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VIKINGS



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Written by William Houseman
Illustrated by Maria Voris

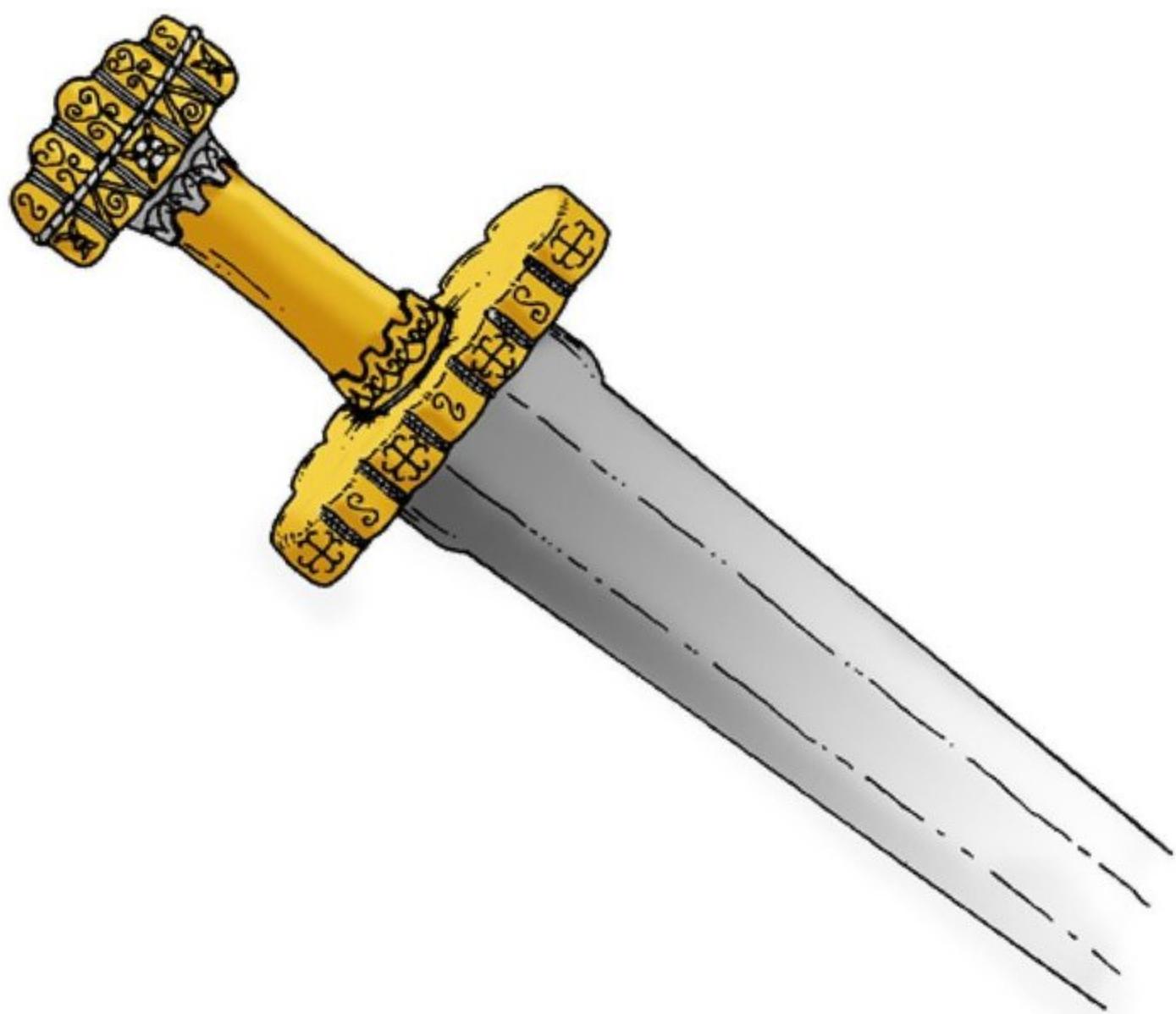
VIKINGS

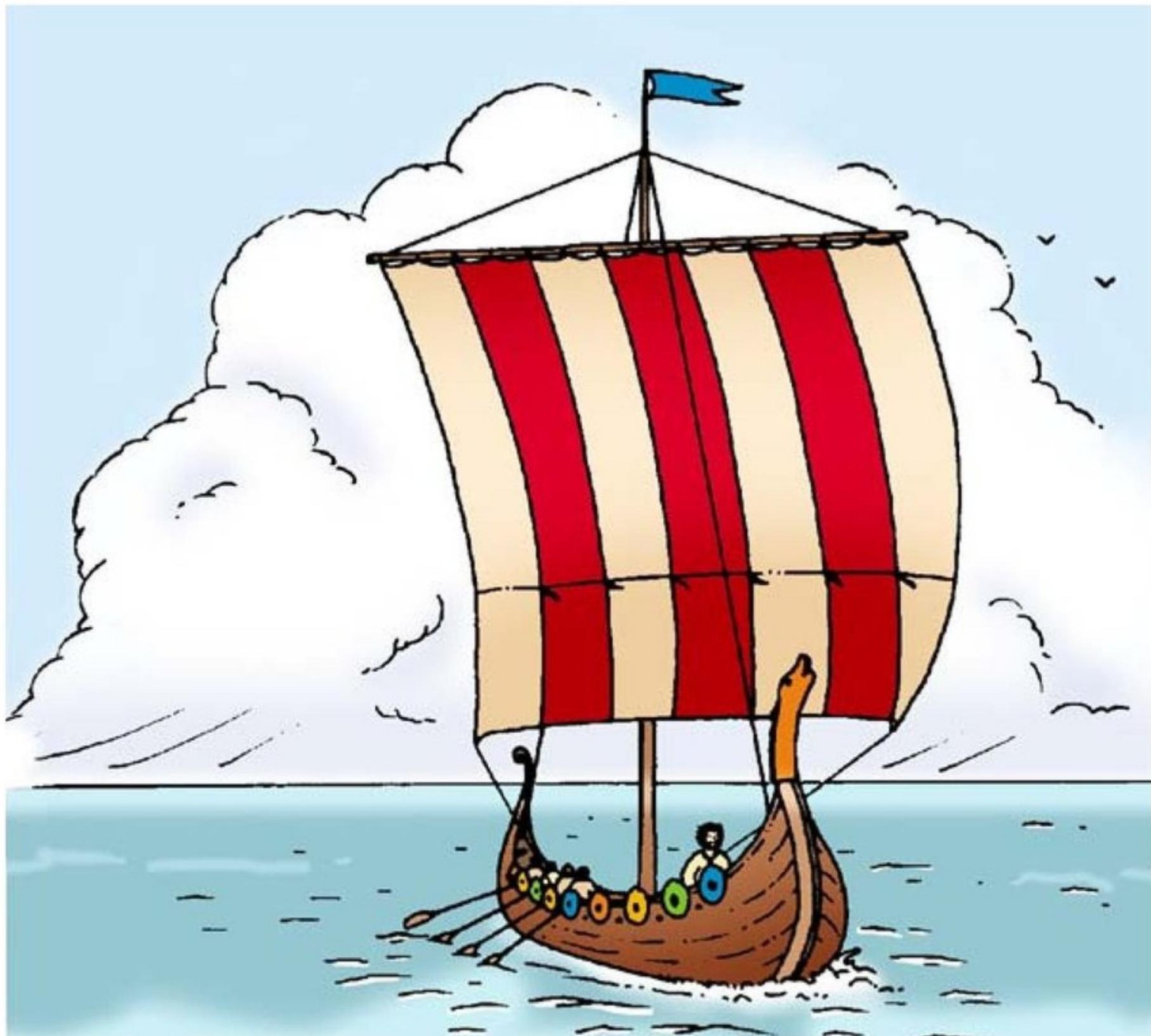


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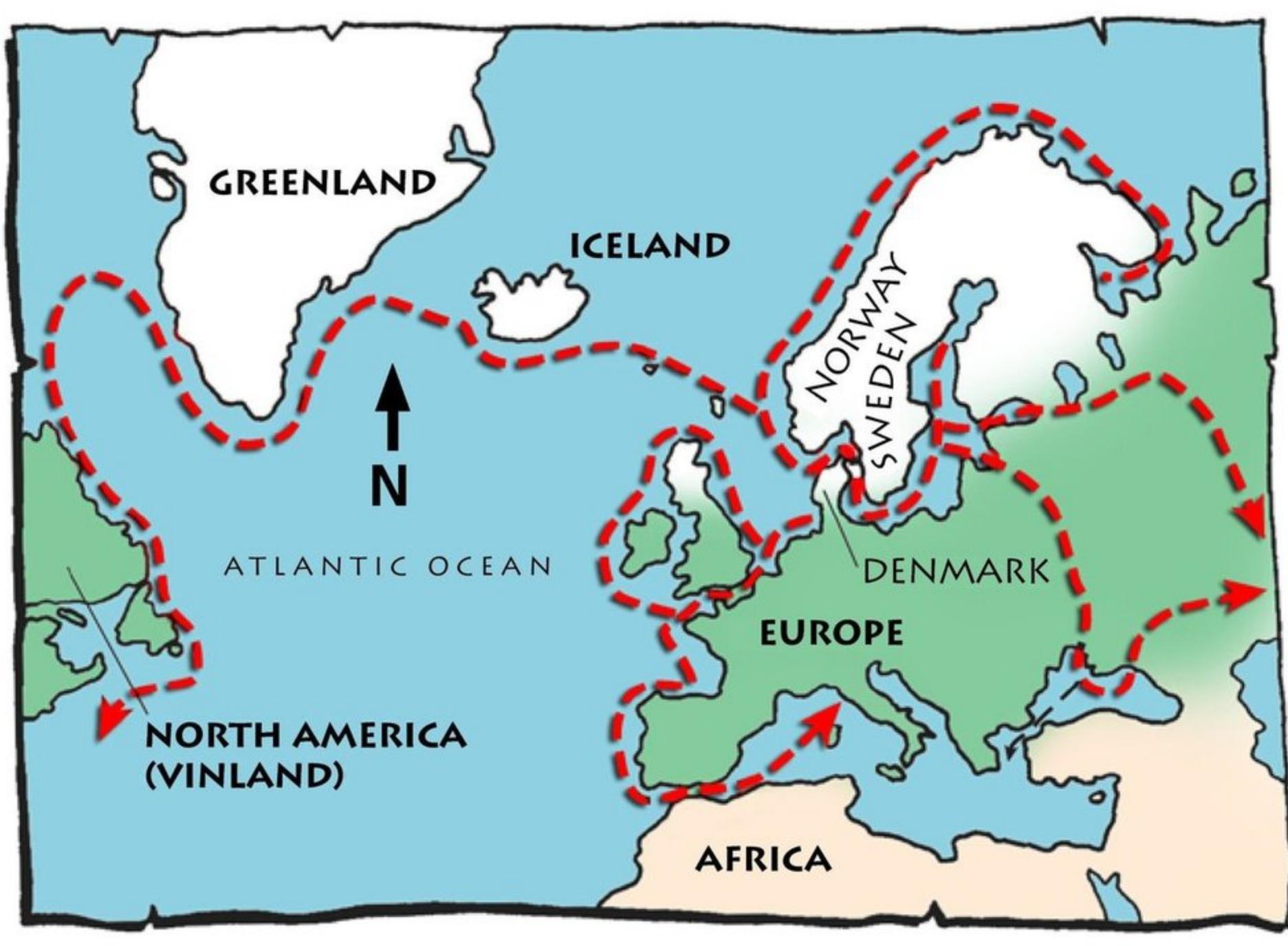
INTRODUCTION

When you hear the word *Vikings*, do you think of warriors or do you think of explorers? Do you think of merchants or do you think of poets? The Vikings were all of these things. They were also scientists, farmers, and fisherfolk. They were courageous fighters who loved to explore the world.

The Viking Age began about twelve hundred years ago. The Vikings came from the coastal lands in northern Europe that are now the countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The Vikings were used to cold weather and learned to sail and fight at an early age. Their ships were fast and could carry many warriors.



Over time, the Vikings' spirit of exploration and adventure led them to places all around Europe. It even led them to discover new lands that no one in Europe knew existed. They seized land along the western coast of Europe. They even **conquered** land along the Mediterranean Sea. Vikings also went east into what is now Russia. Some Vikings sailed far west over the ocean, eventually reaching North America. And they did so hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus was even born.



— Viking expansion routes

The Vikings' navigation skills, courage, and sturdy ships led them to discover and develop rich new lands.



VIKING WARRIORS

Vikings are often pictured as tall, muscular people wearing helmets with horns. In fact, many Viking helmets were decorated, but they most likely did not have horns. Metal helmets were expensive, and leather caps and shields were a much more common form of defense. Some Vikings also used **mail shirts** for protection.

The spear and the axe were the most common Viking weapons. Many warriors also used swords, knives, or bows.

Berserkers were special Viking warriors who fought without wearing any armor. They often wore the skins of bears or wolves and fought in a rage so great that they would ignore any wounds they received during battle.



The Vikings liked to tell stories and create poems about their achievements and battles. Many of these Viking tales have been preserved in heroic tales known as **sagas**.

