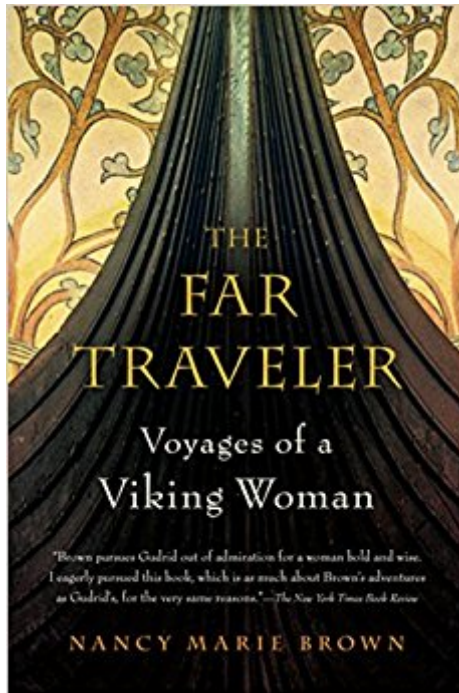




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The Far Traveler: Voyages Of A Viking Woman



Synopsis

Five hundred years before Columbus, a Viking woman named Gudrid sailed off the edge of the known world. She landed in the New World and lived there for three years, giving birth to a baby before sailing home. Or so the Icelandic sagas say. Even after archaeologists found a Viking longhouse in Newfoundland, no one believed that the details of Gudrid's story were true. Then, in 2001, a team of scientists discovered what may have been this pioneering woman's last house, buried under a hay field in Iceland, just where the sagas suggested it could be. Joining scientists experimenting with cutting-edge technology and the latest archaeological techniques, and tracing Gudrid's steps on land and in the sagas, Nancy Marie Brown reconstructs a life that spanned and expanded the bounds of the then-known world. She also sheds new light on the society that gave rise to a woman even more extraordinary than legend has painted her and illuminates the reasons for its collapse.

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Customer Reviews

While most medieval women didn't stray far from home, the Viking Gudrid (985-1050) probably crossed the North Atlantic eight times, according to Brown. Rather than just a passenger, Gudrid may have been the explorer on North American expeditions with two different husbands (one was the brother of Leif Ericson, who discovered America 500 years before Columbus). Brown (A Good Horse Has No Color) catches glimpses of Gudrid in the medieval Icelandic sagas which recount that her father, a chieftain with money problems, refused to wed Gudrid to a rich but slave-born merchant; instead he swapped their farm for a ship and a new life in Greenland.

Specifics about her life are sparse, so Brown, following in Gudrid's footsteps, explores the archeology of her era, including the splendid burial ships of Viking queens; the remains of Gudrid's longhouse in a northern Icelandic hayfield; the economy of the farms where she lived; and the technology of her time, including shipbuilding, spinning wool and dairying. But the plucky and adaptable Gudrid remains mysterious, so this impressively researched account will interest serious students of Icelandic archeology, literature and women's history more than the general reader. Map. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"... [A] marvelously sneaky history of the Viking mind. A nimble synthesis of the literary and the scientific that will charm even readers who didn't know they were interested." --Kirkus Reviews
Brown rightly leaves scholarly work to scholars. Instead, her account presents an enthusiastic appreciation of her education in how fieldwork and literature offer insights into the past."
--The Seattle Times
PRAISE FOR THE FAR TRAVELER
"[A] snappily written biography . . . In surprising flashes, Gudrid comes into focus. Brown pursues Gudrid out of admiration for a woman bold and wise. I eagerly pursued this book, which is as much about Brown's adventures as Gudrid's, for the very same reasons."
•The New York Times Book Review
"Brown's enthusiasm is infectious as she re-teaches us our history."
•The Boston Globe

Although there are a few interesting stories and facts in this book, it is not well organized overall, and the internal organization of the chapters was precarious. You might start out with an interesting tale of, say, Eric the Red, then suddenly find yourself reading a lesson on how to build a turf house in such detail that you forget completely about Eric the Red, the ostensible subject of that chapter. Then it might jump to some other off-topic subject before giving a passing nod to poor neglected Eric at the end. Apparently, neither the author nor her editor ever heard of transitions. Far too much space was devoted to the author's egocentric experience of being an amateur archaeologist, in detail ad nauseam. Overall, there was precious little information about Gudrid Thorbjarnsdottir beyond "might have" or "would have" inferences, and a few contradictions hit one in the face. The author would have been better off taking herself out of the picture and presenting the book as a general "life of Icelandic women in 1000 AD." I've read dozens of works on the Viking period of history by respected sources. Given the egregiously misleading title, I found this book sometimes frustrating, often boring and, generally, disappointing.

