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Erik Wahlgren

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Erik Wahlgren : The Vikings and America (Ancient Peoples and Places) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Vikings and America (Ancient Peoples and Places):

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating mix of known fact and mysteryBy Lee MadlandA very well written, well illustrated, and fascinating recounting of Norse overseas activities in the Atlantic. After reaching and settling Iceland in the late 800s and Greenland in the late 900s, on several occasions recently settled Greenlanders indulged their exploratory and settlement urges and sailed for American shores, which Leif Eriksson had found and named Vinland ("Wineland") at his southern reach in about the year 1000. Erik Wahlgren, a former professor of Scandinavian languages at UCLA, vividly describes the Viking background and the developing Norse culture, of which the Icelandic sagas became, many believe, the first truly notable body of literature in any Germanic language. As penetrating depictions of life, especially the better family sagas still have power to fascinate the modern reader. (This book's title can be a bit misleading since the Iceland and Greenland settlers were not "Vikings," i.e. sea raiders, but settled farmers and stockmen.) After describing the two saga versions of the Vinland story, in an interim chapter the author effectively debunks Minnesota's Kensington Stone as a hoax (the subject of an earlier Wahlgren work) as well as discussing other dubious claims. The rest of the book focuses chiefly on the Vinland ventures. But just where WAS Vinland? Was it at the northern end of Newfoundland, the ruins Helge Ingstad and his wife Anne Stine Ingstad uncovered and painstakingly excavated in the 1960s while finding a number of undoubted Norse artifacts? Although the Ingstad claim has been accepted by many, Wahlgren thinks not. "Ingstad's dilemma stems

from his natural preference for a thoroughly identified Old Norse habitation site over a theoretical one that has not been physically confirmed." . . . "The reconstructed Norse houses at L'Anse aux Meadows represents a first-class achievement in modern archeology, and a major enrichment of our geographical and historical knowledge." . . . "The Ingstad find stands on its own merits and needs no crutch. By the same token, it is not Vinland." Drawing on geographical, botanical, cultural and linguistic evidence, the author thinks it might have been built and used for a short time by other voyagers of which we have no extant record (the saga literature is very family selective and much of it has been lost over the centuries.) Or even -- in a tentative hunch Wahlgren throws out -- that it might just possibly have been Karlsefni's "Straumfjord" of Erik's Saga. The author then makes a very plausible case for Leif's Vinland or land of grapes having been in the Maine-New Brunswick coastal border area, which is better left to the interested reader to judge for oneself after considering the cases for locations others have put forth. Wahlgren's theory is intriguing and definitely in the running. A previous reviewer thought his arguments convincing but reasonably expressed a desire to see opposing arguments. One can get a good idea of other major contentions by reading Ingstad and Carl Sauer (see my other reviews by clicking on the above link). These are by no means all of the Norse activities that Wahlgren discusses interestingly, lucidly and often wittily, including evidence of visits to the High Arctic -- fully as distant a voyage from the primary Greenland settlement area as Norway itself and even more difficult and hazardous. Too, there is definite record of one small ship with seventeen Greenlanders aboard being storm-blown from Markland (Labrador) to Iceland at the late date of 1347 and intimations of periodic visits to those North American shores to secure much-needed timber, "although not one in a hundred of these voyages had the slightest chance of being recorded." Wahlgren's final chapter contains a short but riveting account of what is known of the demise of the Norse Greenland settlements, after existing for half a millennium. For those who wish to get a visceral "feel" of life there, a recent and magnificent piece of historical fiction based on virtually all that is known of that time and place, and written in saga style, is Jane Smiley's "The Greenlanders" (see the reviews).¹⁴ of 15 people found the following review helpful. Highly informative and very interestingBy Susan ZuckermanAlthough published in 1986, this remains a very informative book on the Vikings and their presence in North America. Wahlgren was a professor of Scandinavian languages, so he adds a very interesting linguistic layer, and uses many Old Norse words to bolster his arguments. He has included a great deal of archaeological evidence to explain the Viking way of life in Greenland and Newfoundland., and also information from the Icelandic sagas regarding Leif Eiriksson's and others' voyages.Wahlgren explains very well some of the hoaxes and misinterpretations of "evidence" of the Vikings in numerous areas of North America. He delves into the controversy over the Kensington Stone (a stone with a runic inscription found in Minnesota), and with his linguistic background expertly debunks it.I particularly enjoy Wahlgren's very readable style, full of cute little asides, while remaining scholarly. His personality and wit really shine through.⁸ of 8 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting and fun readBy Andrew WisemanI read this book really quickly, I couldn't put it down. Wahlgren's idea is interesting and he backs it up well, with lots of interesting history and anecdotes. I'd like to see some arguments against it before believing he's right, but he makes a convincing argument. I enjoyed the book and hope to read more by him. Worth reading for anyone interested in Viking and old North American history.

Excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland have revealed the presence of the Vikings around AD 1000. But was this the mysterious Vinland ("land of grapevines") which, according to the Icelandic sagas, Leif Eriksson discovered almost one thousand years ago? In his account Wahlgren argues for a location farther south and also suggests Viking exploration far to the North. He also answers the question: "Why did the Vikings eventually leave the New World?" with his theory that a worsening climate and attacks by native Eskimos and Indians put paid to the first European presence in North America.

A detective story in which Wahlgren sorts through the clues found in ancient manuscripts and meshes them with modern archaeological discoveries. -- Seattle Post-IntelligencerA rare insight into the facts of a contentious issue. -- ChoiceAbout the AuthorThe late Erik Wahlgren was Professor of Scandinavian and Germanic Languages at the University of California, Los Angeles. He was best known for his influential book *The Kensington Stone, a Mystery Solved*.