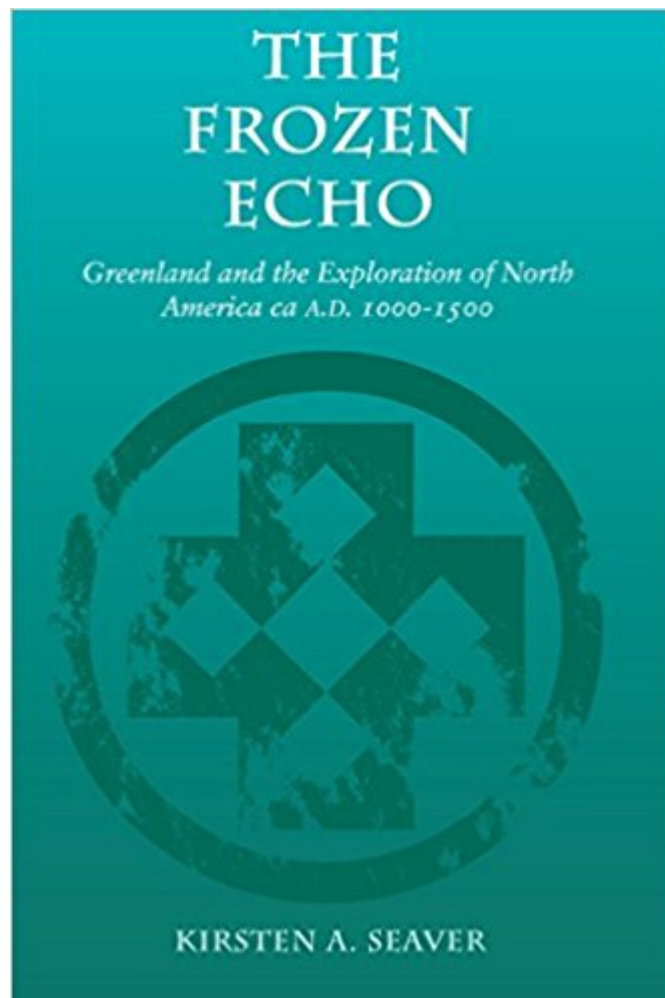




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The Frozen Echo: Greenland And The Exploration Of North America, Ca. A.D. 1000-1500



Synopsis

It is now generally accepted the Leif Eriksson sailed from Greenland across the Davis Strait and made landfalls on the North American continent almost a thousand years ago, but what happened in this vast area during the next five hundred years has long been a source of disagreement among scholars. Using new archeological, scientific, and documentary information (much of it in Scandinavian languages that are a bar to most Western historians), this book confronts many of the unanswered questions about early exploration and colonization along the shores of the Davis Strait. The author brings together two distinct but tangential fields of inquiry: the history of medieval Greenland and its connections with the Norse discovery of North America, and fifteenth-century British maritime history and pre-colonial voyages to North America, including that of John Cabot. In order to evaluate the situation in Norse Greenland at the end of the fifteenth century (when documented English and Portuguese voyages of northern exploration began), the author follows the colony's development—its domestic economy and foreign trade and its cultural and ecclesiastical affinities—from its inception in the tenth century. In the process, she looks critically at commonly held views that have gone unchallenged until now. Among the questions about which the author sets forth new evidence and conclusions are: the extent to which Greenlanders explored and exploited North America after Leif Eriksson, the reasons for the baffling disappearance of the Norse settlement in Greenland, the connection between their disappearance and the beginning of the voyages of exploration that began around A.D. 1500, the routes by which information concerning previous voyages traveled, the history before Cabot of the advance of English fishing fleets from Icelandic waters to the coasts of Labrador, and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on Norse Greenland.

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Customer Reviews

"This is a fascinating book, not only for those engaged in Atlantic studies or early American history. The clear and precise text, the skillful management of complex themes, and above all the sympathetic approach to human endeavors, coupled with a skeptical view of earlier theories and an open mind to new ideas, make it as easy to read as a novel." (The Times Higher Education Supplement)"For many aspiring writers, this book might well be a model of how to put across a complex theme in an easy-to-read manner. It is sure to provide much new information even to those who specialize in the North Atlantic, and provide topics for discussion, disagreement, and thought, as any well-researched book should do." (Journal of the International Map Collector's Society)"Of major importance, this book fills a serious gap in scholarly studies of European expansion. It brings new understandings to the relationships between Norse discoveries and the great voyages of Renaissance discovery in the North Atlantic. Furthermore, it is fascinating reading, written in a lively and very readable style. It should interest the general public and amateur historians as well as scholars." (Dr. Helen Walls, British Map Library)

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The author explains what may have happened to the Greenland settlement colonized by the Icelanders and Norwegians, and which by about 1500 had ceased. Who, why and how it was colonized, and later on the conditions and European events that affected it. Well written and hard to put down.

Not only are Iceland and Greenland covered, but also the homelands, and minor explorations into NA. It is an interesting read.

Author Seaver seems to have ransacked the archives of Iceland and Norway to compile a thorough history of five centuries of Norse settlement in Greenland, including the famous and ill-fated Norse effort to establish a colony in North America about 1000 AD. There are enough Olafs and Sigrids here to people Lake Wobegone. The author is apparently Scandinavian -- or speaks Icelandic and medieval Norwegian -- and is thus able to dig deeper than most authors on this topic. She presents her findings in dry professorial prose that may tell some readers more than they really want to know about the internal politics of the North Atlantic back in medieval times. The great mystery is, of course, why did the Norse colonies in Greenland disappear and when? A worsening climate, Inuit attacks, inbreeding, and isolation have all been cited as reasons. I won't reveal the author's conclusion except to say that she theorizes the Norse survived longer in Greenland -- perhaps after 1500 -- than most scholars believe. The most interesting and original part of the book for me was her examination of the important role of traders and cod fisherman from the English port of Bristol in the exploration of the North Atlantic in the 15th century. She makes a good case that these sailors might have reached the New World a few years before Columbus -- but like good fishermen everywhere kept their favorite fishing holes secret. All in all, this is a well-researched scholarly history with just enough learned speculation to keep a history and exploration buff reading on. It's the kind of book that -- if you're really, really a fanatic -- you could read a second time and benefit from many small points you missed on the first reading. Smallchief

Was it the Thule Eskimos attacking the Norse Greenland colonies which cause these groups of hardy descendants of Vikings to fall off the map of the North Atlantic after 1408? Was it changes in climate that caused them to move? Where then did they go? Was it the fishing vessels of unfriendly foreign powers or neglect from the homeland which cause these settlements to fail? This well-written scholarly work is difficult to put down as it traces the Greenland colonies from their establishment through their explorations of North America until their existence was "forgotten" by the Western World. Drawing on the latest works in archeology, medieval studies, and related scientific fields, this book provides illuminating insight into a unique culture on the edge of the known world and its final destiny.

This is a very well-written intellectual piece tracing Greenland colonies from establishment, to explorations of North America, and subsequently, their disappearance. The author portrays a history of over five centuries and has made discoveries that other researchers have missed. The author's conclusions are solid, however rather than sticking to solely historical facts, she speculates slightly on political issues. Nevertheless, the bulk of the book is thoroughly researched and well presented. An interesting read and a great way to learn some history as it is a book that is difficult to put down once you start.

The story of Norse Greenland, the settlement at the end of the earth, and its disappearance, has fascinated scholars and laypeople for 500 years. Kirsten Seaver has produced the best and most readable work on the subject in 50 years, incorporating the large amount of very recent study being done in the field with acute insight and a clear narrative. (Although it means there is not much point in me writing my book on the subject :()

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