

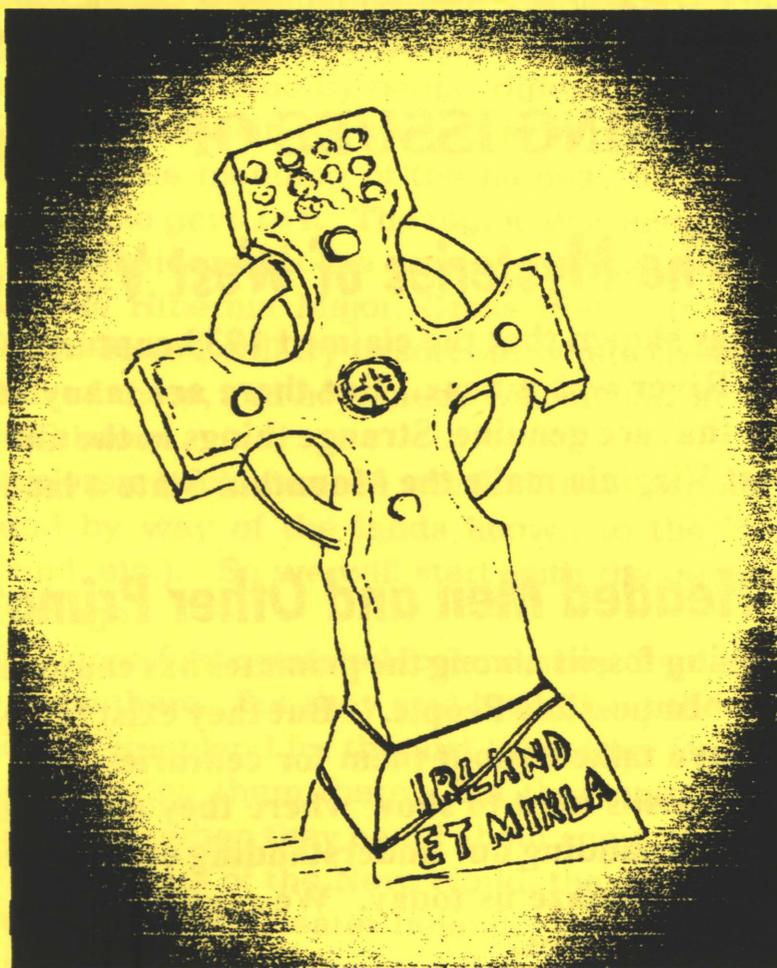
# WONDERS

SEEKING THE TRUTH IN A UNIVERSE OF MYSTERIES

Vol. 6 No. 3

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## THE PRE-COLUMBIAN IRISH



## IN THE NEW WORLD

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# WONDERS

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## IN COMING ISSUES OF *WONDERS*

### **The Mysteries of West Virginia**

My research has shown that the claimed 1933 capture of an "octopus" in the Kanawha River was a hoax. But there are many other mysteries in West Virginia that are genuine. Strange things in the air, the land, and the waters of West Virginia make the Mountain State a land of wonders.

### **The Dog-Headed Men and Other Primate Survivors**

The array of living fossils among the primates has caused some to give them the label of the "Impossible People." But they exist today. People still see them, people have talked about them for centuries, they leave distinctive tracks, and the fossils exist to show where they came from. The finds of new fossils keep expanding our understanding of how these primates have survived so long to amaze us today. We review the big picture of living fossils among the primates.

### **The Vampire Beast of Bladenboro**

What strange dog-killing creatures terrorized the North Carolina countryside a half century ago? The depredations of the "Beast" caused a classic monster hunt. The time has come to explain the mystery behind this classic event.

# THE PRE-COLUMBIAN IRISH IN THE NEW WORLD

by Mark A. Hall

The world of one thousand to fifteen hundred years ago in north-eastern North America is known to us only by archaeological remains and by bits of history we can find in the margins of old maps, in brief passages in old documents, and in the Norse sagas where people find different meanings. Among these clues we seek to locate such lands as Vinland, Helluland, Markland, and Hvitramannaland. The last is the most mysterious because it was a land mentioned by the Viking colonists in Greenland and by Icelanders as a land occupied by people different from themselves.

The land was identified in centuries past by names that mean "White-man's land." That is the meaning of the names "Hvitramannaland" and "Albania" which people gave to it. The region was also known as "Greater Ireland" for it was considered to be a colony of Irishmen. So it has been identified as well as Hibernia Major, Gross Irlund, Irland et Mikla, and Irlandah-al-Kabirah. Here I will try to sort out where Greater Ireland might have been, who lived there, and how much we can find at this point in time about its unusual history.

Like the explorers back then we will find that we must make our way to Greater Ireland by way of the lands known to the Vikings (Iceland, Greenland, Vinland, etc.). So we will start with the geography known to the Vikings of that age.

When the Vikings first occupied Iceland, they displaced the Irish who had proceeded them there. But they said little about these people. When the Vikings reached Greenland for the first time, they found the remains of people who had preceded them there. But they naturally weren't much interested in them. And when they heard about some strange people living near the native inhabitants of the New World, they simply mentioned in a saga that this was probably Greater Ireland. There is this much and still more from other documents to give some idea of what was going on in this mysterious colony that has nearly been lost to history.

We even have an entire archaeological dig in Newfoundland that fits best the remains of some of the work of these Irish colonists -- not by any means all of their presence, but a small portion of it. There has not been an

open discussion among professional archaeologists of such an identity for the site. Instead such a possibility was pushed aside from the start. The place was declared to be Vinland, and then "a staging area on the way to Vinland." Its occupation a thousand years ago by people of European origins seems clear, but who they were is not. As learned a person as the geographer Carl O. Sauer (1889-1975) has come out in favor of an Irish origin for L'Anse aux Meadows. Here I will try to put this site in a context that contends it is a remnant of Greater Ireland.

There are other remains – archaeological finds including distinctive and well-made cairns – that are associated with the people of Greater Ireland. History has left us a scanty record so far. If we give due attention to these traces and search for more we might be fortunate enough in the future to add flesh to the bare bones that have been noticed up to now.

Let me emphasize here that this is *not* an issue that should be examined in terms of *who came first to the New World from Europe*. The crossing of the North Atlantic appears likely to have been going on for thousands of years. There are serious archaeological studies underway that are considering the exchange of people and technology across the Atlantic far earlier than what we are examining here. We will be considering what took place from around AD 500 to 1500 when people originally from Europe were spending time in Greenland, Newfoundland, Labrador, and places nearby.

Those who wish to read about Brendan the Bold will have to consult some of the publications that feature that sixth century monk [1] for he plays no part in my discussion of Greater Ireland. His story is an indication of an early Irish interest in seafaring to the westward, but that is all.

I will draw upon the work of various writers who have considered this subject before me. They have certainly contributed to my understanding of the issues surrounding Greater Ireland. [2] I am able to accept some of what each of them has found, but I must depart from other assumptions and conclusions on their parts. This is to be expected when we are dealing with matters a millennium or more old and are relying on historical fragments to put together a comprehensive picture. So I offer here my synthesis on the Norse in the New World and the Europeans who preceded them. This continues the discussion I began in *Wonders* Vol. 5 No. 2 on the explorations of the Vikings and the traces they left. [3]

## THE NORSE WORLD OF 850 TO 1450.

We can review the Norse presence in Iceland, Greenland, and the North American continent by describing the geography that they established for themselves as they advanced into those regions over a period of centuries. Disagreements have arisen over the identity of places such as Gunnbjorn's Skerries and Ginnungagap so I will include my views on these topics.