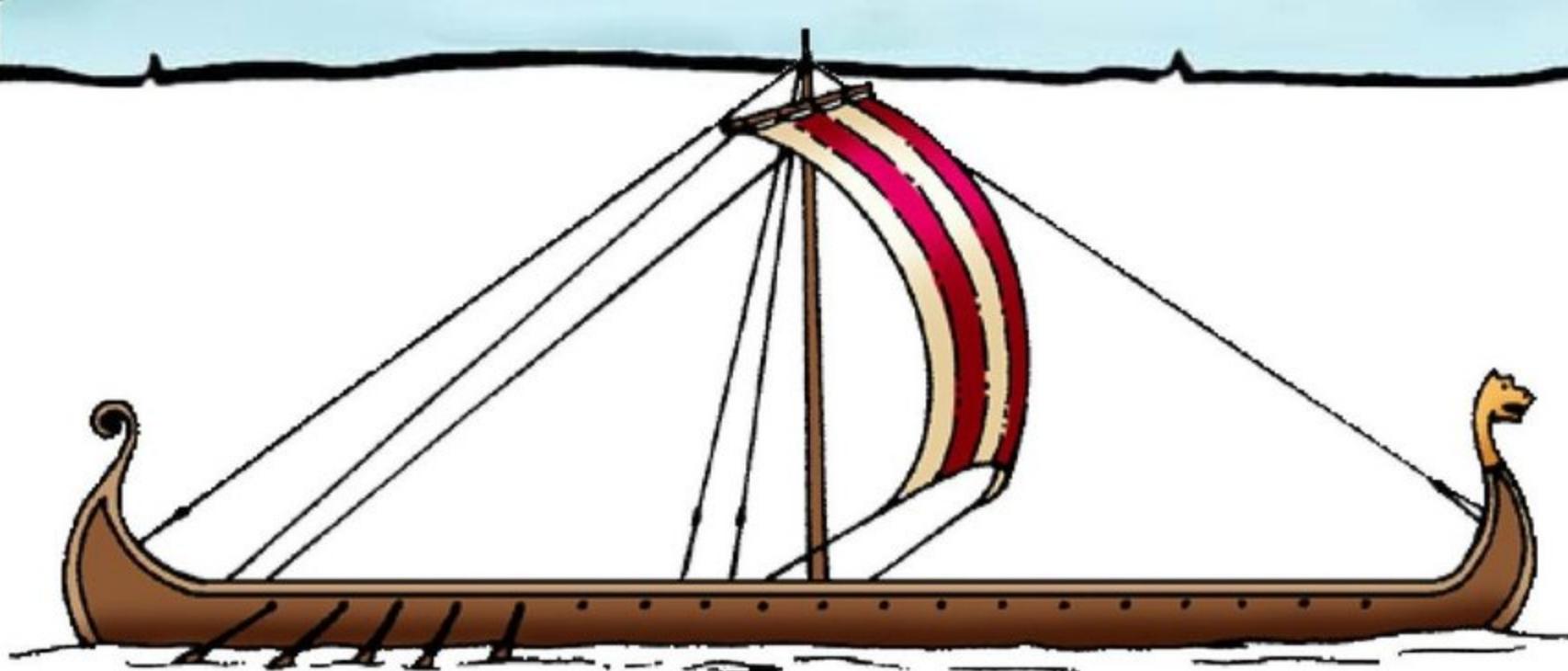
In Viking culture, land was handed down from a father to his firstborn son. Younger sons received no land. They could either work for the oldest brother or strike out on their own to seek fame and fortune elsewhere. Most young Viking men were well trained as warriors. Many of them did not want to work on the land of the oldest brother. The stories of rich lands within sailing distance drew them away from their homeland.

Viking warriors invaded other countries with quick attacks from the sea. Their fast boats were called *dragons* because they often had a carved dragon's head rising from the bow. The dragon's head warned others of the fierce warriors on board.

Despite all the stories about the warlike Vikings, not all Vikings were warriors or stayed warriors. Viking warriors often settled down to live peacefully in the lands they conquered. They became farmers or traders. These former warriors lived much like other people of those lands. They became peaceful citizens.

Do-You-Know?

Viking longships were built with the same shape at both ends. Vikings could jump in the ship and row away from shore. They didn't have to turn the ship around to leave.



DISCOVERING A NEW LAND

One brave Viking, Gardard Svavarsson, sailed beyond the seas where other Europeans had settled. His travels took him far to the north and west. After many days at sea, he found a large island. Today, the island he discovered is known as Iceland.

Iceland became the home for people who were **banished** by the first king of Norway. At that time, Norway was ruled by a very strict king. His rules were harsh. Many people were unhappy. The king feared being attacked by these people. He ordered anyone who wouldn't follow his rules to leave Norway.



These families left Norway and many sailed to Iceland. They built a village there. Within fifty years, four hundred people lived in this new island country.

The new settlers in Iceland wanted choice in their lives. They didn't want a king. They created a **democracy**. In a democratic government, people can vote. People vote on ideas, laws, and rulers. Usually the idea or person with the most votes wins. Iceland continued to attract strong, brave people. Iceland eventually grew to become one of the happiest and most successful countries in the world.



ERIC THE RED

To many people, Iceland seemed an **ideal** place to live. But not everyone fit in there. Most people in Iceland wanted a peaceful life. One man, named Eric the Red, was often in trouble with the authorities. One day he killed three men in a fight. The officials of Iceland grew tired of Eric and ordered him to leave.

Eric decided to look for a new home. He had heard rumors of a new land even farther to the west than Iceland. He sailed off to search for this unknown place.

Eric the Red was named for his thick red hair.

