



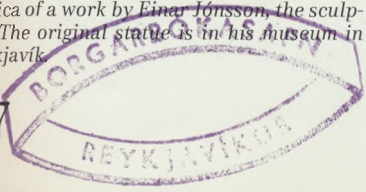
2 Vikings and Settlement

At the time when the Irish had discovered Iceland and started regular sailings there, boatbuilding and skill in navigation were also developing on the west coast of Norway. The settlements in the deep and narrow fjords were cut off from each other by high mountains and woods. Hence, sea transport was soon to become the most important mode of communication. Wood was plentiful for shipbuilding and it is believed that shortly before 800 the Norwegians were able to build seagoing ships. Sailing skills developed, first in the fjords and along the coast, whereby the isolation of the many small places was broken, finally resulting in the quest for the open sea, the westward voyages. Before 800 the Nordic peoples had hardly any links with the mainstream of European civilization, but then suddenly the Vikings came on the scene, sailing in elegantly shaped, fast-running and beautifully decorated ships to distant shores. In the beginning they

raided and plundered wherever they went or traded with the people they came into contact with, but later they settled in other countries, establishing colonies. This was the Viking period, from about 800 to 1050, the beginning of an extremely dynamic epoch in the history of European exploration. The Norse Vikings first went to the Shetlands, then to the Orkneys, Scotland and Ireland. There they may have heard of the voyages of the Irish to Iceland and therefore sought this island in the north, but they might also have stumbled upon it accidentally. Anyway, it could hardly be long before the Vikings with their increasing number of ships at sea would discover Iceland. Seagoing ships were, of course, a precondition for the settlement of Iceland. No remains of ships from this period, however, have been found in Iceland, only fragments of small boats in burial mounds. Information on the Viking ships has to be sought in Norway, where two



Ingólfur Arnarson is considered to have been the first Norse settler in Iceland. He arrived in 870 or 874, but the latter date has received traditional recognition. He built his home at Reykjavík where his high-seat pillars had drifted ashore. The statue of Ingólfur Arnarson stands on Arnarhöll in Reykjavík. It is a replica of a work by Einar Jónsson, the sculptor. The original statue is in his museum in Reykjavík.



big Viking ships have been found, and in Denmark where some old ships have been excavated at the bottom of Roskilde-fjord. Among them was the *knörr*, a type of vessel considered to have been the cargo ship of the Viking period. Norse seafarers discovered Iceland around 850 A.D. or shortly thereafter. Three Vikings are mentioned by name in written sources as explorers of Iceland. The Viking *Naddodur* is said to have been the first Norseman to come to Iceland and he did not find any sign of human habitation. He sailed back to Norway, calling the country *Snæland* ('Snowland'). *Gardar Svavarsson*, a Swedish viking, sailed to *Snæland*. He was the first Nordic man to sail round the country, finding that it was an island. Consequently he named it *Gardarshólmur* ('Gardarsholm'). He wintered at *Húsavík* on the Bay of *Skjálfandaflói*. Next spring when he was ready to sail back, he lost a boat from his ship with a man called *Náttfari* together with a man and woman slave. They settled in *Reykjadalur*. Therefore *Náttfari* is the first Nordic man to settle in Iceland, but as he did not come to Iceland on his own initiative, he has not been included with the settlers. – *Flóki Vilgerðarson*, a Norwegian viking, sailed to Gardarsholm, intending to settle there. He therefore took with him his family and livestock. For guidance he took with him three ravens. When he released the first some way out, it flew back to Norway. When the second was set free further out, it returned to the ship, but later when the third was