This was such an enjoyable book to read. A thorough, scholarly erudition of a woman's life in Norse culture in 1000AD. Every sentence was relaxing in a way that can only be explained as "seeing through eyes long ago". I looked forward each night in bed to read more. One can sense that long ago wave breaking bow on, the knarr rising up, the winds filling the sail. I never before thought how sails were made on these now gone ships. Such educated explanations of viking times is a treasure. Nancy Brown is my heroine of those long ago frozen seas. O'Iceland, O'Greenland, O'Vinland, tharr they be! I want to go so visit Iceland and hang out... may Odin grant my wishes, eh?

Nancy M. Brown does a wonderful job at bringing history to life through her very capable writing and story-telling ability. She also does a great job at keeping the cultural integrity in place regarding the landscapes and people that she is discussing. She doesn't take away from, or gloss over, their flaws nor does she neglect their accomplishments. Her other book "Song of the Vikings" is one that I have recommended to many people because of just how in-depth she is when writing about her subject matter. I highly recommend both this book, and 'Song of the Vikings' for anyone that is interested in heathenry, history, or learning more about the Viking Age and how their stories got their foundations.

I was not sure how this book would read when I first purchased it, but I really enjoyed it. This book primarily looks at account of Gudrid's life, multiple marriages and travels, as well as Icelandic archaeological information to talk about property ownership, women's role with goods and communal living. I have read a few books that generalize about women's roles in Viking society, but I felt this book really got the point across that: without the women producing fine goods, the men would have nearly nothing to trade with. Maybe it's an odd comment, but I really loved the chapters on land claiming (Chapter 5) and turf homes and entire houses dissembled and moved plank by plank to Iceland (Chapter 8). I felt Gudrid's life was an excellent jumping off point for which the author talking about women's roles.

For readers pursuing Brown's engaging thinking about the Lewis Chessmen, this book offers more integrated background from study of the interrelated sagas and gives first hand accounts of the geography and archaeology of Iceland that support new thinking about its Golden Age and individual figures who achieved amazing things.

I am just a general reader who happens to enjoy well-written history. I've never read much at all

about the Vikings but the NY Times review of THE FAR TRAVELER was enticing and I was not let down by its promise. Nancy Marie Brown has reached back to a place and people obscured by time, doing a decent job of erasing some of the fog and cold desolation that obscure the Dark Ages and Medieval Epoch in Iceland and Greenland. She also succeeds in revealing a lot about contemporary archaeological practice and thought. Brown turns first to the Sagas, the 10th and 11th century tales of Vikings, for inspiration. Though embroidered, the Sagas, written down some generations later, are regarded as holding historical memories. Brown focuses on one woman who appears in both the Eirik the Red and Greenland Sagas as her guide, Gudrid, who traveled from Iceland to Greenland to Vinland, back to Iceland and remarkably, in later age, on a pilgrimage to Rome. Her son Snorri was very likely the first European child born on North American soil, circa 1005. Her personal story reveals much about religion, economics, gender relations, values, world view and other aspects of her culture. Born late in the 10th century AD, she witnessed the spread of Christianity and the fading of the violent marauding male economy as the domestic textile industry spun by women on the farm began to reposition Iceland in the world trade scene. Brown travels to all of the places Gudrid did, reads scholarship on her topic and participates in archaeological digs and recreation of weaving studios. The digs at L'Anse Aux Meadows, Newfoundland, have been reported on before, but Brown brings a fresh fascination to them in the context of Gudrid's life. She provides strong descriptive passages of the places she visits and there is one map in the front of the book. It would have been nice, however, to have had some illustrations. I would also like to have known a little more about Brown's own context and interest in this subject.

This wasn't exactly the book I thought it was going to be, but I learned a lot about the times that Gudrid lived in. They were brave and hearty and I can't imagine sailing to the coast of Canada to live for a few years surrounded by hostile Indians and a hostile climate. She is amazing. Good read.

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