The records of the sagas tell us that Norwegians reconnoitered Iceland around AD 850 and that colonization of Iceland began around 870. In the course of sailing around Iceland one Gunnbjorn Ulafsson came across some islands west of Iceland around the year 900. They became known as Gunnbjorn's Skerries.

It has become the common wisdom in recent years to place these islands just off the coast of Greenland because there are presently no other islands between Iceland and Greenland. But we have the evidence of Ivar Bardarson in the fourteenth century that there once were islands there. Sailing directions were seldom written down, but Bardarson did record some that included these lines:

Item from Snaefellsnes in Iceland, where the distance to Greenland is the shortest, two days' and two nights' sailing due west is the course, and there lieth Gunnbjarnarsker half-way between Greenland and Iceland. This was the old course, but now ice has come down from the northwest out of the gulf of the sea so near the aforesaid skerries, that no one without extreme peril can sail the old course, and be heard of again....[4]

So what happened to these islands? The answer was noted by John Fiske (1842-1901) in his *The Discovery of America* (1892):

This island is no longer on the surface, and its fate is recorded upon Ruysch's map of the world in the 1508 edition of Ptolemy: "Insula haec anno Domini 1456 fuit totaliter combusta," – this island was entirely burnt (i.e., blown up in an eruption) in 1456; and in later maps Mr. [Richard Henry] Major has found the corrupted name "Gombar Scheer" applied to the dangerous



Fig. 1. The North Atlantic Ocean. The Norsemen in the ninth century advanced across this region from Ireland and Norway to Iceland and settled on the shore of western Greenland. They visited Labrador and perhaps Nova Scotia. The inhabitants of Greater Ireland, also from Europe, lived in Newfoundland and south of the St. Lawrence River according to the sagas and other sources.

reefs and shoals left behind by this explosion." [5]

Raymond Ramsay also noted this fate for the islands in *No Longer on the Map* published in 1972. About these rocky islets he also made these observations. They might have been discovered by Gunnbjorn as early as 876. There was a failed attempt to establish a colony there about 970. And, finally, a document dating from 1391 indicated that 18 farms were on the islands at that time. [6]

The importance of Gunnbjorn's Skerries is that until 1456 the presence of these rocky islands contributed to the ease of island-hopping across the North Atlantic. An unanswered question and perhaps one never to be answered is when did the islands first appear to serve in that capacity?

Eric the Red went in search of land seen to the west from the skerries and re-discovered Greenland in 982. Two areas of colonization then grew on the west coast of Greenland -- the Eastern Settlement and the Western Settlement. Baffin Island was visited and was known as the "Western Wilds." The "Eastern Wilds" were found on the east coast of Greenland. Further exploration by Leif Erickson and others identified the northern half of Labrador as Helluland and the wooded southern half of Labrador as Markland. Leif's visit to Vinland around AD 1001 appears to have taken him to the southern shore of the estuary of the St. Lawrence River. This waterway and the waters all along the southern coast of Labrador to the Strait of Belle Isle appear to have been identified as "Ginnungagap" at least until the limited extent of this waterway was realized. Those who followed Eric visited Newfoundland also. Thorfinn Karlsefni appears to have identified that island as Vinland. [7]

In lands to the west of Greenland the Norse encountered other inhabitants. They referred to "Skraelings" which is a word as vague as "savages" in the modern day. In Newfoundland they appear to have encountered American Indians. Later they would meet Eskimos in Greenland and in parts of eastern Canada. They encountered trolls whom they also called "giants." There is a major difference between these trolls and the giants of Norse mythology (the Jotuns). The latter are the True Giants about which I have frequently written. This distinction is correctly described in the glossary to *The Sagas of Icelanders*:

Trolls in the minds of the Icelanders were not the huge, stupid

figures that we read about in later Scandinavian wonder-tales and legends. At the time of the sagas, they were essentially evil nature spirits, a little like large dark elves. It is only in later times that they come to blend with the image of the Scandinavian giants. [8]

The "large dark elves" were the carriers of the Dorset culture, a people who become very important in sorting out the prehistory of this region. These trolls or giants of the sagas were a different kind of man altogether. From the find of a skull and other bones dug out of a Norse graveyard in Greenland we know that they were survivors of "Archaic *Homo sapiens*." This find gives them the scientific name of *Homo gardarensis*. [9] There is a record in the sagas that two trolls were taken in at Eriksfjord in Greenland and were living there in 1385. [10]

The sagas also inform us that the Norse were more inclined to kill the trolls, however. For it is bragged that one Viking took charge of Helluland by slaying all the trolls (or giants) that lived there. [11] The remains of the Dorset culture -- which thrived from twenty-five hundred to a thousand years ago -- are intricately involved with the archaeological finds of this region that are associated with the Norse and with the inhabitants of Greater Ireland. This last group -- whom we might best refer to as *Albanians* -- was hostile to the Norse. The policy the Albanians adopted was to kill or hold captive any Icelanders and others who fell into their hands. Later when the Icelanders became Christians the Albanians appear to have been willing to trade with the Norsemen.

The Greenland colonists extended their trips beyond Newfoundland in the thirteenth century. There are records of a discovery of "New-land" (also known as the "Down or Feather Islands") in 1285. King Eric of Norway in 1289 directed that a colony be attempted there. Landa-Rolf gathered men in Iceland the following year. But he died in 1295, and a good assumption is that his colony failed around that time. [12]

"New-land" has been variously placed. As recently as in Farley Mowat's *The Farfarers* the suggestion is made that New-land was on the north shore of Hudson Strait. [13] But such a placement ignores the sailing directions to New-land that indicate a southwesterly direction -- probably to Nova Scotia. Here is another place to look for archaeological remains. The site of Landa-Rolf's failed colony might still be found there some day.