released, it flew straight ahead, directing its owner to Iceland. After that *Flóki* was called *Hrafna-Flóki* ('Raven-Flóki'). They sailed along the south coast and to the fjord *Vatnsfjörður* on the north coast of the Bay of *Breiðfjörður*. Here they spent the summer fishing without procuring any hay for the livestock, which consequently perished during the following winter. Next spring *Flóki* climbed a mountain to look around. He then had a view over a fjord filled with ice. "Therefore they named the country Iceland, a name it has had ever since", says *Landnáma*, the Book of Settlements. – After three years in Iceland *Flóki* sailed back to Norway. *Flóki* had no favourable reports to make on Iceland, whereas his crew spoke well of some things and ill of others. – It is believed that *Gardar Svavarsson* and *Hrafna-Flóki* came to Iceland around 865 or later. The first Norse settler in Iceland is traditionally considered to have been *Ingólfur Arnarson*. On sighting the Icelandic south coast, he cast his high-seat pillars overboard, vowing that he would build his home wherever they drifted ashore. *Ingólfur* landed on or near the promontory of *Ingólfshöfði* on the south coast where he spent his first winter in Iceland. Next winter *Ingólfur* was at *Hjörleifshöfði*, the third at the foot of Mt. *Ingólfssjall*, but when his slaves finally found his high-seat pillars, which had drifted ashore at Reykjavik, he built his home there. It has been estimated that *Ingólfur* came to Iceland in either 870 or 874, the latter date being traditionally recognized as the year



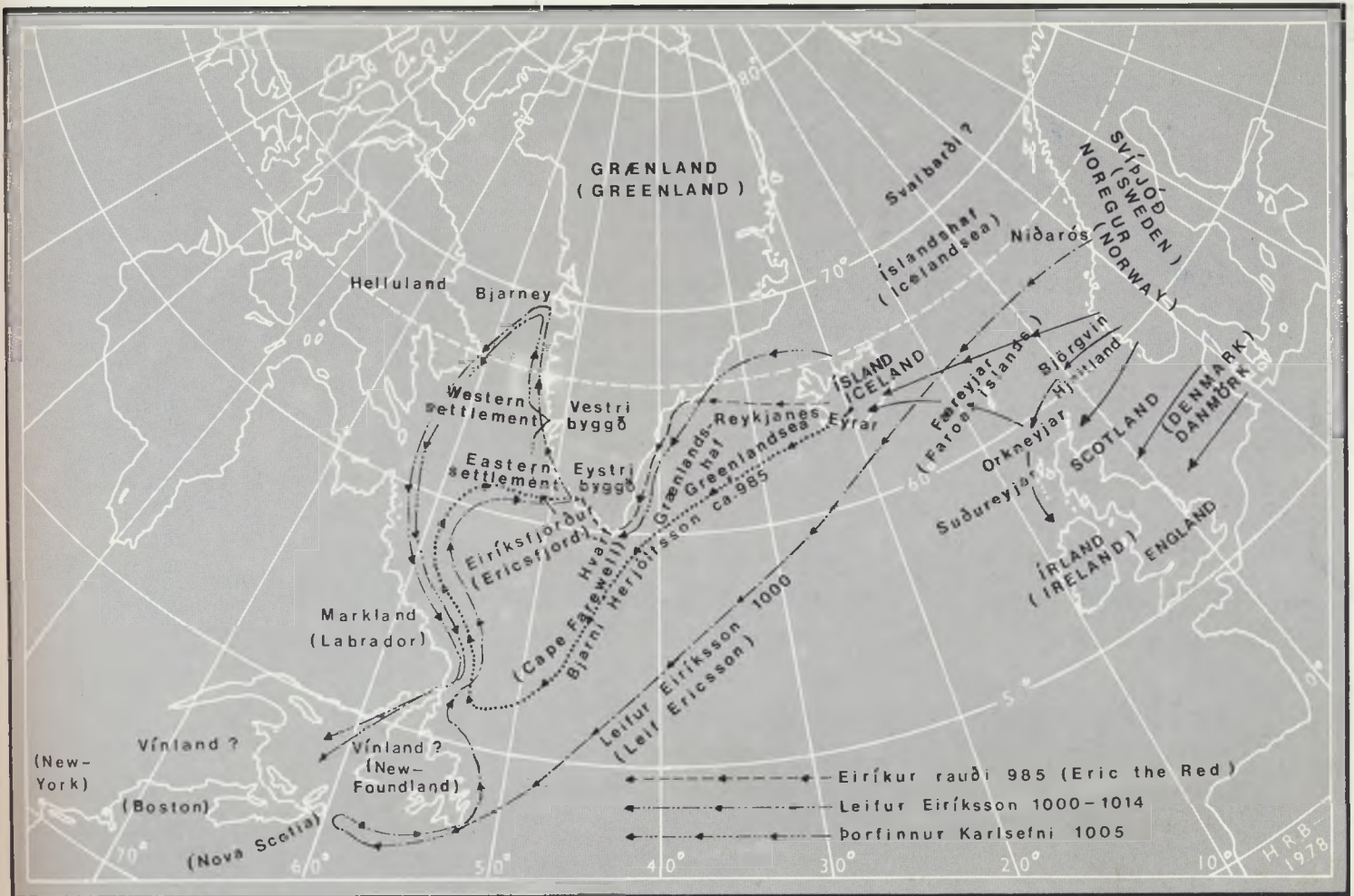
when Norse settlement began in Iceland. Ingólfur's wife was **Hallveig Fróðadóttir**, Reykjavík's first housewife. The age of settlement lasted for about 60 years, ending in 930 when the general assembly, the Althing, was established at **Pingvellir**. During this period about 10–20 thousand people, mainly from Western Norway, the Scottish isles and Ireland, settled in Iceland. This was the first permanent settlement of European people on the other side of an ocean, and as such it was an important historical event. The settlement of Norsemen in Iceland was a natural continuation of their Viking incursions to the west from Norway. Soon after the settlement it became evident to Icelandic seafarers that there was a land to the west of Iceland. **Landnáma** (the Book of Settlements) relates that the Viking **Gunnbjörn** drifted westward from Iceland, coming to a land called **Gunnbjarnarsker** ('Gunnbjörn

