven better than your Christ'). While the Christians dispose of the quasi-unclean food and commend themselves to their God, which brings immediate positive results (the weather breaks, allowing them to fish successfully offshore), Þórhall's non- and quasi-anti-Christian practices lead with rather leaden didacticism to his death.⁸³

The character of Guðríðr, on the other hand, presents an exceptional and intriguing case. She is, as she remarks when Þorbjörg seeks her help in singing what she had learned as *varðlokka*, a Christian woman (*kristin kona*), who, although she initially refuses to participate in the witch's spells, ultimately acquiesces after dominant (male) social pressure is brought to bear (albeit without, apparently, compromising her own perception of her steadfast faith).⁸⁴ As a result she enjoys the prophetess's favor and her prophecies of a fortunate future, as is also the case later, at/after the death of her first husband, who also contributes a prophecy from the Beyond. At that point too, it is clear that Guðríðr enjoys the favor of the Christian god, for although the entire scene is spooky with its two speaking corpses, one of which is dispatched with an axe through the breast, the dead Þorsteinn Eiríksson notes matter of factly that "guð vill, at þessi stund sé mér gefin til leyfis ok umbótar míns ráðs" (*ES*, VI, p. 16) ('God wills that this hour be granted me for taking leave and emending my affairs'). It is unlikely that this controlling god is any other than the Christian deity, since in the following sentence Guðríðr is encouraged to cross and commend herself to this otherwise undesignated god: "Þorsteinn bóndi gengr á fund Guðríðar, ok vakði hana, biðr hana signa sik ok biðja sér guð" (*ES*, VI, p. 16) ('Þorsteinn the farmer went to find Guðríðr and woke her, bidding her to cross herself and pray for God's help'). She then does speak with her husband's corpse, because, as she explicitly notes, she has faith that God, in his mercy (*miskunn*), will protect her. His prediction of her future is less elaborate than that made by the prophetess (he merely says that she

83. He is driven by contrary winds to Ireland, where he and his crew were "barðir ok þjáðir, ok lét Þórhallr þar líf sitt" (*ES*, IX, p. 24) ('beaten and enslaved, and Þórhallr lost his life there'). Hermannsson suggests that the saga is hostile to Þórhallr because he broke from the party, was a "staunch heathen and, if we may believe the account of his disappearance, dabbled in magic" (*The Problem*, p. 21). Intriguingly, Dag Strömback claims that Þórhallr is described as dark complected as "other sorcerers and persons endowed with mystical powers" (*The Problem*, Hermannsson, p. 21). On the motif of the "thaumaturgic duel" in patristic literature and its relevance to this episode, see Theodore M. Andersson, "Lore and Literature in a Scandinavian Conversion Episode," in *Idee. Gestalt. Geschichte. Festschrift Klaus von See: Studien zur europäischen Kulturtradition/Studies in European Cultural Tradition*, ed. Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 261–84.

84. Hermannsson notes that this chapter on conjuring by women is the "*locus classicus* with regard to old magic performances of the kind it deals with" (*The Problem*, p. 12).

will have a great destiny (*forloð mikil*, *ES*, VI, p. 17), but placed in a more explicitly Christian context: he encourages her steadfastness in the faith, especially with respect to his request for an immediate Christian burial in hallowed ground, and he urges her to give their money either to the church or to the poor as alms. Guðríð's future as predicted by the propheticess is indeed strictly circumscribed by its Christian piety, including a pilgrimage to Rome, a retreat into her own monastic establishment after the death of her second husband, and, the crowning glory, the appointment of three of her descendants to Icelandic bishoprics.⁸⁵

It is also against this background of the holy mission to convert Greenland, the quasi-hagiographical depiction of Guðríð, the overt reward of converts and similarly overt punishment of persistent pagans, and the undermining of what Lars Lönnroth has termed a "noble heathen" motif,⁸⁶ that we must see the depiction of the Americans. While they, too, are non-Christians, no full-scale conversion mission is represented in this series of encounters. As in later narratives of Christian European colonization, however, the *mentalité* of the conversion narrative is pervasive, and the material facts are punctually present as well, especially as they function symbolically and schematically. There is in fact only a single instance in which the Norse engage in overt conversion, when they baptize the two kidnapped children in the *Eiríks saga*. In this case, as in so many others in the insistently terse discourse of the sagas, this passage is as interesting for what it does not say as for what it does:

þeir . . . fundu þar Skrælinga fimm, ok var einn skeggjaðr; konur váru tvær ok börn tvau. Tóku þeir Karlsefni sveinana, en hinir kómsk undan ok suku þeir Skrælingar í jörð niðr. Sveina þessa tvá höfðu þeir með sér; þeir kenndu þeim mál ok váru skírðir. Þeir nefndu móður sína Vethilldi ok föður Uvege. Þeir sögðu, at konungar stjórnðu Skrælingum, ok hét annarr Avall-damon en annarr Avalldidida. Þeir kváðu þar engin hús; lágu menn þar í hellum eða holum. (*ES*, XII, p. 29)

[‘They . . . found there five Skrælings, and one was bearded, there were two women and two children. Karlsefni and his crew captured the boys, but the

85. The predictions and the narratives of her future in *ES*, IV, pp. 11–12; *ES*, XIV, p. 31; *GS*, VI, pp. 55–56; *GS*, IX p. 61. On the *Eiríks saga* as a biography of Guðríð, see especially Conroy, “*Laxdæla saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*,” 116–25; and Carol J. Clover, “Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*),” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 298. Ólafur Halldórsson suggests that the prediction concerning Guðríð’s descendants that they will be “illustrious, sweet and of a good savour” (*bjart, sætt ok ilmat vel*) and a “bright beam of light” (*bjart geisli*) would only be used of holy men (“Lost Tales of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir,” *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, ed. Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen [Wien: Böhlau, 1986] p. 243). Hermannsson remarks that in the predictions of Þorsteinn Eiríksson “we can easily detect a monkish touch” (*The Problem*, p. 42).

86. Lars Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 41 (1969), 1–29.

other Skrælings escaped and sank down into the earth. They kept the two boys with them; they taught them language and baptized them. They said their mother was named Vethildi and their father Uvege. They said that kings ruled the land of the Skrælings, one named Avalldamon and the other Avall-didida. They said that there were no houses there; people lived in caves and holes.'].]

It almost seems that both the baptism of the children *and* the report of it are incidental, or automatic, or perhaps, intriguingly (and typically for conversion narratives), both.⁸⁷ We should recall that, as a rule in the European Middle Ages, Roman Catholic baptism was a sacrament that could only be performed by a priest. While the practice of Catholicism in Iceland demonstrates notable deviations from the norm, even from the earliest period, and particularly with respect to the constitution of the priesthood, the sacraments nonetheless remained the province of the priest. Furthermore, as Einar Ól. Sveinsson has meticulously demonstrated, by the time the *Vínland sagas* were composed in the thirteenth century, the church had freed itself of the dominance of the laity, in particular of the claim by holders of *goðorð* to hold orders.⁸⁸ In the *Eiríks saga* no priest has been mentioned as a member of the company up to this point, and none is mentioned now. If the presence of a priest was so automatic in this context as not to deserve mention, and the baptism of captives so automatic as not to deserve more comment than the single verb denoting the deed, then the conversion mentality was very strong indeed. It did not extend, apparently, to preaching to the Americans, as we commonly find in later Portuguese and Spanish narratives, but there seems to have been little direct verbal exchange possible between the Norse and the Americans, at least as represented.⁸⁹ At this point in the process of Norse conversion—especially since many of the Norse themselves, particularly venerable, even heroic, members of the community, refused or perhaps had just not yet gotten around to converting—it is narratively plausible to imagine that evangelizing the non-Europeans in the representation of *Vínland's* colonization might seem premature. As we know from evidence external to the sagas, Christianity came to Greenland otherwise than this saga suggests:

87. Barnes remarks: “When opportunity arises (*ES*, ch. 12), Christianity and the Norse language are imposed as a matter of course” (p. 20). It is particularly interesting here that this imparting of “culture” (i.e., speech) to the alleged “primitives” is a logical and here a syntactic prelude to the next stage of “civilization” (i.e., baptism): “þeir kenndu þeim mál ok vāru skírðir” (*ES*, XII, p. 29) (“they taught them language and baptized them”).

88. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1953), esp. pp. 107–17.

89. While as noted above, the text admits that the two groups did not share a language (*GS*, VII, p. 57), that problem never impedes the delivery of “sign-language” sermons in other conversion narratives.