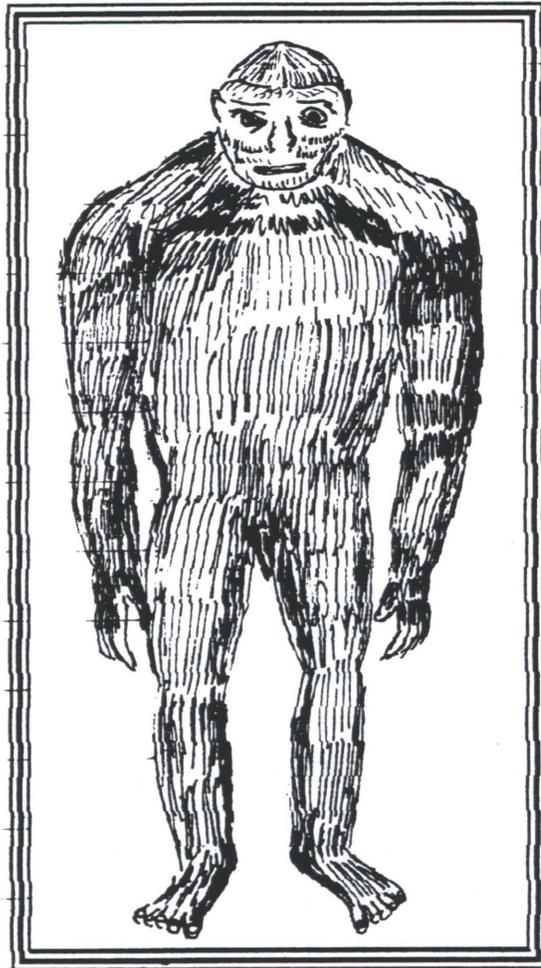


Fig. 2. The Dorset culture bearers looked like this man. This primitive type of man was given the scientific name of *Homo gardarensis* based upon a skeleton dug up in 1926 from a Norse graveyard at Gardar in Greenland. [For a full discussion see *Living Fossils* by Mark A. Hall (1999).] Figurines found at Dorset culture sites show they wore parkas with high collars instead of hoods, as shown at the right above. Archaeologists find this puzzling. [Daniel Odess, Stephen Loring, and William Fitzhugh, "Skraeling: First Peoples of Helluland, Markland, and Vinland," in *Vikings* edited by W. Fitzhugh and E. Ward (2000), page 194]. One reason for a high collar instead of a hood would be that *Homo gardarensis* has acute hearing. That faculty would be hampered by a hood.

The Western Settlement in Greenland disappeared in the fourteenth century. Their fate and the fate of the Eastern Settlement that lasted for at least another century have been long debated. A worsening climate, pirate raids, a declining contact with Europe, and the need to adapt to a more successful way of life appear to have contributed to the demise of the Greenlanders as traditional colonists around 1450 or even close to 1500..

### ICELAND AND CRONLAND

There is wide acceptance that Iceland was known to the Western World as long ago as around 330 BC. The Greek Pytheas made a journey to Iceland and a portion of his travelogue that has survived describes the island.

Farley Mowat writing in *Westviking* has described neglected church documents that refer to both Iceland and Cronland (a name for Greenland prior to Eric the Red) in the 9th century. [14] During a period of warming in the Arctic that began around AD 500 (and lasted till the 13<sup>th</sup> century) Iceland may have been a place of renewed interest for Europeans.

Irish monks were certainly spending time in Iceland in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. There has been a dispute in recent years about whether other Celts were also living there. Archaeologists haven't yet found pre-Norse sites in Iceland so they take a negative view on any alleged presence there. Others such as Katharine Scherman in *Daughter of Fire: A Portrait of Iceland* [15] and Farley Mowat in *The Farfarers* [16] point out the roaming tendencies of Irish monks, They sought havens in isolated places and the sea could be crossed by them and their followers. The monks of that era were not necessarily celibate and so may have had families of their own.

Mowat even suggests that early in the Christian era there were settlers on Iceland. Encouraged by the climactic warming that began in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, he suggests that more people moved to Iceland and points west in search of the ivory, skins, and products from walrus and other northern resources. In the sixth century he has them reaching Greenland waters. They then move on westward to become the inhabitants of Greater Ireland or Albania. Mowat calls these people "Albans" and traces their history back through Scotland to the mainland of Europe. In any case, he is giving his views in *The Farfarers* on the people who lived in Whiteman's Land.

For reasons that will be discussed later, I think we have a mix of

European sources for the Albanians, the inhabitants of Greater Ireland. They were first people from Ireland and Scotland with later additions from there and elsewhere.

And if a colony of such peoples was established in North America and was to survive for hundreds of years (as did the Greenland colonies), those beehive huts found in New England might truly date from a century or more ago. For Irish monks still seeking isolation might have found their way as individuals to such pleasant surroundings far to the south of their brethren in Greater Ireland. But the famous Mystery Hill in New Hampshire, championed by William B. Goodwin in 1946 [17] is not to be associated with Greater Ireland in my view. That mystery dates from another era altogether. To find Greater Ireland's location we need to look "a little behind Vinland."

### THE HOME OF THE ALBANIANS

In my view there is not a great dollop of North America that could be properly labeled Greater Ireland. Rather, the evidence so far suggests to me that Greater Ireland was a patchwork of places inhabited by immigrants from Europe. Those places are in the area of Chaleur Bay in New Brunswick on the mainland of North America, on both sides of the island of Newfoundland in its southern parts, and on the tip of northern Newfoundland where the site of L'Anse aux Meadows has already been discovered.

The people of Greater Ireland arrived over a period of perhaps hundreds of years. They may have settled these areas in stages as the population grew and as people arrived from Europe as refugees. Some Icelanders who fell into the hands of the colonists were also added to the population. To pin down such events will require the re-evaluation of archaeological finds already made and future discoveries of archaeological remains that could be dated to demonstrate such occupations. For now we have only one site and the appearance in historical records of people visiting a place inhabited by Irish, other Europeans, and Icelanders who were held there against their will.

The anchor for the modern evaluation of the subject of Greater Ireland is the site of L'Anse aux Meadows near the tip of northern Newfoundland. The site has now been thoroughly picked over and the objects found have been dated. The official interpretation of the findings appears to be flawed.

Archaeologists who have written on this site (such as Helge Ingstad and Brigitta Wallace) have dodged the question of whether the site could be explained as a part of the mysterious Whiteman's Land of the sagas. A claim to have found Vinland has been too intoxicating for them to pass up. Helge Ingstad dismissed Whiteman's Land as a myth not worth considering. [18] Wallace has suggested that the "white men" were the holders of the Dorset culture wearing polar bear coats. [19]

The Dorset culture occupied L'Anse aux Meadows from around AD 250 to 750. (The Dorsets were in Labrador from 500 BC to AD 1200.) Following them in the official interpretation there are thin layers of use by the "Late Prehistoric Indian" culture and the "Point Revenge Indian" culture. The years for the "Norse" then follow in 980 to 1020. [20]

When describing the site in those last years Wallace is forced to observe that it is not a typical Norse settlement. In a north-south arrangement on high ground there had been 3 large multi-roomed halls and 5 other huts in the area. Artifacts found included iron rivets, jasper fire-starters, a ringed pin, a bone needle, and a spindle whorl formed from soapstone.

She was at pains to explain away indications of a Dorset presence that dated from the assumed Norse period of use. The spindle whorl had been reshaped from a Dorset artifact. So maybe the Norse found a Dorset pot. A Late Dorset soapstone lamp was found that dated to AD 1000-1350. [21] So someone must have made a journey to Labrador and brought it back. A better explanation would be that the Albanians occupied the site and were working jointly with the Dorset at that time.

Remains of butternuts were found here also. Wallace advises:

The area closest to Newfoundland where butternuts grow is the Saint Lawrence River valley, just east of Quebec City in northeastern New Brunswick, a bit inland from the Bay of Chaleur, the Miramichi, and other river estuaries. [22]

She thinks the Norse traveled south to find butternuts. Perhaps the Albanians lived where butternuts grew and brought them north to the site.

The buildings were burned at the time of the abandonment of the site. If it were an outpost of Greater Ireland, the reason for this is obvious. The Norsemen had arrived in the area.



Fig. 3. Based upon archaeological findings at L'Anse aux Meadows and the record of tower beacons, the likely settlements of Greater Ireland included the south shore of Chaleur Bay in New Brunswick, the L'Anse aux Meadows site at the northern tip of Newfoundland, and two areas in the southeastern and southwestern corners of Newfoundland.