Ingólfshöfði, a promontory on the south coast of Iceland where the first Norse settler, Ingólfur Arnarson, landed and spent his first winter in Iceland. In the background the Vatnajökull glacier can be discerned. Hjörleifur, Ingólfur's foster-brother, landed at Hjörleifshöfði farther west on the south coast where he and his Norwegian followers were killed by their Irish slaves who then fled to Vestmannaeyjar (the Westman Islands). Ingólfur followed them, killing the slaves. He spent the following winter at Hjörleifshöfði, the third winter near Mt. Ingólfsfjall, but the following summer his slaves found the high-seat pillars where they had drifted ashore at Reykjavík. There he finally settled. For place names see the map on page 8.

Skerries'). **Snæbjörn galti** found this land again in 970. **Eiríkur rauði** (Eric the Red) was born at **Drangar** on the north-west coast of Iceland. His son was **Leifur heppni Eiríksson** (Leif Ericsson the Lucky). Eric the Red sailed to the west around 982, looking for **Gunnbjarnarsker**. He sailed up to the east coast of Greenland and then southwards along the coast, inside the drift ice. He was then the first man known to have rounded **Hvarf** (Cape Farewell), the southernmost tip of Greenland. When reaching the western coast, he found inhabitable areas. He explored the region for three years, calling the country Greenland as he realized that an alluring name would attract more settlers. After one year back home in Iceland, Eric sailed again for Greenland in 986, now accompanied by 25 ships and more than 300 settlers from Iceland. Only 14 of these ships arrived safely in the settlement area, the other ships being lost at sea or returning back to Iceland. The Icelandic settlements in South-west Greenland were in two regions: One was called **Eystrbyggð** ('the Eastern Settlement') now the Julianehåb district, and the other **Vestribyggð** ('the Western Settlement'), now the Godthåb district. Eric the Red built his home at **Brattahlíð** at the bottom end of **Eiríksfjörður** ('Eric's Fjord'), now called **Kagssiarssuk**. Brattahlíð was ever after the focal point of the Icelandic settlement in Greenland and the **Þjóðhild Church** was built there. – One of the settlers who went to Greenland with Eric the Red was **Herjólfur**. He lived at **Eyrarbakki**

