

The Discoveries of  
The Norsemen in America  
with special relation to their  
early cartographical  
Representation



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39 GREAT RUSSELL STREET OVER AGAINST THE SOUTH-WEST

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Wineland to have been of the same race whom the people of Greenland called Skrälings.<sup>1</sup> There is no further mention of Wineland in the Iceland book as known to us, but it must be noted that Ari speaks of Wineland as of a country well known to all, whose inhabitants were still in a lower grade of civilisation.

There are three other ancient authorities, probably based upon Ari,<sup>2</sup> although they only incidentally touch on Greenland and Wineland. The chief of these is the "Landnámabók," the book of the settlement of Iceland from 870 to 930 A.D. We are told there, that Eric the Red came to Iceland with his father, Thorwald, who had to leave Norway for manslaughter. When his father died, Eric settled in the south-west of Iceland, where other Norwegians of position had already taken up their abode. He was condemned to three years banishment for manslaughter, and went out to the country which Gunnbjorn of Iceland saw in 920, when a storm drove him west of Iceland.<sup>3</sup> The common name of the islands came to be "Gunnbjorn's Cliffs," and a popular idea sprang up that there was a large country to the west. Thither the exile made his way. He landed safely, and tried to explore thoroughly, his western home. He spent the first summer on Eric's Island, which we cannot exactly identify, and started from there to boldly explore the north. In the autumn he returned to the south of Greenland, and spent the winter at the southern extremity on an island, to which he gave the name of "Eric's Island." He spent three years in exploring the coasts of Greenland, and returned home to advertise his discoveries. He wished to obtain public confidence, and called the island "Green Land," or Greenland. In this he succeeded. Eric himself settled in Brattahlid, by Erics-

(1) E. Mogk, on p. 61 of his "*Die Entdeckung Amerikas durch die Nordgermanen*," is quite right in laying stress on the fact that the inhabitants of Wineland were called Skrälings before it was thought that the same race must have lived in Greenland as was already known in Wineland.

(2) See G. Storm, "*Vinlandreiserne*," p. 11; A. M. Reeves, "*Wineland*," p. 12.

(3) Gunnbjörn's Cliffs were probably, as E. Mogk, "*Die Entdeckung Amerikas*," p. 64, note 1, remarks, a small group of islands between Iceland and Greenland which, according to Ruysch's map of 1508, were destroyed by volcanoes in 1456. The legend on Ruysch's map reads: "Insula hec in anno Domini 1456 fuit totaliter combusta." See Norden-skiöld, "*Facsimile Atlas*," pl. 32.

fjord,<sup>1</sup> where green land is still to be seen, and where Greenland cattle browse.<sup>2</sup>

The Landnámabók only twice, and that briefly, notices Wineland. Once it serves to determine the geographical position of greater Iceland, or the white men's land, "which lies close to Wineland." On the other occasion it is mentioned in the genealogy of Thorfinn Karlsefni, "who found Wineland the Good."<sup>3</sup> Both the other reports, which are to be traced back to Ari, supply many gaps in the history of geographical discoveries, and are nearly identical with those in the Kristni Saga, and in Snorr's "Königssaga."<sup>4</sup> Leif, a son of Eric the Red, had been sent by King Olaf to preach the Gospel in Greenland, and on his way home from Norway he discovered Wineland the Good. On the same voyage Leif saved from certain death a number of fellow-travellers, and from this was nicknamed "Hinn Hepni," "the Fortunate." It must be noted that every passage speaks of Wineland the good, as a country universally known and in want of no further explanation.

Adam of Bremen and Ari the Wise give us, in their histories of the Far North, but slight notes on the corresponding geographical connexion, but from a geographical standpoint their reports are most fortunately corroborated by a geographer in the middle of the 12th century, who was probably the Abbot Nicholas of Thingeyre (d. 1159).<sup>5</sup> The reports of the ancient geographer are to be found in Icelandic MSS. of the 14th and 15th centuries, forming a short description of the world, based on Latin sources and the reports of

(1) Landnámabók, II. 14. The report is to be found in the Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni, or Eric the Red in A. M. Reeves, "*Wineland*," p. 28, sqq., and in the account of the Flatey Book, p. 60, sqq. See also K. Maurer, "*Grönland im Mittelalter*," p. 204, note 3.