Leif's "mission" is clearly fictive.⁹⁰ But its function is thus all the more important as part of the discourse of Eurocentrism, for as we know from cultural encounters earlier and later, conversion is cotemporal and concomitant with colonization, and that same conqueror's obsession with Christianity makes itself apparent here in the recurring and intrusive running chronology of the penetration of Christianity into Icelandic and Greenlandic culture: in the *Grœnlendinga þáttur* an event is designated as having taken place fifteen years before Christianity came to Iceland (*GS*, I, p. 46:); there was a Christian Hebridean with Bjarni's father Herjólfur on the voyage of emigration to Greenland, whose poem is included here (*GS*, II, pp. 47–48); "Heiðit var fólk á Grœnlandi í þann tíma" (*GS*, II, p. 48) ('The people in Greenland was heathen at that time'); Þorvaldr gives instructions about how to bury him: "þar skulu þér mik grafa ok setja krossa at höfði mér ok at fótum ok kallit þat Krossanes jafnan síðan" (*GS*, V, p. 53–54) ('You should bury me there and set crosses at my head and feet and call it Krossanes forever'); immediately thereafter it is noted: "Grœnland var þá kristnat, en þó andaðisk Eiríkr rauði fyrir kristni" (*GS*, V, p. 54) ('Greenland had by then been Christianized, though Eiríkr the Red had died before the conversion'); before the death of Þorsteinn Eiríksson: "Þá var enn ung kristni á Grœnlandi" (*GS*, VI, p. 54) ('Christianity was still in its infancy in Greenland at this time'); Þorsteinn svartr proves, even at his first appearance that he is a "noble heathen" by acknowledging: "Annar sið hefir ek ok en þér hafið, ok ætla ek þann þó betra, er þér hafið" (*GS*, VI, p. 54) ('I have a faith different from yours, and I think that the one you have is better'); on Auðr: "þar lét hon reisa krossa, því at hon var skírð ok vel trúuð" (*ES*, I, pp. 3–4) ('she had crosses erected there, for she had been baptized and was quite devout'); the Greenlandic custom of provi-

90. Wahlgren ("Some Further Remarks," pp. 27–28), notes that *Eiríks saga's* notion of Leifr is "shadowy, contradictory, and in fact ridiculous," while Gunnlaug's "contamination" of the saga with the story of Leif's Christianizing Greenland is nothing less than "hallucinogenic hagiography." Even so, there are occasional indicators in other sagas of Leif's connection with the process. According to one variant of the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (included as cap. 1b in Hermannsson's edition of *GS*, in *The Vinland Sagas*, p. 47) Eiríkr rauði viewed Leif's saving the people from the skerry and his having brought a *skímadr* ('juggler', 'hypocrite,' i.e., a priest: *svá kallaði hann prestinn*) to Greenland as a balancing of good and evil deeds. *Eiríks saga* makes no mention of a priest, but it tells us that Leif's mother promptly embraced the faith preached by her son and built a chapel 'not too close to the house' (*ES*, V, p. 14). A similar, though even more explicit version is found in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (cap. 96): "[Leifr] hafði þannug með sér prest ok kennimenn" ('Leifr brought with him a priest and clerics'). The *Kristni saga* even mentions Leif's mission to Greenland "at boða þar trú" (from *Hauksbók*) ('to preach the faith there'); as does *Alfræði islenzk* (the relevant passages here ed. by Hermannsson [*Vinland Sagas*, pp. 66–68]). Ólafur Halldórsson suggests that Leifr rescued a priest from the skerry and then went back for his wood, which, he speculates, had been specifically sent along with him to build a church in this land without wood ["Lost Tales of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir," p. 245].

sional burial (until a priest could perform funeral rites) is explained (*ES*, VI, p. 17); in identifying Haki and Hækja, it is said that they were given to Leifr when Óláfr “bað hann boða kristni á Grænlandi” (*ES*, VIII, p. 20, variant AM 557) (‘asked him to preach Christianity in Greenland’).⁹¹

Finally, with respect to the paradigmatic Eurocentric claim of European moral superiority: non-Europeans are generally represented as criminal, treacherous, cowardly, lascivious, unclean, and violent. Thus in the *Eiríks saga*, Karlsefni and his men simply assume that the five sleeping Americans found on the beach are outlaws in the specific Norse sense and murder them (*ES*, XI, p. 27).⁹² Similarly, in the *Grænlandinga þáttr*, Þorvaldr and his men capture and then without further ado simply kill eight Americans whom they find sleeping on the beach.⁹³ In both cases we need note the sagas’ unreflected presumption of cultural identity—a common Eurocentric assumption—inherent in the claim that the Americans under the boats are “outlaws” in the Icelandic legal sense and thus subject to execution with impunity. In other episodes the Americans are represented as rather clearly diabolical. The adults accompanying the two children kidnapped by Karlsefni, for instance, escape and sink down into the earth—to Hell, to the Otherworld, or simply, symbolically to death; but in any case it is a mysterious escape and one smacking of magic and the diabolical. Furthermore, the Americans are represented as wishing—with implied malicious intent—to trade furs for weapons, which is forbidden

91. Ingstad remarks “Eirik’s Saga is permeated with Christian reflections, sometimes almost in the form of biblical texts” (“The Viking Discovery,” in Hødnebo and Kristjánsson, p. 201).