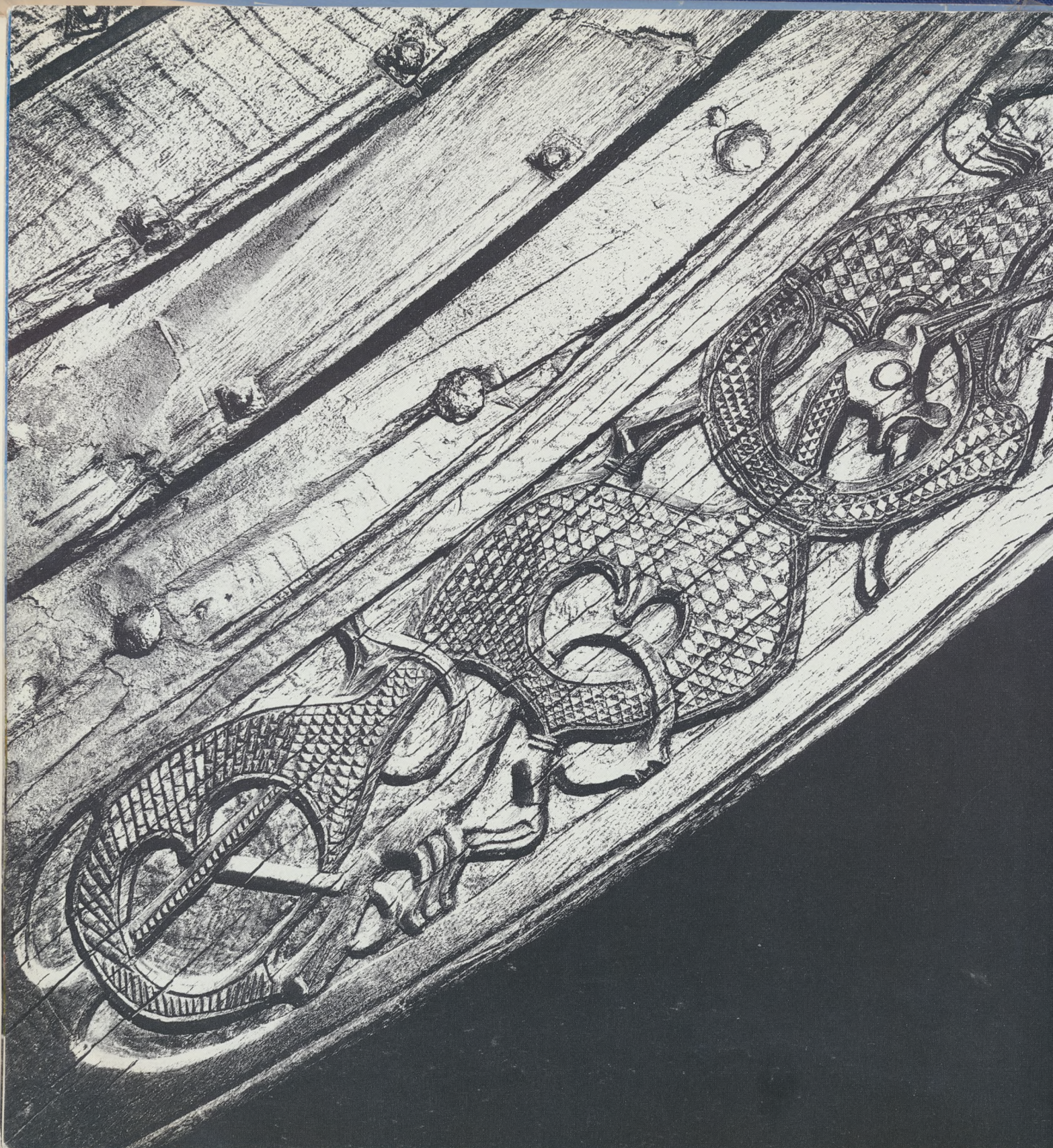




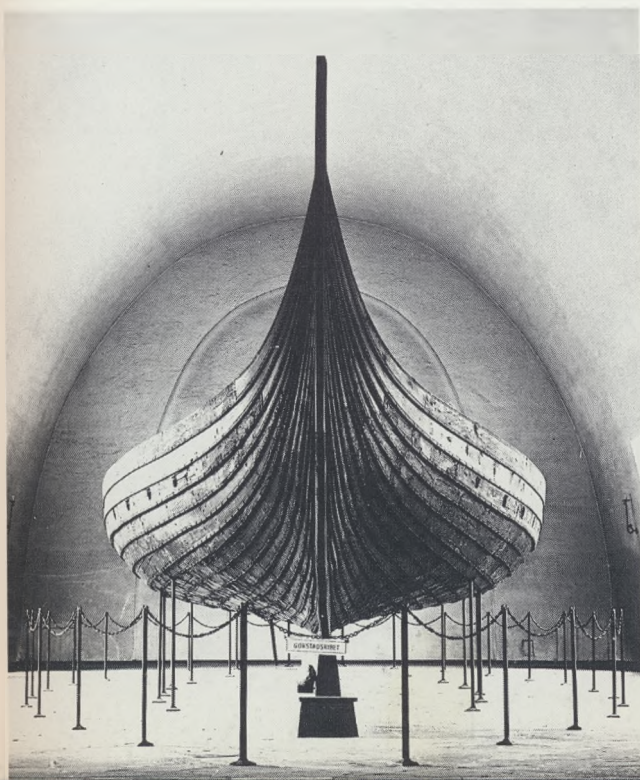


On the occasion of the eleventh centenary of the settlement of Iceland in 1974 a memorial was erected at Ingólfshöfði where Ingólfur Arnarson, the first Norse settler in Iceland, first came ashore. To the left is a view from the memorial at Ingólfshöfði towards Óræfajökull glacier, the highest peak in Iceland. Above is a map showing the routes followed by the Nordic Vikings on their western voyages before and during the age of the Icelandic settlement. From the west coast of Norway the Vikings first sailed to Scotland and Ireland where Viking colonies were established. Iceland was settled both direct from West-Norway and from the Viking settlements in Ireland and Scotland. From Iceland the Vikings sailed to Greenland where they established Eystribyggð (the Eastern Settlement), and Vestribyggð (the Western Settlement), both on the west coast of Greenland. Bjarni Herjólfsson from Iceland around 985 or 986 for Greenland, but drifting farther west he discovered America. Leifur Eiríksson (Leif Ericson) sailed from the Icelandic settlement in Greenland to explore the American coast further during the years 1000 to 1014, and then he found the land he called Vinland, which has not been conclusively identified. The Viking settlements in America were not permanent as the Vikings withdrew from there after fighting with the aborigines, most likely eskimos. Shortly after 1410 the connections with the Icelandic settlements in Greenland were disrupted, the fate of the settlers there being unknown. To the right is a copy of a map by Sigurður Stefánsson of Skálholt in Iceland. He was the headmaster of the Skálholt School from 1595 onwards, a learned and versatile scholar. His map is the oldest in existence to show correctly the Icelandic settlements on the west coast of Greenland. The original map of 1590 is lost, but a copy survived. The year 1570 on the map is a misprint. It should read 1590.

