



English 401: Viking Studies The Medieval North Atlantic



The Role of the Skraelings, Magic, and Monsters in The Vinland Sagas

The descriptions of the Skraelings in these sagas provide us with our first historical glimpse of New World inhabitants through Old World eyes; more than that, however, they provide us with a sense of how early Europeans first perceived the “other” whom they would someday come to overrun and nearly destroy. Further, although some of the descriptions of the Skraelings might seem realistic, at other times they seem exotic and alien creatures; this is the stuff of the early Spanish travelogues to the New World. Mythical creatures and magical events also crop up at odd times, and these too are reminiscent of much later interpretations of foreign lands by European explorers. Find a number of examples of exotic descriptions of the Skraelings, magical or otherwise inexplicable events, and monstrous or fantastical creatures in these narratives. Think about and be prepared to discuss how these passages illustrate Medieval Norse perceptions of travel and exploration which resonate with 15th and 16th century European perceptions.