92. Barnes comments on “the assumption of cultural superiority in terms of language, religion, and social practice, and in the exercise of unprovoked aggression. In *ES*, for example, a group of five indigenes, found sleeping along the coast, are killed by the Norsemen on the erroneous assumption that such an isolated company—presumably on a hunting expedition—must be outlaws” (p. 20). Wahlgren’s remarks on the incident point out the typical Christian self-contradiction in colonizing/conversion narrative: the author of the *Eiríks saga* “was pious,” and “Karlsefni’s men slaughtered in cold blood five *Skrælings* whom they found asleep. This, explains the saga rather smugly, was because they reckoned that these men ‘must be outlaws.’ The saga does not specify whether the horde of natives with whom the Scandinavians fought a pitched battle were also outlaws. No good *Skræling* but a dead *Skræling*” (“Some Further Remarks,” p. 32).

93. In a quirky bit of irony the Norsemen are themselves then overcome by drowsiness and fall asleep even as a large force of Americans comes to attack them; they, however, are directly saved by a mysterious and unidentified voice that rouses them from sleep and to arms: “Vaki þú, Þorvaldr, ok allt foruneyti þitt, ef þú vill lif þitt hafa, ok far þú á skip þitt ok allir menn þínir ok farit frá landi sem skjótast” (*GS*, V, p. 53) (‘Wake up, Þorvaldr, and all of your company, if you wish to stay alive, and go to your ship with all of your men, and go away from this land as quickly as you can’); Walter Baumgartner notes that this inexplicable deep sleep is also part of Irish Immram, especially the Brendan-ales (see “Freydis in Vinland,” p. 18); William Sayers inexplicably claims that the Americans are responsible for this ‘magical sleep’ (“Development of an Irish Loan: ON *vertha at gjalti* ‘to go mad with terror,’” *JEGP*, 93 (1994), 177, n. 43).

by the Norse leader, whereupon one American tries to steal a weapon and is promptly killed by a Norseman (*GS*, VII, p. 57/*ES*, XI, p. 25).

In pitched battle the Americans are not represented as the equals of the Norsemen. They attack only in massive numbers and engage in mysterious signs and use a magical weapon (*ES*, X and XI, pp. 24 and 26). That they are panic-stricken, child-like cowards and flee at every opportunity is a stock motif in any situation in which they appear. One such instance is particularly interesting in this regard: in *Eiríks saga*, when Freydis, Eirík's daughter and the leader of one of the colonization parties, advances to meet them, the Americans immediately turn in flight, despite the fact that they enjoy a potentially decisive military advantage at that moment. The larger context of the incident is pertinent here, for the Norsemen were at that moment fleeing the overwhelming numbers of attacking Americans. Freydis demonstrates her own bravado in advancing against the Americans and denigrating the fleeing Norsemen; she claims that they should be able to slaughter the Americans like cattle (*sem búfê*, *ES*, XI, p. 26). The "cowardly" Americans then abandon the pursuit of the Norse warriors and close in on this single woman. But when she takes up a sword and turns to face them, they flee in panic at the sight of—of what? A pregnant woman (the general interpretation of *eigi heil*, *ES*, XI, p. 26)? A woman holding a sword? A female warrior? A woman exposing her breast and using it as a razor strop to whet (*letta*) the blade of a sword?⁹⁴ However this particular passage is to be read in the internal Norse context of recurrently strong women in the sagas, it is impossible not to be struck—in the present context of a study of Eurocentric discourse—by its Amazon-like dimensions, for Amazons figured in Eurocentric depictions of the Outland since the ancient Greek period and continuing up through the period of modern European imperialism.⁹⁵ In the length and breadth of this legend, Amazons embody a human antipode of [originally Greek] civilization. All that is characteristic of "legitimate" culture is turned on its head by the Amazons, and thus their society is a paradigmatic representation of anti-culture: they live on the margins of the known world; they are renowned warriors, hunters, and rulers, and thus inhabit the space outside, not inside the home, in the conventionally public, not private sphere; and most importantly they mirror the European gender-based