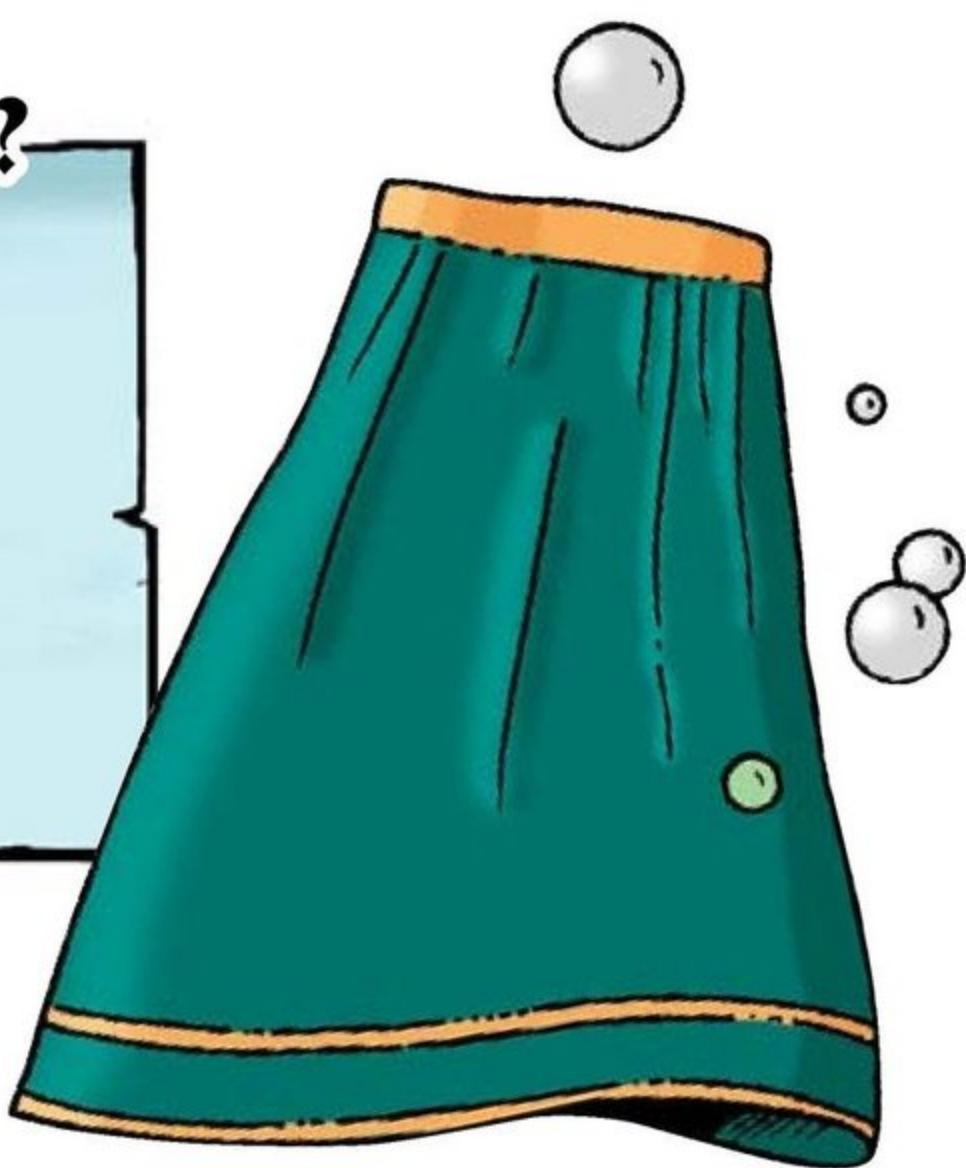


Eric the Red found the new land after only two days! He wanted other people to come to live there, so he told them stories about how green it was. He named this new land he had found *Greenland*.

He led a group of twenty-five ships full of people who wanted to live in Greenland. The seas were very rough, and several ships sank, while others were forced to turn back. Fourteen ships arrived safely. The people built two new communities. They set up a democratic government as they had in Iceland. Within ten years, nearly 3,000 people had come to live in Greenland. Today, about 56,000 people live there.

Do-You-Know?

