

fences, rivers, mountains, lakes and gathering places). Likewise, some photographs are reproduced as many as three times in the book. Finally, an inclusion of a CD or DVD with audio or video materials of the Oral History Collection might further enrich this book.

Beyond these editorial issues, *People of the Lakes* is an inspiring book and worthwhile reading. The beauty of this impressive volume lies in the continuity of the narratives and the intimacy in which the different generations tell about their personal lives and those of their ancestors. The book offers new insights into Van Tat Gwich'in history and illustrates how stories can and have been used as pedagogical tools. It is an invitation for Van Tat Gwich'in youth to listen to their elders and revisit historical places. Most of all, the book is a welcoming invitation for any reader interested in Gwich'in lives, aboriginal and Canadian history, anthropology, religion, politics, and ethnohistory. To conclude, *People of the Lakes* does fulfill its promise of learning quite a bit more about Margaret Blackfox and her people's history.

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THE LAST VIKINGS: THE EPIC STORY OF THE GREAT NORSE VOYAGERS. By KIRSTEN A. SEAVER. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010. ISBN 978-1-84511-869-3. xx + 277 p., maps, b&w illus., reference notes, works cited, index. Hardbound. £18.99.

From medieval literary sources and archaeological evidence, it is known that people of Scandinavian descent came to Greenland around the year 1000 and lived there for about 500 years. These people came from Iceland and colonized two areas on the southwest coast of Greenland: the Eastern Settlement (the Julianehåb district) and the Western Settlement (the Godthåb district). From Greenland, these colonists sailed onward to North America, setting foot on the shores of this continent 500 years before it was discovered again by Columbus. By about 1500, the Norse settlements in Greenland were abandoned, and the fate suffered by the settlers is an unsolved riddle, though one that has given rise to many theories: that they were attacked by or mixed with the Inuit, that they were exterminated by sickness, that they emigrated to America, that they were attacked by English pirates, and that a worsening climate resulted in famine. In *The Last Vikings: The Epic Story of the Great Norse Voyagers*, novelist, translator, and independent historian Kirsten A. Seaver examines what happened in the years between 1000 and 1500 on the basis of archival research, historical data, and archaeological evidence. She takes a critical

look at the theories about the demise of the Norse colonies in Greenland, for, as she points out, "serious problems arise when attempts at riddle-solving blossom into fanciful creations because records are spotty and scarce or, better yet, nonexistent" (p. 2).

In chapter 1, "No Forwarding Address," Seaver introduces the medieval literary sources about Greenland and assesses some of the suggestions as to why the Norse Greenlanders vanished. She dismisses climatic changes, arguing that "changes in the climate would not in themselves have caused an entrenched population to vanish while there was still food on the land and in the sea" (p. 9). She is also skeptical about the theory that the severing of contact with Norway around 1400 was a contributing factor, noting that "the Eastern Settlement lasted for a century or a century and a half after the rupture of formal Norwegian connections" (p. 11).

Chapters 2, "Eirik the Red Knew Where to Go," and 3, "Forging a New Homeland," provide an overview of the emigration to and colonization of the southwestern coast of Greenland. Chapters 4, "Leif Eiriksson Explores Another New Land," and 5, "Who Were the Skrælings?" treat the discovery of North America by Norse Greenlanders and their attempted settlement in the New World, which was abandoned because of clashes with the aboriginals. In medieval Icelandic sources, these aboriginals are referred to as *skrælingjar*—a term that Seaver maintains is a direct translation of *Pygmæi* (Pygmies), and which is used in reference to both Amerindians and Inuit peoples.

Chapters 6, "Relations with Church and Crown," and 7, "Foreign Trade," concern contacts with Norway. The former discusses the (successful) attempts of Norwegian kings to impose organized Christianity upon Greenland, and the latter, Greenland's exports, with a focus on Norway's increasingly tight restrictions on trade with and among Norway's Atlantic colonies. Chapter 8, "Contact with Iceland," gives a survey of historical events in Iceland from around 1000, including the Conversion, the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth, and Norwegian politics in Iceland. Seaver devotes several pages to an account of the wedding of Sigrid Björnsdóttir and the Icelander Thorstein Olafsson in Greenland in 1408 and of their departure in 1410, which is the last recorded voyage from Greenland.

Chapter 9, "The English in the North Atlantic," is also concerned with Iceland, though the focus here is on the English pursuit of cod and cod products in and around Iceland, especially as it relates to the consequences for the Norse in Greenland. Seaver speculates that the powerful Thorstein Olafsson probably encouraged English merchants to become middlemen for trade in Greenland stockfish, and she points to artefacts of English origin discovered in late-phase strata at Norse Greenland farms.