94. On this glossing of the word *letta* 'to slap', 'whet', see Einarsson, pp. 249–50.

95. Among the vast scholarly literature on the Greek and Greek-derived later tradition of Amazons, see in particular Wm. Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984), and Page DuBois, *Centaur and Amazons: Women and the Prehistory of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1982); on medieval Germanic reflexes of the problematic, see my *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), Chap. 5, pp. 137–69.

stratification of society, for they capture and keep men only for the purposes of reproduction, since otherwise they prefer their own company. The men are then cast off or enslaved; sons born are returned to their fathers or exposed to die, for only daughters are valued. Conventionally they are depicted as exposing or even cutting off one breast in order to enhance movement in combat (especially archery). As already noted, it is not just in the ancient or medieval world that Amazons were imagined as actually existent; even Columbus insists on the presence of an Amazon island in the Caribbean; Hegel blithely describes such a prehistoric state in an Africa completely unknown to and irrelevant for him and his conception of historical teleology (*Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 120); and it is no accident that the most massive river running through the most impenetrable jungle of the western hemisphere was imagined as the home of the Amazons. The depiction of Freydis has much in common with specific components of the Amazon myth: she is a strong-willed, arrogant, independent woman with a weak husband, who rules—at least for a season—a society on the margins of the known world (although it is a patriarchal society); she is an effective military force all by herself; she dominates the men around her by her wits and physical strength; she procreates according to her own will; she has her male enemies killed without compunction; she goes bare-breasted into battle (and in a seventeenth-century manuscript copy of *Skálholtsbók*, AM 770b 4to, she cuts off one of her breasts and throws it at the enemy).⁹⁶ Despite the striking similarities here to the Amazon myth, however, we need not pretend to a strict identity of the cases. After all, the society in which Freydis lives is staunchly patriarchal; she does *not* remain at the extreme margin (Vínland), but returns unconquered and unpunished *home* from that extreme margin to the slightly less extreme margin of Greenland, where she again is subordinated to male rule. Additionally, in rather un-Amazon-like fashion, in the one incident in which she has her male competitors murdered, she herself murders the *women* in their party, for the men in her party refuse to do it.⁹⁷

96. “[H]ún dró þá út brjóstit undan klæðunum ok skar þat af sér, og grýtti eptir þeim.” On this incident, see also Einarsson, pp. 246–56. In general he views her extreme behavior as an attempt to “range her with the male beserks” (p. 250). He finds similar, though distinctly different, motifs in other earlier, especially Irish, literary texts. His focus is, legitimately, on Norse and the adjacent Irish narrative traditions and thus does not deal with the incident’s implications for the European traditions of Amazons.

97. I came across Wolf’s extremely interesting article after my essay was finished, and was delighted to find that although it consists primarily of a survey of research and plot summary, its last three pages in fact address the issue of Freydis as Amazon, although with a very narrow understanding of the ancient legend and quite a straight-jacketed sense of the broad and deep medieval traditions, which she views as relevant because they are “rich in transvestite traditions” (p. 483)! She claims that since Freydis’s mother is not named in the saga, it “wipes clean the history of Freydis’s lineage,” which is then somehow imagined as evidence

To return to Freydis's counterattack: whatever the relationship of the Freydis incident to the Amazon myth, the Americans' panic at the sight of Freydis demonstrates that from a Eurocentric perspective, they are indeed "primitives." The Americans also flee at the roar of the bull (*GS*, VII, p. 57/*ES*, XI, p. 25),⁹⁸ which, however we wish to understand it, is not particularly likely, if we for a moment consider the probable culture of tenth-century North Americans of the Atlantic seaboard. It seems likely that such a hunter-gatherer culture would have been rather accustomed to the periodic snorting or bellowing of large, and not necessarily always dangerous, sea and land mammals—depending on where *Vínland* was located: walrus, seals, moose, caribou, musk oxen—so that a bull would have almost certainly seemed rather less than terrifying to such a culture, and its roar could have been thought so only from the perspective of one trying to depict a "primitive" culture that lacks large *domesticated* stock animals.⁹⁹