As told in the Vinland sagas, the Vikings made visits repeatedly sailing through the Strait of Belle Isle. The Albanians did not want to be noticed. Their site at L'Anse aux Meadows was their most forward and vulnerable point. So they burned the halls and abandoned the site after many years of joint occupation with the Dorset.

We can agree with the assessment made for the use of the site. Wallace writes:

Putting all the evidence together, we find that L'Anse aux Meadows was not a colonizing venture but a base at which a large group of people, perhaps three ship crews, stayed for a short time. The occupants of the base were mostly men, from many walks of life, some with particular skills such as ironworking, carpentry, and boat repair. A few women were there, but there was no family life with children and regular households. [23]

Early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century an Icelandic historian referred to a map showing Albania. Here is that passage:

Sir Erlend Thordsen, a priest in the parish of Staden, Iceland, in the year 1568 obtained from abroad the geographical chart of that Albania or Vitramannaland which is situated opposite Vinland the Good and which the merchants formerly called Hibernia Major or Irland Mikla (Greater Ireland). [24]

Arlington Mallery pursued this map and claimed to have located it. What he published was a portion of the Jon Gudmundsson map. [25] The whole map is reproduced here as Fig. 4a. The corner of the map (shown as Fig. 4b) appears to show a rough approximation of Labrador from the eastern shore of Hudson Bay to land south of the St. Lawrence River. Mallery saw in this depiction places in North America all the way to Alaska. I doubt that interpretation and I have my doubts that this truly is the "geographical chart" of Sir Erlend Thordsen, something we would truly like to examine.

Gudmundsson's map does show a region labeled "Albania" that resembles the Gaspe Peninsula. Another label is "Helleland" in a spot that looks like Ungava Bay. The interior contains two labels. One means "Land

Fig.4a.

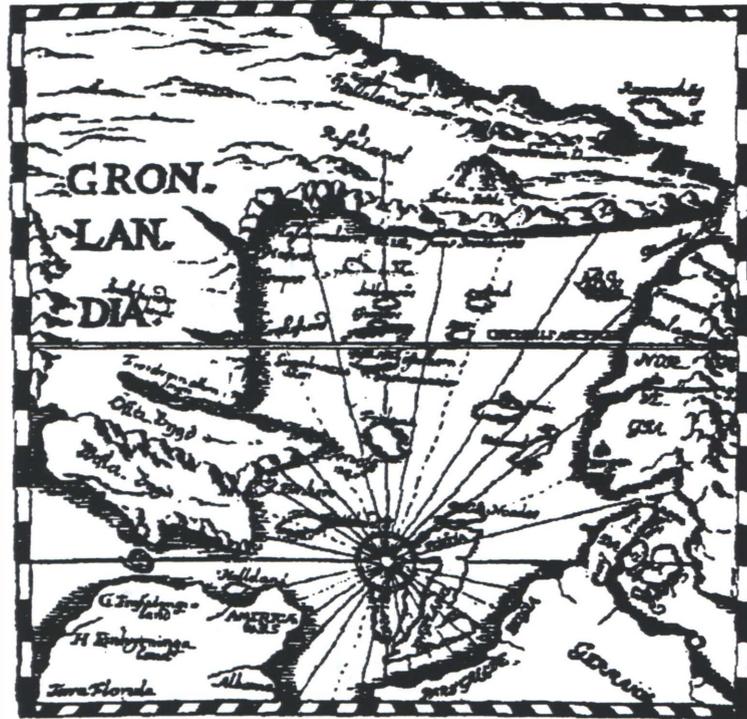


Fig.4b

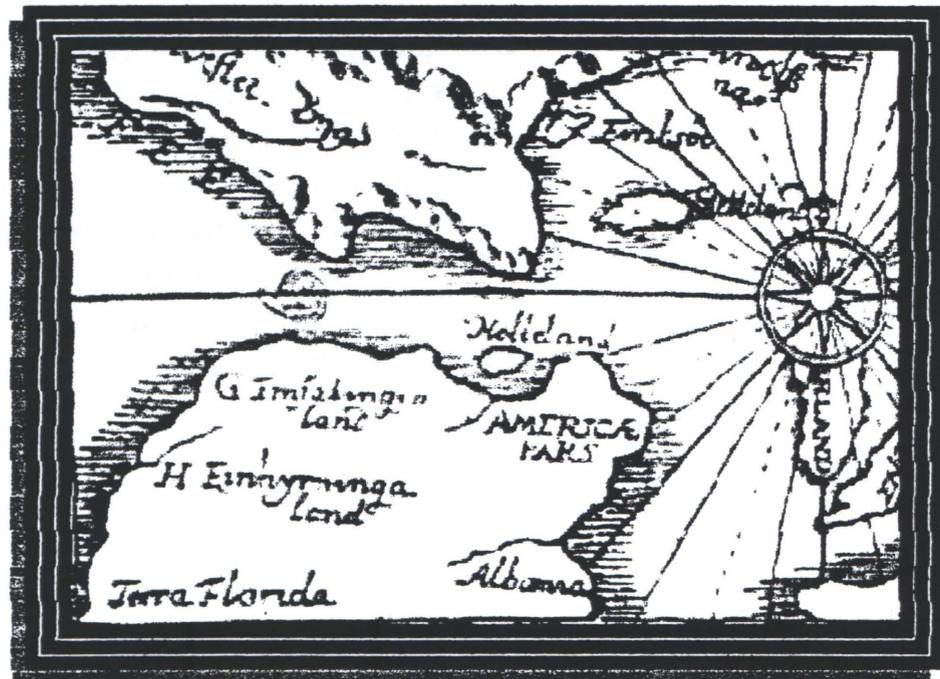


Fig. 4a. Map by the Icelander Jon Gudmundsson, born 1574. From Fridtjof Nansen's *In Northern Mists*, Vol. 2 (1911), page 34.

Fig. 4b. Corner of Gudmundsson's map showing Labrador and the St. Lawrence with "Albana" to the south of the river.

of the People of the One-Horned Ax" which might indicate the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians. The other label means "Land of the One-Footers." This land is a problematical issue, but one good suggestion is that it refers to the Eskimos. In the very corner of the map Florida is indicated because by the time this map was made everyone knew that Florida was in America somewhere to the south.

This map placement of Albania south of the St. Lawrence and the butternuts found at L'Anse aux Meadows call our attention to Chaleur Bay. To the north of this bay is the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec. The bay's southern shore is in New Brunswick. The bay itself is an inviting change from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, less fog with a harbor at Nepisiguit Bay. On the northern shore the land rises and is forested. On the southern shore is land that has proven good for agriculture. Here is a place that the people of Greater Ireland might have declared to be the land of the Irish and a home as well for other people who found it necessary to leave Europe.

The people of Greater Ireland appear to be responsible for unique markers of their presence centuries ago. Lands of rocky shores, forested uplands, and foggy seas can present similar appearances. The seekers after Vinland, etc. have demonstrated this condition over and over as they proposed different routes for travelers in the sagas. The Albanians had an idea how to cope in that world. They constructed enormous cairns – best referred to as *tower beacons* – at certain places and in groups of one to three. [See Fig. 5.] When a person passed one of these sites he was sure where he was. Some of them were visible by line of sight from one to the other.