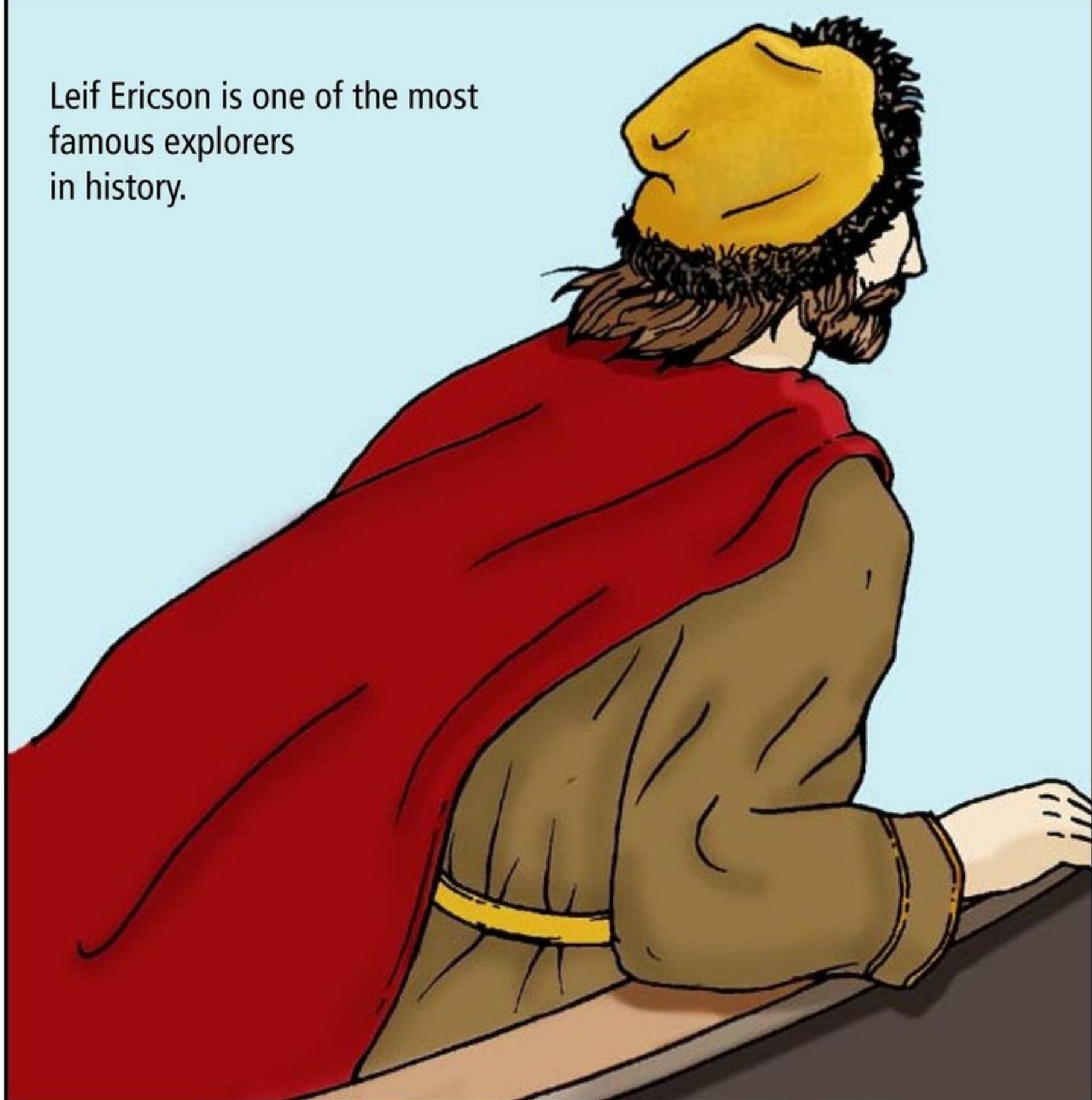
Nine hundred common English words come from the Viking language. Some of the words are sky, skin, scrape, skirt, husband, bubble, and window.



LEIF ERICSON

Perhaps the most famous Viking was a son of Eric the Red. His name was Leif (pronounced *leaf*). Since he was the second son, he wasn't given land to farm from his father. Family farms went to the oldest sons. Leif wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. He decided to sail to Norway to look for work.

Leif Ericson is one of the most famous explorers in history.