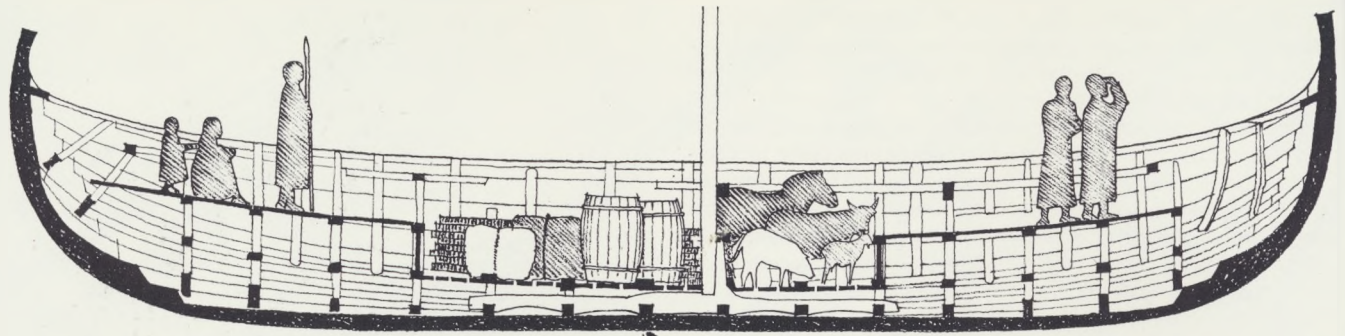




(Eyrar) on the south-west coast of Iceland. His son was **Bjarni Herjólfsson**. When he came back home from a voyage abroad later that same summer, he was told his father had emigrated to Greenland. Although late in the season, Bjarni set off on his ship to follow his father to Greenland. He and his men drifted westwards, passed Greenland, came to a low wooded coast, sailed north and northeast, and finally arrived at **Herjólfssnes** in the Eastern Settlement of Greenland (now Iqigait). Around 990 Leif Ericsson sailed from Brattahlíð on an exploration voyage on Bjarni Herjólfsson's ship, and it is believed that Bjarni himself went with him on this voyage to the west. During this expedition they came to **Helluland** (Baffin Island), **Markland** (Labrador, Newfoundland), and an area further south which they called **Vinland**, but it is uncertain where that land was. – Several expeditions were made from Brattahlíð around the year 1000 for the purpose of further exploration and settlement of Vinland. The leader of the main expedition was **Þorfinnur Karlsefni**, whose wife was **Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir**. They intended to settle down in Vinland, but due to a conflict with the natives there, most likely Eskimos, the settlers returned to Greenland after a two-year stay in Vinland. Later Þorfinnur Karlsefni and his wife Guðríður moved back to Iceland together with their son, **Snorri Þorfinnsson**, who was born in Vinland. He is the first white man known to have been born in America. Although permanent settlement in Vinland was abandoned in the years around 1000, fishermen from the Icelandic settlements in Greenland had stations there later on, bringing back with



Seagoing ships and certain navigational skill were obviously a prerequisite for the settlement of Iceland. No remains of seagoing ships from the Viking age have been found in Iceland. All these pictures are from the Viking Ships Museum in Oslo. Above is the Oseberg ship, and the picture to the far left shows a part of the beautifully decorated stem of the ship. Left is a view from the prow of the Gokstad ship. These ships are ships of war, light and slim, fast-running and finely ornamented longships. Recent tank-testing and calculations have shown that under sails these ships could reach a speed of up to 10 miles. But they were not suitable for carrying cargo. That was the function of the *knörr*, the cargo ship of the Viking Age. In 1957 the salvage and conservation of five old ships found at the bottom of Roskilde Fjord in Denmark were commenced. One of these ships is a *knörr* of around 1000 A.D., i.e. of a period towards the end of the Viking age. Now the single parts of this ship have been assembled with painstaking care so that the size and form of the cargo ship type of the Viking Age can be studied at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde. The *knörr* is shown in the picture on the next page (page 24).



Below is a picture of the cargo ship of the Vikings, the knörr, in the Ship Museum in Roskilde in Denmark, and above is a drawing, a side view of the ship, showing the part-decks fore and aft. The frame parts found indicate the location and size of these decks. This ship was built of fir,

the hull consisting of very wide planks, so it is believed the ship was built in Southern Norway. The length of the ship is 16–17 m, the width 4.5 m and the depth 1.9 m.