These beacons are found all over northeastern Canada from Baffin Island to Newfoundland. [See Fig. 6.] The beacons are often associated with house sites that may have been covered with whale bones or with up-turned boats. Farley Mowat promotes the latter explanation in *The Farfarers*.

These large cairns are unlike the *inukshuk* constructed by the Eskimos. The *inukshuks* are man-sized and of simple construction.

The Albanians probably built the beacons jointly with the carriers of the Dorset culture, taking advantage of the strength of the Dorset men. That strength allowed such large and sturdy constructions. The beacons have been attributed by archaeologists solely to the Dorset.

Massive boulders are present on the Melville Peninsula which is

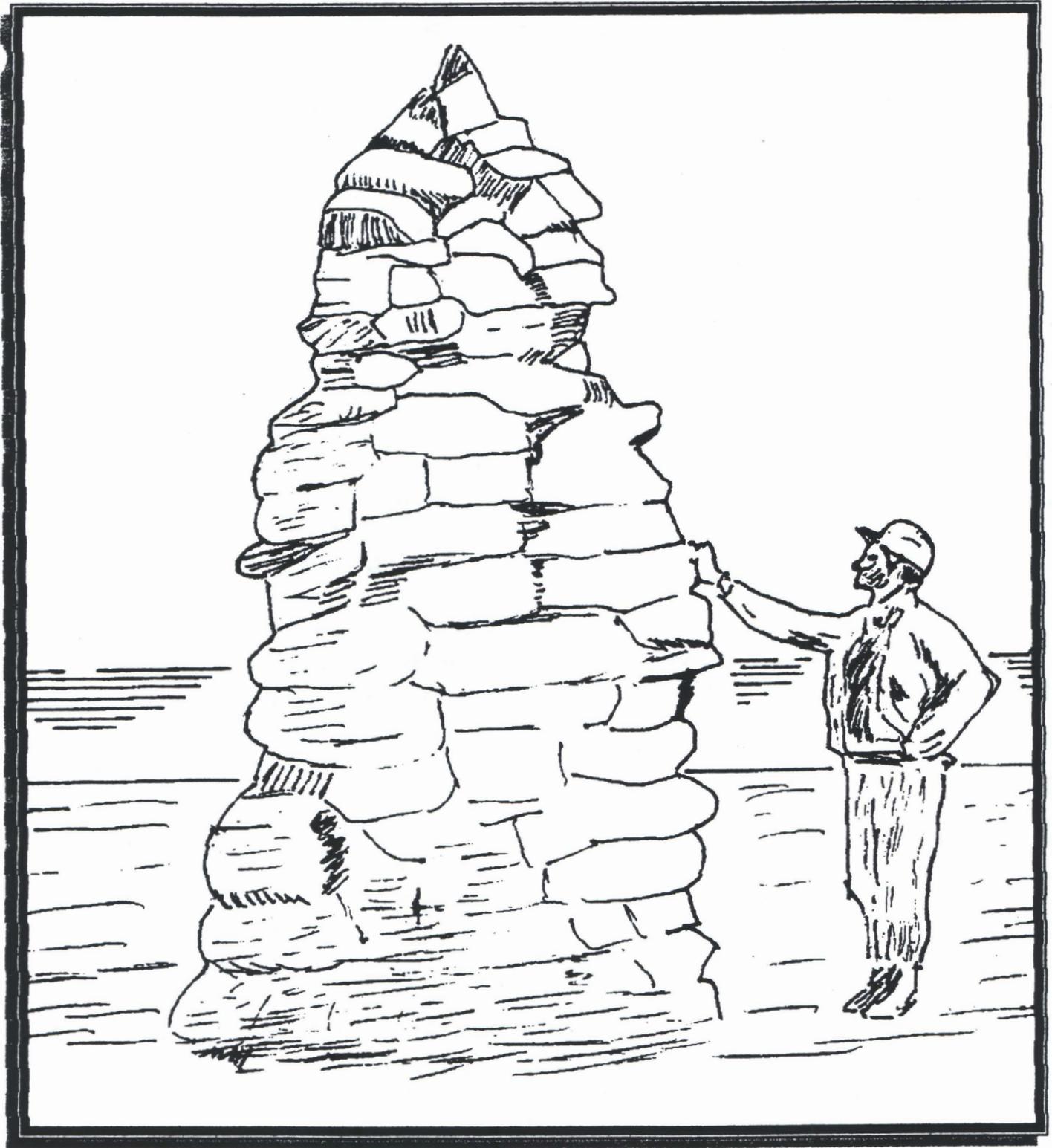


Fig. 5. A tower beacon on Ivik Island near the mouth of the Payne River.  
After a photograph in Mowat, *The Farfarers*, page 165.

located to the southwest of Baffin Island. The boulders are raised on smaller rocks and oriented in one direction. The Eskimos say they were put up by the Dorset. [26] They look like the kind of beacon the Dorsets might have built when left on their own. The purpose of these raised boulders remains uncertain.

The work of archaeologist Thomas Lee, especially in the area of Ungava Bay, has suggested that the Dorsets worked with people who originated in Europe to exploit the resources of the Arctic. Farley Mowat has extended the knowledge of tower beacons down to Newfoundland. Beacons still remain there. And there are records of others that have been dismantled in historic times. They are found in southwestern Newfoundland and on the other side of the island near the same latitude. [27]

The old map and the tower beacons in southern Newfoundland indicate the places to look for the remains – if any survive in the ground – of the settlements of Greater Ireland. We should look roughly along the 48<sup>th</sup> parallel on the southern shore of Chaleur Bay and in the southern parts of Newfoundland where the beacons still might show the way.

### THE HISTORICAL ALBANIA

In 1837 a Danish philologist Carl Christian Rafn (1795-1864) set off the modern era of interest in Norse and Irish trips to America with the publication of his *Antiquitates Americanae* where he discussed Vinland and Greater Ireland.

Ten years later I. A. Blackwell in *Northern Antiquities* gave this summary of the issue of Whiteman's Land:

In an old Icelandic geographical treatise there is the following passage: "To the south of inhabited Greenland are wild and desert tracts and ice-covered mountains; then comes the land of the Skraelings, beyond this Markland, and then Vinland the Good. Next to this, and somewhat behind it, lies Albania, that is to say, Hvitramannaland, *Whitemansland*, whither vessels formerly sailed from Ireland. It was there that several Irishmen and Icelanders recognized Ari, the son of Mar and Katla of Reykjanes, whom there had not for a long time been any tidings of, and whom the natives