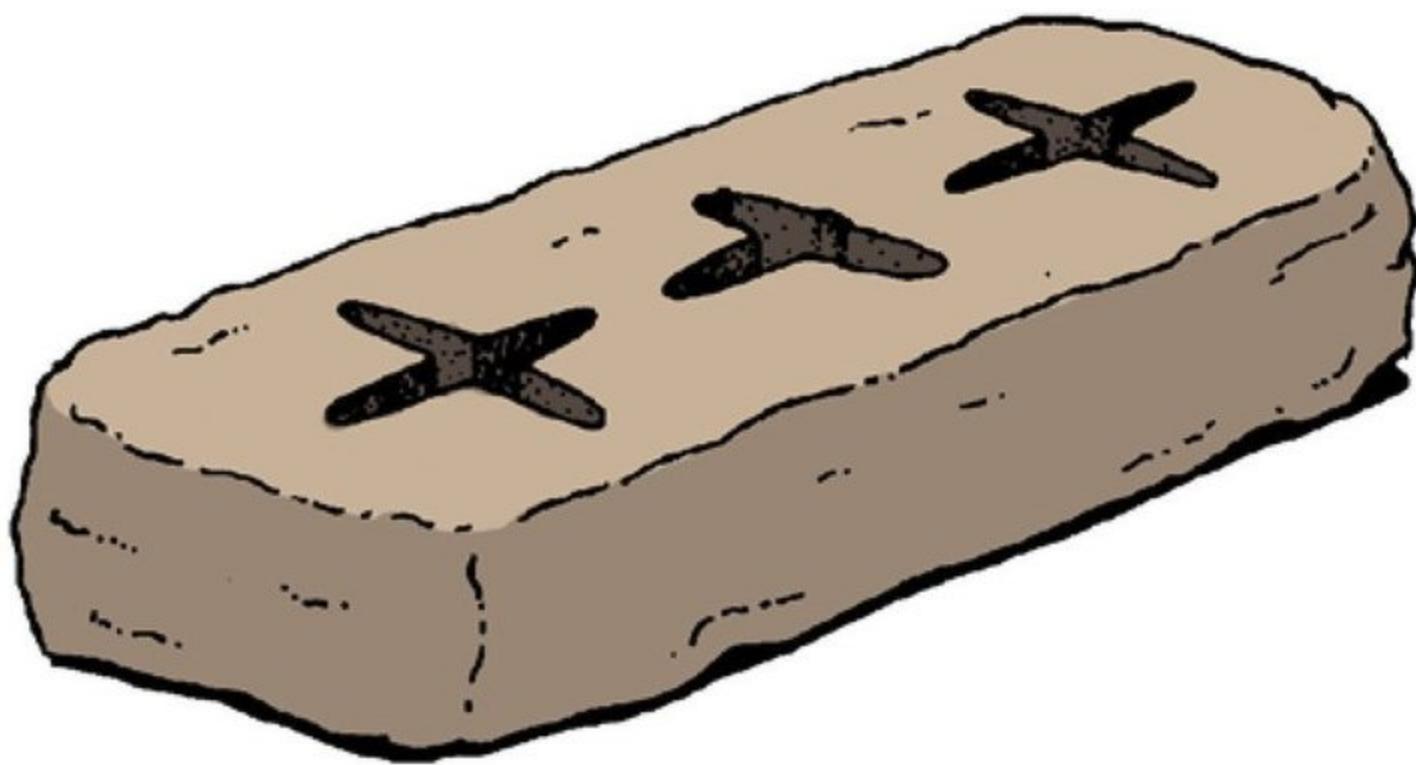
While in Norway, Leif heard a strange story. A trader said his ship had been caught in a bad storm. He had been blown far off his course. While trying to find his way back home, he got lost. He saw a coast that wasn't on his map. He didn't know exactly where he had been. But the trader described the coast clearly.

Leif Ericson bought the man's ship. He and a small crew sailed to find this mysterious coast. One day, they saw a place that looked like the coast the man talked about. They found vines with fruit growing there, so they called the place *Vinland*. Today, no one knows exactly where Vinland was. But **archaeologists** have discovered a small Viking outpost in Newfoundland, Canada, that was settled at about this time.



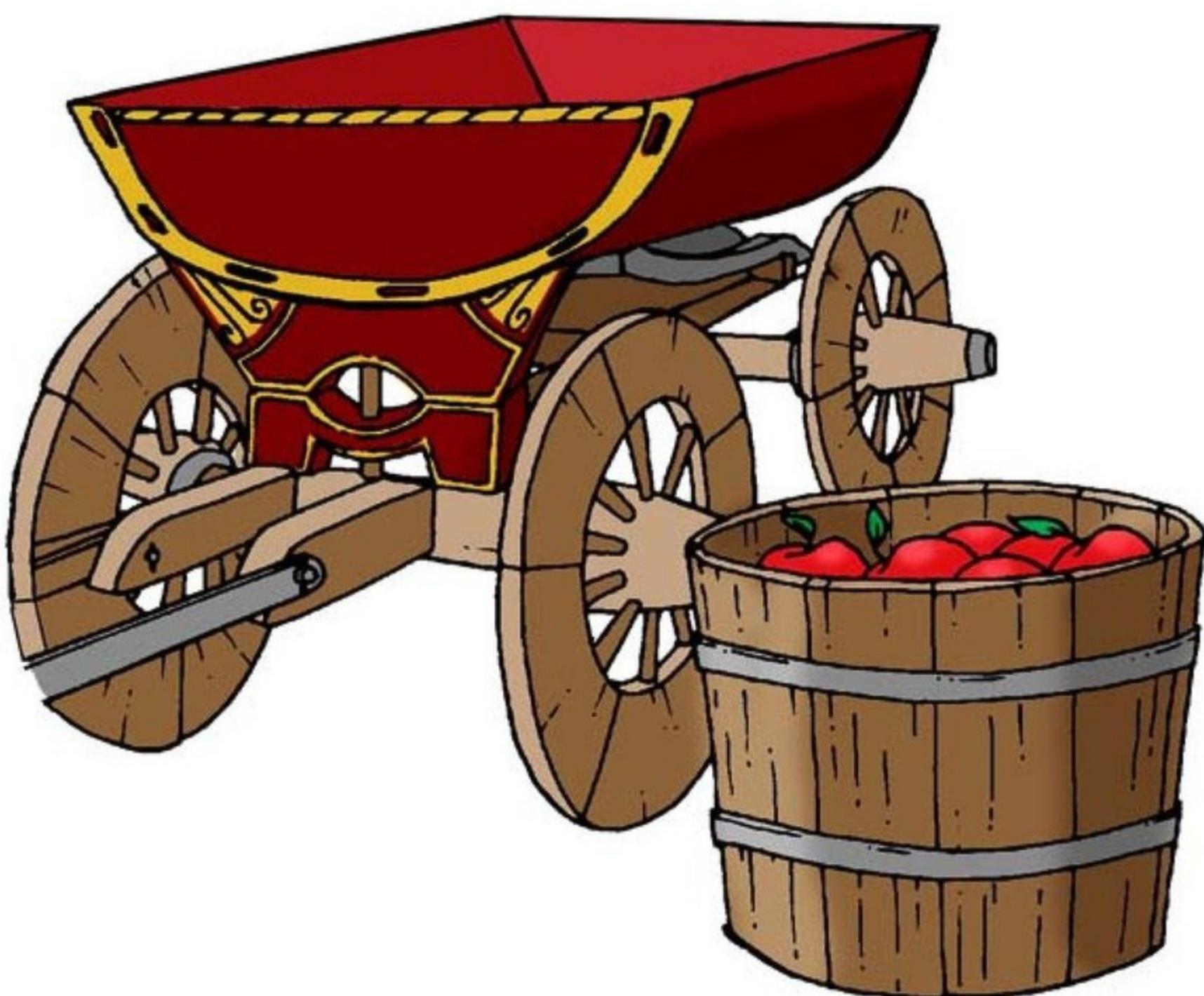
Leif and his crew built a house. They spent the winter in Vinland. On the way home the next year, they found a wrecked trading ship. As a reward for saving the crew, Leif was given all the ship's cargo. People started to call him Leif the Lucky. But after that adventure, Leif stayed home. Leif never went on another voyage.

