

The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, Helge Ingstad and Anne Stine Ingstad

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The Viking Discovery of America: The Excavation of a Norse Settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. Helge Ingstad and Anne Stine Ingstad. St. John's, Breakwater Books, vi, 194 p., illus., cloth, 2000, ISBN 1-55081-158-4.

STUART C. BROWN

IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, the province has celebrated two great trans-Atlantic events -- things Norse and Morse -- the arrival some one thousand years ago of Leif Eiriksson on the shores of Newfoundland and the receipt in 1901 of the first trans-Atlantic radio signal by Guglielmo Marconi. In addition to this, the province has mourned the passing of Helge Ingstad on 28 March 2001, at the great age of 101. So this book could be considered both timely and useful. Until the publication of this slim volume, those who wished to inform themselves about the research and discoveries made by the Ingstads at the Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows between 1961 and 1968 had to wade through the two formidably large volumes which they published in 1977 and 1985.

In eleven chapters bookended by a foreword and an epilogue, the Ingstads provide a distillation of their earlier publications. In a previous review of the 1985 volume, I noted the glaring omission of any reference to the excavations conducted by archaeologists from Parks Canada at L'Anse aux Meadows between 1973 and 1976, research which arrived at quite different conclusions from the Ingstads. For Helge Ingstad, L'Anse aux Meadows was Leifsbudir, the main Norse settlement. However, on the basis of new evidence, Birgitta Wallace from Parks Canada has persuasively argued that the site was a transit station and ship repair site at the entrance to the region of Vinland, the southern and western reaches of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. *The Viking Discovery of America* was previously published in 1991 under the same title by J.M. Stenersens in Oslo at which time the Ingstads passed up yet another opportunity to include some reference to the new Parks Canada material and alternative viewpoints. The present volume therefore perpetuates an incomplete and lopsided account of L'Anse aux Meadows -- a matter for considerable regret.

It is also a matter of regret that the publisher decided not to include any of the colour plates which make the U.S. version (*The Viking Discovery of America*, New York: Checkmark Books, 2001) considerably more appealing. Trust the Americans to have better production values! There are also a number of editorial lapses. The attractive colour illustrations on the front and back of the dustcover are not identified. Nor is Elizabeth S. Seeberg, listed on the cataloguing page, identified as the translator of the 1991 text. On the same page, the notification that the book was printed in Canada comes in the form of a sticker! In the foreword, reference is made to 1000 A.D. which should read A.D. 1000 and there is an inconsistent rendering of numbers -- 500 years, two hundred years, etc. And as for the title, I wish, how I wish, that people would get over this obsession with Vikings. Quite properly, there is no reference in the actual text to Vikings! Viking used accurately refers to a period when Norse warriors were raiding the Atlantic coast of Europe. The Norse who came to Vinland were farmers, merchants and sailors -- the story is dramatic enough without Hollywood hyperbole.