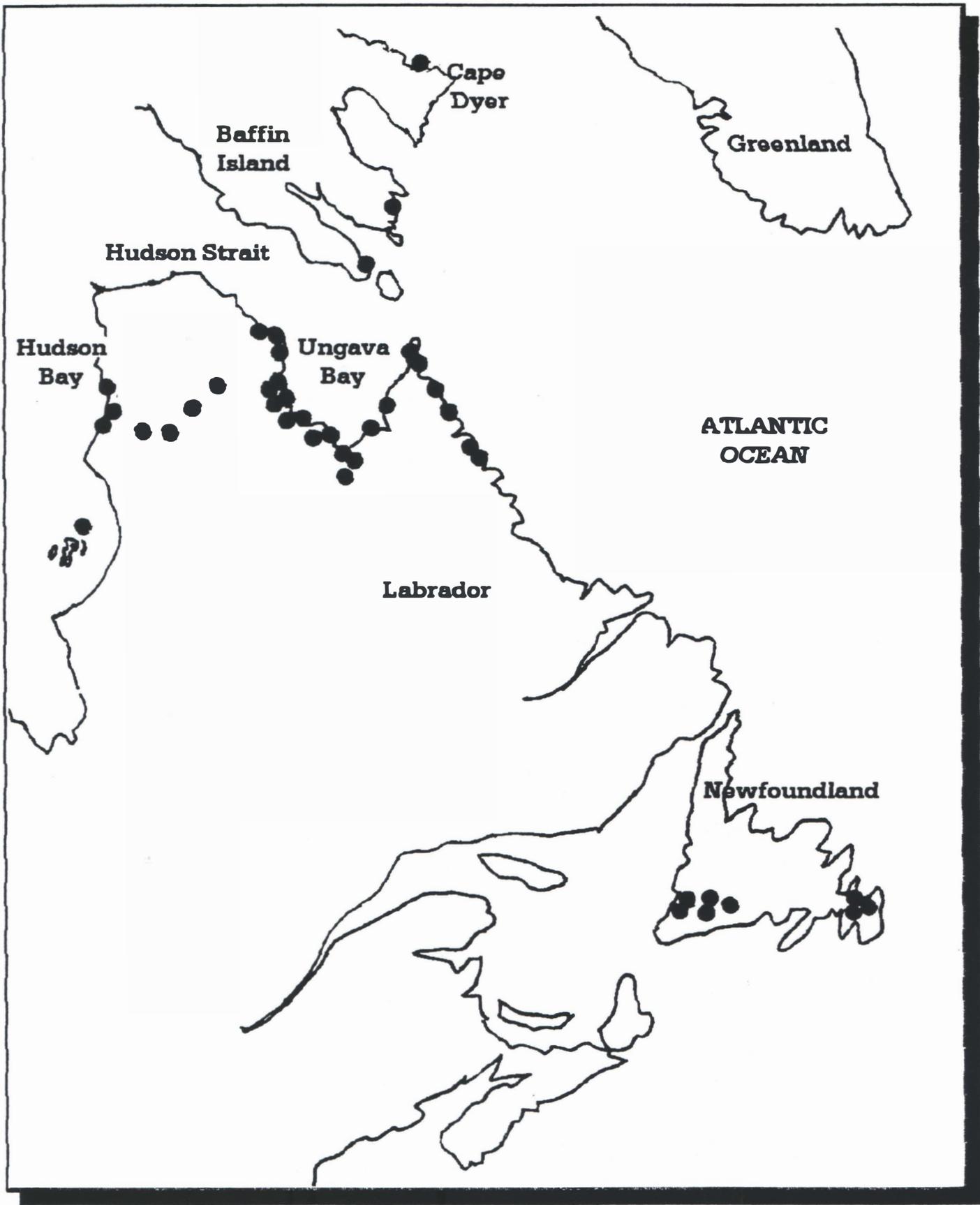


Fig. 6. Map showing the locations of known tower beacons. Each dot represents one beacon. Based on a map and the text in Farley Mowat's *The Farfarers*.

of the country had made their chief."

The Landnamabok also states that Ari Marson was driven by a tempest to Hvítramannaland, and detained and baptized there; and we are told in Thorfinn's Saga that the Eskimaux children [probably Indian children – MAH] taken in Markland declared that beyond their country lay another, the inhabitants of which wore *white* dresses and bore flags on long poles, a statement obviously of no value in itself, but remarkable for the conclusion drawn from it by the Northmen, that the country thus described must necessarily be Hvítramannaland, which shows, at all events *that at the period the Sagas were written* the existence of such a country was a fact generally admitted. Mr. Rafn has given us two Sagas relating to Hvítramannaland, but they are of a totally different character from those which narrate the voyages of Leif and Thorfinn, and by no means entitled to the same credibility.

It would appear that the Northmen received their account of Hvítramannaland, which was also called *Irland it Mikla* – Great Ireland – from Limerick [in southwestern Ireland -- MAH] traders, and that vessels had sailed there previous to the discovery of Vinland. These circumstances, and the mention made of Ari's baptism, have led some writers to suppose that there was an Irish colony established on the coast of America, south of Massachusetts, in the ninth and tenth century.... [28]

Blackwell goes on to say that he finds all this too vague to be of historical value. But since his time others have pointed out that it is special pleading to say that the Vinland sagas are credible and the White-mansland sagas are not. They are all involved with historical persons from Iceland and Greenland going to places that can be found on the modern map. If Vinland is to be credible, then so is the Irish land.

Blackwell's reference to "south of Massachusetts" derives from the popular assumption in his time that Vinland was to be found in that state. A better understanding today is that Markland was Labrador. And the area across from it was northern Newfoundland, the site of L'Anse

aux Meadows in fact. In the words of the saga, Thorfinn Karlsefni's young captives who grew up with the Norse "said that there was a country across from their own land where the people went about in white clothing and uttered loud cries and carried poles with patches of cloth attached. It was thought this was Hvitramannaland." [29]

Ari Marson was thought to have been blown by a storm into his captivity in the year 983. [30] A colony known as Greater Ireland had thus been established by that time.

A much earlier date is suggested by this item noted by Raymond Ramsay in *No Longer on the Map*:

A certain Feargal, an Irish priest in Germany during the eighth century, got in trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities for maintaining that the world contained other inhabited lands. He cleared himself by satisfying the authorities that the Irish had regular dealings with a land across the Atlantic, and this show of erudition led to his appointment as bishop of Salzburg. [31]

We now come to the two sagas mentioned above by Blackwell. They concern the experiences of Bjorn Asbrandson and Gudleif Gudlaugson. The gist of them is contained in a good summary provided by Rasmus B. Anderson a century ago:

The Landnamabok and Eyrbyggja Sagas give elaborate accounts of these adventurers, the substance of which is as follows:

The powerful chieftain Are Marson, of Reykjanes, in Iceland, was, in the year 983, driven to Great Ireland...by storms, and was there baptized. The first author of this account was his contemporary, Rafn, surnamed the Limerick-trader, he having long resided in Limerick, in Ireland. The illustrious Icelandic sage, Are Frode, the first compiler of Landnama, who was himself a descendant in the fourth degree from Are Marson, states on this subject that his uncle, Thorkel Gellerson, (whose testimony he on another occasion declares to be worthy of all credit,) had been informed by

Icelanders, who had their information from Thorfinn Sigurdson, jarl of Orkney, that Are had been recognized in Great Ireland, and could not get away from there, but was there held in great respect. This statement therefore shows that in these times (A.D. 983) there was an occasional intercourse between the western part of Europe (the Orkneys and Ireland) and the Great Ireland or Whiteman's Land of America. The Saga (Landnamabok, Landtaking Book, Domesday Book) expressly states that Great Ireland lies to the west, in the sea, near to Vinland the Good, VI days' sailing to the west from Ireland; Professor [Carl C.] Rafn was of the opinion that the figures VI have arisen through some mistake or carelessness of the transcriber of the original manuscript, which is now lost, and were erroneously written for XX, XI, or perhaps XV, which would better correspond with the distance. The mistake might easily have been caused by a blot or defect in the manuscript.