Only a few lines later, however, it is the Norse who are terrified, here too at a loud noise, but now of the unknown, dark blue 'sphere on a pole' hurled at them by the Americans. And now it is the Norse who flee, outnumbered and apparently also at a technological disadvantage, for the Americans are using catapults/war-slings (*valsöngur*; *ES*, XI, p. 26) and bombarding the Norse with showers of missiles (*skothríð*). Their retreat in the face of this military disadvantage is thus justified—from the logistical, that is, rational and thus paradigmatically European, point of view. When Freydis steps forward to condemn their alleged cowardice, it is in the con-

for the matrilineality of Amazons: "Freydis, then, stands free within the acceptable limits of the narrative from subjugation within the patrilineal frame," as also demonstrated in her use of a sword instead of an axe, the sword being "a suggestive token of phallic authority, which she controls and which she is not prepared to wield" (p. 484). But the fact is, Freydis does "wield" it, to very specific and militarily successful effect. It is difficult to imagine how Wolf's conception of matrilineality is to work, since it is Freydis's *mother* who is not named, while her father is Eiríkr, *the* patriarchal center of the tale (although not its hero in any sense), for it is this connection that functions to legitimize Freydis in the tale and authorizes her to lead an expedition to *Vínland*. She is by no means outside any patrilineality, but squarely within its traditional structures, with an explicit and typically patriarchal denial of the mere relevance of the mother, who is not even named. Her Amazon-like nature is suggestive here, but there is no need to insist on its exclusivity.

98. In *Eiríks saga* it is only four sentences after their having fled the bellowing bull (although three weeks have passed in the narrative) that the Americans return, this time themselves 'howling': "ýla upp allir mjök hátt" (*ES*, XI, p. 26) ('all were howling loudly'), designated by the same verb.

99. Does this also imply that the Norsemen knew nothing of the large land mammals in this part of America? Or is it rather again simply a problem for the Icelandic author two centuries after the fact and thousands of miles distant from *Vínland* and the possibility of knowing its fauna? William Sayers's quizzical suggestion that the Americans fear the bull because they are practitioners of magic and thus psychically 'vulnerable' seems pointless ("Development of an Irish Loan: ON *vertha at gjalti* 'to go mad with terror,'" *JEGP*, 93 (1994), 178, n. 43).

text of the Americans' "irrational" terror at the bull only a few lines before, the "rational" terror (i.e., "caution") of the Norse in the face of military disadvantage, and the Americans' impending terror at the sight of Freydis.

Finally, let us consider issues of the purpose and expressed intent of the historical Norse movement across the Atlantic—from the Scandinavian peninsula to the Faroes, Iceland, Greenland, and Vínland—in combination with the represented Norse purpose in the Vínland sagas. The sagas report on this entire trans-Atlantic colonial project in a matter-of-fact manner. *Eiríks saga* begins with the conquest by Norwegian prince Óláfr of Dublin and by his son of the Hebrides and much of Scotland. After the death of both father and son in battle, Óláfr's daughter Auðr moves on to the Orkneys and thence to Iceland, and her freedman's granddaughter, Guðríðr goes on to Greenland, thus transcribing the Norse trajectory of conquest and colonization across the North Atlantic. In both of the sagas the interest of Eiríkr himself in Greenland was not as the goal of a single exploratory or trading voyage, but rather as the continuation of his own apparently inevitable trajectory across the Atlantic, from his homeland in Norway and subsequent exile, to his residence in Iceland and subsequent exile, and then to his colonization of Greenland: "Þat sumar fór Eiríkr at byggja land þat, sem hann hafði fundit" (*ES*, II, p. 6; my emphasis) ('That summer Eiríkr went to colonize the land that he had found'). That trajectory did not stop there, however, as is made clear in the sagas, for exploration in general and expeditions to Vínland in particular are recurrently noted as issues of burning relevance in the *Grœnlendinga þáttr*: "Var nú mikil umrœða um landaleitan" (*GS*, III, p. 49) ('Now there was a great deal of talk about discovering countries'); "In sama var umrœða á Vínlandsförlum sem fyrr, ok fýstu menn Karlsefni mjök þeirar ferðar, bæði Guðríðr ok aðrir menn" (*GS*, VII, p. 56) ('There was the same talk about Vínland voyages as before, and everyone, including Guðríðr, put pressure on Karlsefni to make a voyage'); "Nú teksk umrœða at nýju um Vínlandsferð, því at sú ferð þykkir bæði góð til fjár ok virðingar" (*GS*, VIII, p. 58) ('Now there was new talk of Vínland voyages, because such voyages seemed good for both profit and reputation'). Likewise, in the *Eiríks saga*: "Á því gerðisk orð mikit, at menn mundu leita lands þess, er Leifr hafði fundit" (*ES*, V, p. 14) ('There was much talk about this now, that one should search for the land that Leifr had found'); "Í Brattahlíð hófusk miklar umrœður, at menn skyldu leita Vínlands ins góða" (*ES*, VIII, p. 20) ('In Brattahlíð there were great discussions that one should seek Vínland the good'). Lest we be tempted to imagine that such voyages were expressions of any putative "spirit of adventure," we need note that from the outset they were represented as commercial ventures intended to yield a profit, in goods