(2) See E. Mogk, "*Die Entdeckung Amerikas*," p. 67, in Laub's description in the report of the second German Polar expedition. On p. 64, sqq., Mogk makes an exhaustive research into the first voyages of discovery made by Eric the Red.

(3) cf. Storm, "*Vinlandsreiserne*," p. 11, and for Greater Ireland, pp. 63, sqq.; Reeves, "*Wineland*," p. 12.

(4) cf. Storm, and Reeves, p. 12.

(5) For this 12th century geographer, see Werlauff, "*Symbolae*," p. 4, sqq.; Rafn, "*Grönl. hist. Mindesm.*," III. 218, sqq.; Storm, "*Vinlandsreiserne*," p. 11, sqq.; Baumgartner, "*Island*," p. 278, sqq. Winsor takes no notice of this valuable report. Reeves, p. 15, notes the report, but not the Abbot Nicholas.

Abbot Nicholas, himself a great traveller. The only MS. which contains a paragraph on the discovery of Wineland in the description of the countries W. and S.W. of Iceland is one which gives details of the authority of Abbot Nicholas. This is regarded therefore as of the highest antiquity, and is rightly traced back to the Abbot.<sup>1</sup>

According to this report: "Helluland lies to the south of Greenland, then comes Markland, and a little way on Wineland the Good, which is said to be joined to Africa. If this be true, the ocean must flow between Wineland and Markland. Leif the Lucky first [fyrstr, as the first] discovered Wineland, and there [on the same voyage] he found merchants shipwrecked on the sea, and by the grace of God he saved their lives. He also introduced Christianity into Greenland, and it flourished so exceedingly that a Bishop's see was created in Garde."<sup>2</sup>

The last statement could obviously not have been written before about 1125, when Bishop Arnold (1123-1152) established his see at Gardar. Werlauff, Rafn and Storm may therefore be quite correct in ascribing these reports to Abbot Nicholas, who died in 1159. This account agrees with the narrative of Adam of Bremen, and Ari, and gives confirmatory evidence of the 12th century, that according to the earlier traditions of Iceland a Wine country had been discovered "south of Greenland" together with two other countries, Helluland and Markland, Wineland being discovered first and quite accidentally by Leif, who was on the way home from Norway, to introduce Christianity into Greenland. This enables us at last to understand the ambiguous phrase of Ari, where he describes Karlsefni as a man "who found Wineland the Good."<sup>3</sup> We are informed by this learned geographer that Karlsefni set out later to find Wineland the Good, and that he came to a place "where men thought, this was the country sought for," but that he was unable to explain Wineland with advantage.<sup>4</sup> I agree entirely with Reeves<sup>5</sup> that only two voyages to Wineland are

(1) Storm, p. 11. Werlauff and Rafn agree in this.

(2) "*Grönl. hist. Mindesm.*," III. 220, sqq.; Reeves, "*Wineland*," pp. 15, sqq.

(3) Storm, p. 11; Reeves, p. 12.

(4) "*Grönl. hist. Mindesm.*," III. 221; Reeves, p. 15; Storm, l. c.

(5) Reeves, p. 161.

mentioned by the writer: the voyage of discovery by Lief, and the voyage of exploration by Karlsefni.

Greenland and Wineland were known to the earliest Icelandic town and family Sagas as well as to historians and geographers of high learning and good repute. According to the Eyrbyggja Saga (about 1250 or 1260), the men of Eyrbygg and Alptfirdingen made a truce, and about the year 1000 Snorri and Thorleif Kimbe, the sons of Thorbrand, set out for Greenland. Kimbervaag took its name from Thorleif Kimbe. Snorri went on with Kalsefni to Wineland the Good, and "Snorri's son, Thorbrand, fell in battle, when they fought with the men of Skräling in Wineland."<sup>1</sup>

In the Gretti Saga, about 1290, pórhallr Gamlason is mentioned as having taken part in Karlsefni's voyage to Wineland. At the close of the expedition he settled in Iceland, at Hrutafjord, and was called the Winelander, from his voyage to Wineland.<sup>2</sup>