It must have been in this same Great Ireland that Bjorn Asbrandson, surnamed the Champion of Breidavik, spent the latter part of his life. He had been adopted into the celebrated band of Jomsborg warriors, that Dr. G. W. Desant describes in his "Vikings of the Baltic," under Palnatoke, and took part with them in the battle of Fyrisval, in Sweden. His illicit amatory connection with Thurid of Froda (River Frod) in Iceland, a sister of the powerful Snorre Gode, drew upon him the enmity and persecution of the latter, in consequence of which he found himself obliged to quit the country for ever, and in the year 999 he set sail from Iceland with a northeast wind.

Gudleif Gudlaugson, brother of Thorfinn, the ancestor of the celebrated historian, Snorre Sturleson, had...made a trading voyage to Dublin, in Ireland; but when he left that place again, with the intention of sailing round Ireland and returning to Iceland, he met with long-continuing north-easterly winds, which drove him far to the southwest in the ocean, and late in the summer he and his company came at last to an extensive country, but they knew not what country

it was.

On their landing, a crowd of natives, several hundreds in number, came against them, and laid hands on them, and bound them. They did not know anybody in the crowd, but it seemed to them that their language resembled Irish. The natives now took counsel whether they should kill the strangers or make slaves of them. While they were deliberating, a large company approached, displaying a banner, close to which rode a man of distinguished appearance, who was far advanced in years, and had gray hair. The matter under deliberation was referred to his decision. He was the above-named Bjorn Asbrandson. He caused Gudleif to be brought before him, and, addressing him in the Norse language, he asked whence he came. On his replying that he was an Icelander, Bjorn made many inquiries about his acquaintance in Iceland, particularly about his beloved Thurid of Frod River, and her son Kjarten, supposed to be his own son, and who at that time was the proprietor of the estate of Frod River. In the meantime, the natives becoming impatient and demanding a decision, Bjorn selected twelve of his company as counselors, and took them aside with him, and some time afterward he went toward Gudleif and his companions and told them that the natives had left the matter to his decision. He thereupon gave them their liberty, and advised them, although the summer was already far advanced, to depart immediately, because the natives were not to be depended on, and were difficult to deal with, and, moreover, conceived that an infringement on their laws had been committed to their disadvantage.

He gave them a gold ring for Thurid and a sword for Kjarten, and told them to charge his friends and relations not to come over to him, as he had now become old, and might daily expect that old age might get the better of him; that the country was large, having but few harbors, and that strangers must everywhere expect a hostile reception. Gudleif and his company accordingly set sail again, and found their way back to Dublin, where they spent the winter; but

the next summer they repaired to Iceland, and delivered the presents, and everybody was convinced that it was really Bjorn Asbrandson, the champion of Breidavik, that they had met with in that far-off country. [32]

Gudleif's voyage has been dated to AD 1029, thirty years after Bjorn disappeared. The resemblance to the Irish language is what identifies this country as Greater Ireland. The patriarch in that place refuses to identify himself to Gudleif, but at the end of the saga the obvious conclusion is reached that he was Bjorn. The presence of horses is implied and has been a cause for some objection. But there is nothing that would prevent ships from having carried some horses to Greater Ireland. No one has suggested that they were numerous there. Translations of the complete sagas are available. For example, see pages 258 to 275 of *The Norse Discovery of America*, edited by Anderson and Buel (1906). [33]

Finally from the old records, mention should be made of Bishop Eric Gnupsson. Upon being named the bishop for Greenland he immediately embarked on a voyage to Vinland in 1121. And he disappeared.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Norsemen probably had realized that their Vinland and Greater Ireland were substantially the same place. Their Vinland was inhabited by Skraelings (Indians) and by Christians who had been hostile to Icelanders, Greenlanders, and any strangers who drifted their way as we saw with Gudleif's trip. Bishop Eric Gnupsson might well have wished to minister to those Christians. The hazards of his journey were such that he might not have survived.

Constance Irwin mentions that the still-controversial Vinland Map that turned up in 1957 contains a notation that the bishop visited Vinland in 1117. She suggests that two trips might have been made. She also notes that several Icelandic Annals record the 1121 trip with the same verb that has two meanings: "to go in search of" and "to go to give aid to." Translators have used the first meaning only because they have assumed that there was no one in Vinland to be aided. [34]

## THE FATE OF SIXTY BANISHED COUPLES

An Irish record of a voyage of two monks presents us with a record of people banished from Ireland who found a home over the sea to the west. Here is the story as related in Nansen's *In Northern Mists*:

In the "Imram Snedgusa ocus Mac Riagla" (of the tenth or close of the ninth century), [cf. Zimmer, 1889, pp. 213 f., 216], the men of Ross slay King Fiacha Mac Domnaill for his intolerable tyranny. As a punishment, sixty couples of the guilty were sent out to sea, and their judgment and fate left to God. The two monks, Snedgus and Mac Riagail, afterwards set out on a voluntary pilgrimage on the ocean – while the sixty couples went involuntarily – and, after having visited many islands, reached in their boat a land in which there were generations of Irish, and they met women who sang to them and brought them to the king's house.... The king received them well and inquired from whence they came. "We are Irish," they replied, "and we belong to the companions of Columcille." Then he asked: "how goes it in Ireland, and how many of Domnaill's sons are alive?" They answered: "Three Mac Domnaills are alive, and Fiacha Mac Domnaill fell by the men of Ross, and for that deed sixty couples of them were sent out to sea." "That is a true tale of yours; I am he who killed the King of Tara's son [i.e., Fiacha], and we are those who were sent out to sea. This commends itself to us, for we will be here till the Judgment [i.e., the day of judgment] comes, and we are glad to be here without sin, without evil, without our sinful desires. The island we live on is good, for on it are Elijah and Enoch, and noble is the dwelling of Elijah." [35]

At the time of this banishment there was feuding between the northern and southern branches of a powerful clan in Ireland. A member of the northern branch, Domnaill (956-980), successfully forced the submission of the southern branch. [36] This story appears to be historical. It tells us that the people who slew him were banished and

sent to sea after 980. They found their way to an island to the west where they were visited by the two monks. Here is another likely glimpse of Greater Ireland, a place where people found refuge.

### PRINCE MADOG AND A FREEMAN OF WALES

A familiar name in history from the 12<sup>th</sup> century has a place in our consideration of Greater Ireland. Prince Madog ab Owain Gwynedd (1150-1180?) of Wales might have found his way there. Or the deeds of an unnamed Welshman celebrated in a Norse saga might have been attributed to Madog.

Prince Madog has been put forth as a "discoverer" of America, because there has been a tendency to single out one man to be so credited. A 15<sup>th</sup> century Welsh poem tells of his departing Wales with ten ships of would-be colonists after he had found a land to colonize across the ocean.