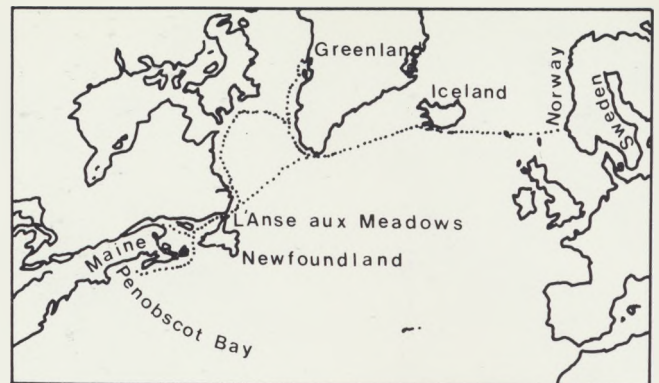
them many products, especially timber, as it was much shorter to transport it from there than from Norway. – The Vinland voyages, therefore, did not result in permanent colonization by Nordic people on the American mainland. There was the end of the westward drive during the Viking age with only a small community remaining behind in the homeland, Iceland. The connection with the Icelandic settlements in Greenland was also disrupted shortly after 1410, the fate of the settlers there being unknown. Therefore, the only permanent settlement during the Viking age in a new land was in Iceland. During the first few years of Norse settlement in Iceland it is believed that the number of inhabitants increased rather slowly, the first settlers appropriating very large areas. The main influx of settlers in Iceland occurred during rather few years towards the end of the age of settlement, between 890 and 910. The settlers came mainly from south-western Norway, a famous Viking area during the age of settlement. Land was scarce there, and most of the Vikings who raided the Scottish islands and Ireland came from there. Later they established Viking colonies and in due course they intermarried with the Celtic population of these countries. The Vikings had also taken Celtic people as slaves and brought them back to Norway. Thus, during the Icelandic age of settlement these Vikings had come into close contact with Celtic people and must, therefore, have been considerably influenced by Celtic culture. At that time there was no uniform nation in Norway as the separate fylki ('shires') were independent communities. Harald Fairhair was the first king to reign over most of Norway after his conquest of the different shires. The Vikings in south-west Norway fought bravely against him, but in the Battle of Hafursfjord towards the end of the 9th century Harald Fairhair won a famous victory over the westcoast Vikings. After that many of them fled from Norway to their relatives on the Scottish islands and Ireland, whereas others went to Iceland. Later the Vikings on the Scottish islands raided places in Norway until King Harald Fairhair sent a fleet with warriors to the islands and conquered them. Then several of the Vikings fled from the Scottish islands to Iceland. But at the same time as the West-Norwegian Vikings were faced with this defeat both in Norway and on the Scottish isles, the Norwegian colonies in other areas were also overpowered, sustaining heavy losses in many places. They were thrown out of Dublin in 902 and their areas were reduced both in Scotland and on the Hebrides. As King Harald Fairhair had conquered the areas of the west-coast Vikings in Norway, they could no longer expect any support from Norway. Therefore the situation both in Norway and on the British islands no doubt encouraged mass-emigration to Iceland during the decades just before and after 900. It is interesting to note that due to inexplicable fate or a remarkable chain of events it was mostly the West-Norwegian Vikings who had had the closest contact with



Porfinnur Karlsefni, an Icelandic seafarer, was the leader of an expedition from the Icelandic settlements in Greenland to Vinland in North America around 1000 A.D. His statue in Reykjavík is by Einar Jónsson, the sculptor, whose museum in Reykjavík contains many splendid works of art.

(overleaf) This more than 100 years old artistic view of the past illustrates the arrival of Eric the Red to Greenland from Iceland around 982 A.D. It gives an impression of the spectacular surroundings enroute between the east coast of Greenland the arctic sea-ice off shore. Here Eric the Red sailed southwards along the coast, round Hvarf (Cape Farewell), and proceeded further up along the west coast. Here he found inhabitable areas, where the Icelandic settlements in Greenland were subsequently established (Eysribyggð – 'the Eastern Settlement', and Vestribyggð – 'the Western Settlement').