Two years later, his younger brother asked a favor. He wanted to borrow Leif's ship. He wanted to see for himself this new land that Leif had found. Leif's brother and his crew explored the coast of Vinland for over two years. They used Leif's former winter house as a base.



This stone was used as a mold to make both metal Christian crosses and the Hammer of Thor symbol (the center shape). Thor was a powerful Viking god.

Some of their explorations were tragic. Their arrival frightened the native people. Small fights happened. But then, men from the ship's crew killed several native fishermen without reason. Striking back a few days later, angry native men attacked a group of Vikings. In the fight, Leif's brother was wounded by an arrow. He died there, and his body was buried in Vinland. He became the first European known to have died and been buried in North America.



Wagons, furniture, horses, and foods were some of the items known to have been buried with their Viking owners.

OTHER VIKING CONQUESTS

For about 275 years, the Vikings swept across Europe in wave after wave. Many were hungry to fight and greedy for riches. They built trade stations along European rivers all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. Viking explorers and raiders even traveled to the Middle East and Asia.

The Vikings were very skilled. They could do many things well. They were great warriors, sailors, and explorers. Their conquests left lasting marks on world history. They will always be remembered for their bravery and strength in battle as well as for their explorations of new lands.



TIMELINE IN VIKING HISTORY

Year	Events
790s	Viking raids in Europe, including Scotland and Ireland, begin
793	Viking raid on Lindisfarne monastery
844	Viking raids on Spain
845	Conquest of Hamburg and Paris
856–7, 861	Paris conquered by the Vikings
870–930	Norse settlement in Iceland
880s	Harold Finehair attempts to unite Norway
885–6	Siege of Paris
902	Vikings expelled from Dublin
911	Foundation of Normandy by Viking chieftain Rollo
912	Viking raiders on the Caspian Sea
917	Refoundation of Viking Dublin
930	Foundation of the Icelandic Althing
980s	Conversion of Russia
985	Eric the Red settles in Greenland
1000	Iceland converted to Christianity; voyages to Vinland
1066	Battle of Stamford Bridge, Battle of Hastings, Norman conquest of England
1066–87	William the Conqueror, king of England
1091	Norman conquest of Sicily

GLOSSARY

archaeologists (<i>n.</i>)	people who study ancient cultures (p. 15)
banished (<i>v.</i>)	forced to leave (p. 10)
berserkers (<i>n.</i>)	special Viking warriors who wore animal skins and fought recklessly in battle (p. 7)
conquered (<i>v.</i>)	attacked another country or group and won control of the land (p. 6)
democracy (<i>n.</i>)	a form of government that is run by the people through free and frequent elections (p. 11)
ideal (<i>adj.</i>)	perfect; couldn't be better (p. 12)
mail (<i>adj.</i>)	armor made from metal rings linked together (p. 7)
sagas (<i>n.</i>)	stories written in Iceland during the Viking Age about heroes and their adventures (p. 8)

Vikings
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