The Norse sagas include an unnamed Welshman who was notorious in the North Atlantic about the time of Madog. Gwyn A. Williams in *Madoc* writes of the Icelanders:

Their *Orkneyinga Saga* (the Earls' Saga) makes frequent reference under the years 1139-48, to a 'Freeman of Wales' who repeatedly harassed their settlements in the Southern Isles, as well as Tyree and the Isle of Man. In revenge, Sweyn and Holdboldi savaged Wales. The Freeman ran to Lundy [Island], where the Icelanders tried but failed to block him in. [37]

Williams points out parallels between the "Freeman" and Madog in their supposed ancestry and their associations with Lundy Island. He suggests that the deeds of one might have become attached to the other.

The notion that a Welshman visited a land to the southwest of Ireland came into vogue only because Florida was known by the time Europeans began speculating on where the Welsh colonists might have gone in their ships.

A clue to where they did go is found in Hakluyt's *Voyages*. Richard Hakluyt (1552?-1616) writes that Madog gave names to his land that were still in use. Among them was the "Island of Penguin." This island (also known as Bird Rocks) is mentioned in 16<sup>th</sup> century accounts of voyages in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. [38] The island was a breeding ground for the

Great Auk (*Alea impennis*), the "penguin" that is now extinct.

Whether Welshmen went to Greater Ireland in the 12<sup>th</sup> century is not demonstrated by these bits of history. But if there is ever to be a foundation for the Welsh having attempted to colonize across the Atlantic at that time, Greater Ireland, known to the region's seafaring peoples in that period, is the likely place for them to have gone.

### THE FISHERMAN'S TALE

In a roundabout way we are offered another glimpse of Greater Ireland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We find it in the history of the Zeno brothers and the possible journey to the New World by their patron Prince Henry Sinclair (d.1400?).

The best lengthy treatment of this pre-Columbian voyage is to be found in Frederick J. Pohl's *Prince Henry Sinclair: His Expedition to the New World in 1398*. [39] While I cannot agree with Pohl in every particular, his discussion does validate much of what Nicolo and Antonio Zeno had to say about their activities around 1400.

Part of that history includes the tale of a fisherman from the Faeroes Islands whose adventure began around 1375. Here is the beginning of John Fiske's treatment of this story including his footnotes:

About six and twenty years ago, said Antonio [Zeno] in a letter to Carlo [Zeno], four small fishing craft, venturing very far out upon the Atlantic, had been blown upon a strange coast, where their crews were well received by the people. The land proved to be an island rather smaller than Iceland (or Shetland?) , with a high mountain whence flowed four rivers. The inhabitants were intelligent people, possessed of all the arts, but did not understand the language of these Norse fishermen. [\*] There happened, however, to be one European among them, who had himself been cast ashore in that country and had learned its language; he could speak Latin, and found some one among the shipwrecked men who could understand him. There was a populous city with walls, and the king had Latin books in his library which no one could read. [\*\*] All kinds of metals abounded, and especially gold. [\*\*\*] The woods were of immense extent. The people traded with Greenland, importing

thence pitch (?), brimstone, and furs. They sowed grain and made "beer." They made small boats, but were ignorant of the lodestone and the compass. For this reason, they held the newcomers in high estimation.[\*\*\*\*] The name of the country was Estotiland.

\* They were, therefore, not Northmen.

\*\* Pruning this sentence of its magniloquence, might it perhaps mean that there was a large palisaded village, and that the chief had some books in Roman characters, a relic of some castaway which he kept as a fetish ?

\*\*\* With all possible latitude of interpretation, this could not be made to apply to any part of America north of Mexico.

\*\*\*\* The magnetic needle had been used by the mariners of western and northern Europe since the end of the thirteenth century. [40]

"Estotiland" has been interpreted by some as "Escociland" meaning "land of the Irishmen (Scots)." [41] Those who want to find this place on the modern map have come to identify it as Newfoundland.

Three centuries after Gudleif Gudlaugson was turned away from the island of the New World Irish, the Albanians appear to have become more friendly to strangers and to have made their peace with their fellow Christians in Greenland. They were trading in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The fisherman's tale goes on with further adventures that took him back to Europe after years in the New World. Those events can be found in the books of Pohl and Fiske.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ALBANIANS ?

Greater Ireland was no longer around in any of its parts when Jacques Cartier arrived. In 1534 he scouted Chaleur Bay and nearby regions. It appears that some time after 1375 when the Faeroes Islands fisherman visited Newfoundland the parts of Greater Ireland had disappeared.

Because the last of the Greenland colonies was expiring at this time also, there is a natural suspicion that these colonies failed for similar reasons. The colder climate that was coming on would have had a greater impact upon the Greenland people, but it would still have had an impact

further south. The Albanians who worked with the Dorset people would have been affected by the death of so many of them at the hands of the Norse who made a habit of killing the "giants" in Labrador.

The pirate raids that are told of in Greenland would have been a likely pestilence for the Albanians too. Their whereabouts were known to ship captains. They were probably as vulnerable to raids as the Greenlanders.

Their trade relations were probably becoming difficult as were those of the Greenlanders. In addition, there have been recent findings of syphilis dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the port city of Hull in England. It is possible that this dreadful disease was carried to European ports from the New World in the course of pre-Columbian voyaging.

### AN OVERVIEW OF GREATER IRELAND

The Irish and allied peoples came across the North Atlantic early. Individuals such as the Irish Culdee monks who sought isolation may have led the way by seeking points ever further westward from Iceland where the Irish clerics were certainly to be found in the eighth century. It may be that the mysterious beehive huts of New England do date from a period a thousand and more years ago. They might be evidence of how far to the West those monks were able to go in a time when a colony of European refugees was located on the American coast.

The Irish who fled out of Iceland and their friends who went west earlier certainly would have reached Greenland. There they left the remains noted by Erik the Red upon his first visit to the island. These pre-Norse travelers would have soon found a better climate to the southwest and moved on to Newfoundland and New Brunswick. Working jointly with the carriers of the Dorset culture whom they met along the coast they could have exploited the bounty of the Arctic in the summers. They fitted out their ships at L'Anse aux Meadows. In the Arctic they could have met the Dorset each year at sites with tower beacons and used those markers to keep themselves and the Dorset organized in their mutual pursuits.

For hundreds of years this life would have gone on undisturbed except by the chance shipwreck from Europe when people were added forcefully to their population (such as were Ari Marson and Bjorn Asbrandson). Trade was carried on with Europe (such as traders in Limerick) and then Greenland. The population was increased by refugees like the men of Ross and their families. Perhaps Prince Madog or his Welsh equivalent was there

too if any of his armada survived an Atlantic voyage.

The Norsemen finally came into their world again after AD 1000. The shipworks at L'Anse aux Meadows were burned to avoid detection. Fortunately none of the early forays into Vinland reached Chaleur Bay or the southern extremities of Newfoundland where the Albanians would have been encountered when they considered themselves enemies of the Norse..

There is a moment in the saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni where his wife Gudrid is approached by a woman who came with the Skraelings (Indians) to their Vinland camp (probably on the eastern coast of Newfoundland). It is a tragedy of history that she only had time to announce to Gudrid that she herself was also named "Gudrid." At that moment a fight broke out between the Skraelings and the Norsemen. The woman vanished and never told her story. If only she had more time to talk we might have heard through the sagas a most interesting background from her.

But later, after the Vikings became Christians, it seems that trade did develop between Greater Ireland/Albania and the Greenland colonies. But both groups of people were to share the same dismal fate. The Greenlanders and the people of Greater Ireland were soon to disappear.

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