Celtic people who emigrated to Iceland. Vikings who had been living for two or three generations in Ireland and on the Scottish isles had established close relations with Celtic families through inter-marriages and friendship when they moved to Iceland, and it is well known that both free people and slaves of Irish origin came along with the Vikings to settle in Iceland. It is therefore historically proved that the people who settled in Iceland were almost entirely of Norwegian-Irish stock. The Nordic root, however, is dominant with respect to language as all the settlers spoke the then common Nordic tongue, and only very few Irish words found their way into the Icelandic language except in personal names and place names. On the other hand, it is believed that Irish culture had great influence on the saga writing and other literary activities of the Icelanders. The fact remains at least that nowhere else in the Nordic countries did saga-writing become as common as in Iceland. Indeed, the Icelandic sagas are the main source of information on all the Nordic countries during the Viking age and the period of the Icelandic Commonwealth. Irish culture also influenced Icelandic religious traditions and enhanced navigational skills during the Viking age. As mentioned above, the Irish had sailed to Iceland long before the Vikings arrived, and it is not impossible that some of the Norse settlers who came from Ireland brought with them Irish navigators. Furthermore, it may not be entirely an accident that after the Vikings had been in contact with the Irish and become acquainted with their navigational skills, the Icelanders discovered Greenland and later Vinland on the American continent. It is not being suggested, however, that the navigational skills of the Norse Vikings might not have been sufficient for them to achieve what they did. – So far historical sources have been drawn upon in an attempt to verify the origin of the Icelandic population. By measuring skeletons in burial mounds from the pagan period in Iceland and comparing them with skeletons of a similar period in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Viking settlements on the Scottish isles and Ireland, scientists have demonstrated that height and headforms indicate that the settlers in Iceland were mainly of West-Norwegian origin, the same being true of the Viking settlements in Scotland and Ireland. These people are a mixture of Nordic and Celtic populations. Finally, it may be pointed out that blood group studies show that the A-group is the commonest among the Norwegians, the Swedes and the Danes, whereas the O-group dominates among the Icelanders. Similar studies in the British Isles show that the Scots and the North-Irish have a blood group distribution similar to that of the Icelanders. Thus, both archaeology and blood group studies support the historical evidence that the Icelandic population is of West-Norwegian/Celtic origin, whereas the Icelandic language is purely Nordic.



Several expeditions have been undertaken in search of remains from the Viking voyages to America as related in the Icelandic Sagas. The best known results are from the excavations of old dwellings in L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland by the couple Anne Stine and Helge Ingstad. The study of these ruins reveal the type of houses that were common during the Viking age in Norway, Iceland and Greenland. Also some smaller items found are believed to be of Nordic origin, i.e. a spindle whorl, a stone lamp, a ring-headed pin and a broken bone pin. Radiocarbon (C-14) dating of material from the excavations indicates that the house sites are from the years 800–1200 and could therefore be from the beginning of the 11th century, which is in conformity with written Icelandic sources. Even though the Vikings are known to have lived in New Foundland, it is not necessarily Vinland. – In 1961 two amateur archaeologists found a small broken coin, 16.5 mm in diameter, about 30 cm below the surface in bone and shell garbage on the coast of Penobscot Bay near Boston. It looks as if a hole was drilled in the coin so that it could be worn on a string as an ornament but that it cracked through the hole. It was not until 1978 that a study of the coin established that it was of Norwegian origin, dating from the reign of Olafur Kyrre (1066–1093). One side shows an unknown animal whereas the other side has a cross. No traces of Norse remains have been found near the place where the coin was found. Possibly some Icelanders from the settlements in Greenland were trading with the aborigines (Eskimos or Indians) after 1066, the coin being worn as an ornament, or a Nordic man lost the coin on the shore. – This coin find in such a southerly location is an important historic event. Still, the question of Vinland remains unsolved. It is possible that Penobscot Bay was grassy land (vin in Icelandic), or this place was on the route of the Icelanders on their way farther south to Vinland the good, where wild grapes grew in abundance.

Leifur Eiríksson (Leif Ericson), son of Eiríkur rauði (Eric the Red) was born in Iceland, most likely in the Breiðafjörður area. He sailed on an expedition from Brattahlíð in the Icelandic settlement in Greenland to Vinland in North America at the beginning of the 11th century (see map on page 21). After that sailings between Greenland and Vinland were common. The monument of Leif Ericson is at Skólavörðuhólt in Reykjavík. It is by Stirling Calder, the sculptor (b. 1870), and was presented by the United States of America to Iceland in 1930 on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the foundation of the Althing, the Icelandic parliament.