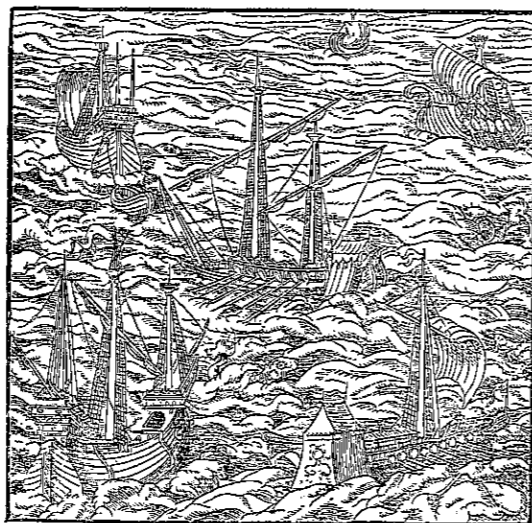
In these accounts we have the earliest notices of the discoveries of the Norsemen in America. It may be that the "King's Mirror," which gives very precise details of Greenland, is as early as the 12th century. But it makes no mention of the other countries, Helluland, Markland and Wineland, and we will therefore treat it in detail later in this volume. The previous accounts, which were mainly by earlier explorers, have been entirely neglected by Justin Winsor, but have been duly emphasised by Storm and Reeves. The notices are very brief, especially as regards Wineland. But we can trace a general consensus of tradition in the northern regions, a tradition dating from the 11th century, and stating definitely that Eric the Red discovered Greenland in the year 985 or 986 and colonised it. Further, his son Leif was returning from Norway to Greenland, where King Olaf had commissioned him to spread the Gospel, when he discovered Wineland the Good, in the year 1000.<sup>3</sup> Thorfinn Karlsefni attempted later

(1) Storm, p. 12, sqq., and H. Gering, "*Eyrbyggja Saga*," c. 48, n. 2, p. 179; pp. xi, sqq., give full details as to contents, author, date and sources.

(2) Storm, p. 12, sqq. See note 2 for the verification of the nickname.

(3) The year 1000 is not definitely given in the authorities, but this fact is historically confirmed, King Olaf Trygvason of Norway did send Leif to spread the Gospel in Greenland. As to Olaf, cf. Storm, "*Om Aarsiallet for Trondhjems Grundlaeggelse*," Drontheim, 1897.

to colonise Wineland, but was unsuccessful as he was defeated in battle. The hardy explorers discovered two more countries, Markland and Helluland, situated to the south of Greenland.



## CHAPTER II.

More Detailed Authorities of the 13th and 14th  
Centuries on the Discovery of the  
Norsemen in America.

**T**HUS having tested the historical accuracy of the reports of Adam of Bremen, Ari, and the rest of the early authorities, we are now able to estimate the true value of the fuller details contained in the Icelandic Sagas of the 13th and 14th centuries, relating to the discovery of America by the Norsemen. So far as Greenland is concerned, we find no critical difficulties in the authorities. For the account of the discovery and colonisation of Greenland the Sagas refer us to our old and trustworthy friend, the *Landnámabók*.<sup>1</sup> It is quite another matter when we come to the account of the discovery of the continent of America. The Sagas perhaps agree in the main, that in the south-west of Greenland three countries were discovered; the first stony, the second wooded, and the third rich in grapes, Helluland, Markland, and Wineland respectively; but the authorities differ entirely as to the name and person of the first discoverer, as to the time and circumstances of the discovery and subsequent exploration. We are therefore obliged to make it our first duty to set out clearly how far the Sagas are as a rule to be trusted, and then to select the best of the Sagas dealing with the discovery of the mainland of America.

The word Saga,<sup>2</sup> which corresponds with the Greek *λόγος*, was used by the Icelanders both for an historical report in the strictest sense of the word, as for example, the Iceland Book of Ari, and for what we call a mere legend. We need

(1) See p. vi.

(2) For the historical value of the Sagas, see K. Maurer, "*Island*," p. 463, etc.; Alex. Baumgartner, "*Island*," p. 293, etc.; Paul, "*Grundriss*," p. 117, etc.; Ch. Smith, "*The Vinland Voyages*," p. 510, etc.