In chapter 10, "Where Did the Norse Greenlanders Go?" Seaver advances the theory that the Norse Greenlanders left on their own accord: "So few artefacts have been found in the ruins of both farms and churches that it points to a community decision to move on and bring their valuables with

them” (p. 158). She argues that an eastward migration is unlikely: “If word had reached Danish, Norwegian, or Icelandic officials that the Norse Greenland colony had ceased to exist, it would have been noted by somebody” (p. 166). She also rejects the possibility of a northward or southward migration: “For the Norse Greenlanders to settle farther north in their Arctic homeland would have made no sense, and there is no indication of a wholesale movement south, such as to the British Isles” (p. 166). This, then, leaves only the option of going west. Following an overview of the cartography of the North Atlantic area, Seaver discusses the explorations of João Fernandes and his companions around the turn of the 16th century and the Azorean and English plans to exploit the resources of the Labrador-Newfoundland coast, which would require a permanent settlement with skilled workers. She proposes that “João Fernandes with his Azorean and British associates may have been the catalyst for the Eastern Settlement to lose the strongest and most fertile segment of their population around 1500” (p. 182) and points out that “[i]f the Norse Greenlanders had adjusted both their domestic and export economy to English demands for stockfish and other fish products that had now dwindled to the point where the Greenlanders were facing complete isolation, they would primarily have required assurance about transportation and help to get started with a new life” (p. 182–183). She speculates that “[i]f the Norse Greenlanders migrated west to a stretch of Labrador chosen by others...they may have ended up on the bottom of the Davis Strait before ever reaching the other shore, or they may have perished during their first winter in the new land from new diseases, from starvation or simply from the bitter cold” (p. 183).

In the final chapter 11, “Who Went Looking for Them?” Seaver examines accounts of post-medieval efforts to reconnect with the Norse Greenlanders and also notes that recent DNA testing of a number of Inuit people has not revealed any discernible genetic mingling of Norse and Inuit during the Middle Ages. In a postscript, “The Fictional Norse in North America,” Seaver discusses what she calls “alternative histories festooned with ‘Norse’ objects found in America” (p. 203), such as the Newport Tower, the Kensington Stone, and the Vinland Map.

*The Last Vikings: The Epic Story of the Great Norse Voyagers* is a book that makes the fascinating reality considerably more interesting than the fictional stories that have arisen about Norse activities in Greenland and America. Admittedly, many of Seaver’s suggestions and conclusions are speculative, but they are sound and based on careful scrutiny of archaeological evidence, historical data, and literary analysis. Some chapters seem encumbered by digressions or by too much detail or information irrelevant to the story of the Norse in Greenland, such as accounts of personal travels and impressions. Moreover, Seaver’s attempt to combine a style that is novelistic and yet scholarly seems strained at times and becomes somewhat wearisome as the book progresses. Nevertheless, in her attempt to solve the mystery of the fate of the Norse Greenlanders, Seaver

manages to hold the reader’s attention until the very last page.

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THIS VANISHING LAND: A WOMAN’S JOURNEY TO THE CANADIAN ARCTIC. By DIANNE WHELAN. Half-moon Bay, British Columbia: Caitlin Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-894759-38-0. 176 p., maps, colour illus. Softbound. Cdn\$28.95.

*This Vanishing Land*, a companion to the author’s National Film Board production *This Land* (2009), based on the same event, describes Dianne Whelan’s participation in Operation Nunavut 07. She drove a snowmobile in one of three Canadian military units that took part in the Arctic sovereignty patrol from 24 March to 10 April 2007. The entire patrol of 24, approximately half active Canadian soldiers and the other half Inuit Rangers, joined forces at Resolute, where they constructed their komatiks (sledges) and packed each with 907 kg, the necessary supplies for the entire trip. From Resolute, they traveled together on 24 snowmobiles to a spot outside Grise Fiord, where they split into three eight-member units, each of which took a different route before reuniting at Alert at the end of the trip.

A 42-year old journalist and a white woman to boot, Whelan wheedled her way onto the expedition by getting what the military’s public affairs officer thought impossible: three letters from broadcasters interested in her footage and reportage. She then discovered she had one more crucial test: passing the snowmobile operator’s exam. She easily accomplished this feat and was assigned to the group led by Major Bergeron, the operation’s commander.

Once the mission began, she faced more challenges, some relating to her gender and others to being an outsider to the military world. On less demanding assignments, Whelan might not have faced as many gender issues as she did with the 22 macho military men. There was one other woman, a Native elder who did not speak English, but she was on another of the three units and not on hand when Whelan needed her most. The most difficult challenges, however, came from the land and climatic conditions that do battle against everyone on such patrols.

With little practice, Whelan was immediately faced with understanding a snowmobiler’s techniques for hauling a loaded komatik with no brakes and navigating through rough terrain. She managed all right, but was ever-conscious of the men watching her. Although they insisted they must work as a team and, in fact, their survival demanded teamwork, Whelan was often the butt of their jokes, when she needed a bathroom and the landscape was flat for miles, or