and materials brought back as cargo to sell (e.g., grapes and timber), and through exploitative trade with the Americans, especially for furs (cf. esp. *GS*, VII, p. 57), a commodity that was to be of prime European interest as an item of trade with Americans up through the French domination of Canada and the upper Mississippi valley. While Karlsefni sets up quasi-democratic conditions of partnership with his crew, and Freydis also makes an agreement to share whatever *gæði* results from the venture with her partners Helgi and Finnbogi (*GS*, VIII, p. 58), in both cases these conditions clearly demonstrate the fundamental nature of the profit motive: “Þann máldaga gerðu þeir Karlsefni ok hásetar hans, at jöfnum höndum skyldi þeir hafa allt þat, er þeir höfðu fengit til gæða” (*GS*, VII, p. 56) (‘Then Karlsefni and his crew made an agreement that they would share equally in all that they gained as profit’). The treatment of the dwellings in *Vínland* indicates as well that they are not imagined as temporary trade depots or summer transient dwellings, but as the settlement of a full-fledged colony. Leifr has no intention of relinquishing his ownership of the booths, but freely lends their use to other explorers (Karlsefni, *GS*, VII; Freydis, *GS*, VIII). Concerning Karlsefni’s expedition, it is said: “Þeir höfðu með sér alls konar fénað, því at þeir ætluðu at byggja landit, ef þeir mætti þat” (*GS*, VII, p. 56; my emphasis) (‘They had with them all kinds of livestock, for they intended to colonize the land if they could’). Thus Freydis’s alibi, upon her return to Greenland without the entire party of her expedition partners, whom she had murdered in *Vínland*, is that they had stayed on as colonists there: “Nú skulu vér þat segja, at þau búi hér eptir, þá er vér fórum í brott” (*GS*, VIII, p. 60; my emphasis) (‘Now we have to say that they stayed behind here when we went away’). Apparently this is a reasonable enough possibility, that her cover-up would have worked, had some of her companions not told the truth once they had returned to Greenland.

In the end, perhaps the primary difference between the facts of the *Vínland* case and any “Eurocentric norm” is that this Norse colony was not “successful.” The case is a problematic one, however; for very recent history has taught us that the permanence of European colonies is often illusory and always historically determined. Primarily due to the displacement and in some cases extermination and replacement of the native populations by inhabitants of European descent, European colonies in North America, Australia, and some areas of South America have become permanent and “successful,” insofar as that “success” has led to their becoming independent nation states populated and ruled primarily by descendants of Europeans. On the other hand, European colonies in Asia, Africa, and some regions of South America, which experienced quite different colonial processes, have all but disappeared in the last half centu-

ry. Likewise, only those Norse colonies that displaced local populations or were established in the absence of such populations have survived, such as those in the Faroes and Iceland, while their colonies in Normandy, East Anglia, Ireland, Greenland, and Vínland have disappeared. In Normandy and East Anglia, the Norse population was assimilated and absorbed into the local population. The linguistic and cultural assimilation of the Normans was surprisingly rapid, for when they invaded southern England in 1066 only a few generations after having settled in Normandy, they were themselves the vehicles of a specifically *French*-speaking culture. In East Anglia, the Norse assimilation left little more than traces in the language (many of which have survived to the present). In Ireland, a recognizably distinct Norse culture survived longer, although Jonathan Swift's contention that it was still possible in his day to hear native Dubliners of Norse descent speaking Norse on the streets of Dublin, today receives (and almost certainly deserves) little credence as anything beyond an example of the bishop's extraordinary penchant for biting irony. In Greenland the Norse colonies lasted for some six hundred years (and thus longer than the *post*-Columbian European colonies in the Americas have thus far lasted). We lack sufficient information concerning the colony on the American continent proper, but based on the L'Anse aux Meadows complex in Newfoundland, currently the only known confirmed and excavated settlement site, the Norse settlements seem to have lasted only a few years or perhaps decades, with longer term timber-gathering forays from Greenland probably continuing to take place over the course of the subsequent few centuries. While the historical Eirík's Greenland mission was "successful"—for himself and a score of generations after him—the mission of his son's generation, to colonize Vínland, met with less "success." For those who, some two and a half centuries later, wrote the sagas that represented these efforts, Greenland was still a living colony, and Vínland was perhaps still at least a source of timber, if not more. Some might reckon that in itself already in some restricted sense "successful." Zerubavel, for instance, suggests that since Greenland is distant from Canada's Ellesmere Island by only twenty-five miles, a better case could be made for Eirík's discovery of America than for Columbus in his landing on Bermuda, which is seven hundred miles from the North American coast: "Such glaring inconsistencies clearly underscore the tremendous blinding power of social convention" (pp. 26–27). Others, however, have denied that the Norse activity in Vínland itself constitutes "discovery." O'Gorman remarks: "The beneficiaries of a chance encounter, [the Norsemen] were capable of nothing more than establishing a few precarious trading posts. Furthermore, since the northern regions which they explored provided no new spectacle of Nature, if by chance the news of their findings went beyond

the narrow confines of the nations to whom it was familiar, it could never assume any true significance. Properly speaking, therefore, this was no discovery” (p. 32). Inge Langenberg, too, denies “discovery,” though on slightly different grounds:

Akzeptiert man die Definition von ‘entdecken’, die Schmitt 1950 (102) in Abwandlung eines Wortes von Bruno Bauer gibt, so kann man zur Zeit der Jahrtausendwende noch nicht von einer Entdeckung Amerikas sprechen: ‘Entdecken kann nur derjenige, der seine Beute besser kennt als sie sich selbst und sie sich aus dieser Überlegenheit der Bildung und des Wissens zu unterwerfen vermag.’ . . . In jedem Fall jedoch handelte es sich bei den normannischen Fahrten lediglich um eine ‘Vorentdeckung’ Amerikas. Obwohl diese frühe Berührung mit der Neuen Welt vermutlich durch Jahrhunderte fort dauerte und umfassender war, als man in der Forschung lange Zeit annahm, ist den Normannen nie bewußt gewesen, daß sie einen neuen Erdteil entdeckt hatten. Die Kenntnis des Landes im Westen blieb daher eine Episode. Erst mit Kolumbus begann die *Entdeckung* Amerikas.¹⁰⁰

Haugen not only denies that this constitutes discovery as such, but even that European discovery was possible at the time:

Why did this news [sc. Adam of Bremen’s account of the discovery of Vinland] fail to stir the European imagination and awaken the spirit of enterprise? The real reason was that in the year 1000 Europe was not ready to discover America. Europe and Scandinavia consisted of a mass of petty states, bickering and fighting among themselves and wholly occupied with internal problems. The kings were often nominal or temporary heads, whose authority was none too secure. None of the European nations was very old, and they were just beginning to acquire some slight stability. Four hundred years later they had grown large and strong; kings sat securely on their thrones as the wielders of unlimited power, with huge national treasuries at their command. England, France, Spain, and Portugal had accumulated large capitals which could be used to finance expeditions of exploration and settlement. Firearms made the subjugation of native populations easy. Even so, it took the European imperialists a century of heartbreaking failures before they gained a secure foothold on this continent.¹⁰¹

Obviously the tenth-century Norse activities in Vinland did not participate in such large-scale, world-political conceptions. Whether or not they

100. Langenberg, *Die Vinland-Fahrten*, pp. 9, 119; she quotes from Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Cologne, 1950), p. 102.

101. Einar Haugen, *Voyages to Vinland: The First American Saga* (New York: Knopf, 1942), pp. 160–61. Haugen’s sympathies and his basic idealist ideology are clear, as in his insistence on the proper siting of the royal buttocks as determinative of exploration. Certainly the treasuries of Europe were *not* full at the end of the Middle Ages. In fact it was not until treasure from the New World began to flow into European treasuries in the sixteenth century that capitalist expansion was even possible, which led directly to European abilities to explore more widely and control even more effectively that which was “discovered.” Without question firearms, large ships, and navigational expertise played key roles in the ‘success’ of such ventures.

constituted “discovery” obviously depends on one’s definition and thus on one’s ideologies of exploration and colonization, and that topic remains beyond the scope of the present paper. In any case, however, the literate Icelanders of the thirteenth century, consciously or not, incorporated the medieval Norse occupation of the North Atlantic into a larger political and narrative discourse that did take part in a long-standing European discourse tradition that represented confrontations with non-European geography, and this Norse version of it we now can recognize and identify as Eurocentric.