

Veranstalter:	<b>Prof. Craig Davis</b>
Thema:	<b>Viking Diaspora: The First New World of the North Atlantic</b> [AA-M7, AA-M15, AA-M16]
Art der Veranstaltung:	<b>Seminar II</b>
Veranstaltungsnummer:	<b>53-574</b>
Zeit:	<b>2st., Di 10-12</b>
Raum:	<b>Phil 564</b>
Beginn:	<b>5. April 2011</b>

**Kommentar zur Veranstaltung:**

The Norse colonies of the ninth and tenth centuries have been described as the first European societies of the New World. Refugees from western Norway fled the rule of kings and central government to establish independent polities on the sub-arctic islands of the North Atlantic. In particular, the *Althing* 'National Assembly' governed Iceland as a Commonwealth from c. 930 until 1264 AD. Further west, the Norse colony on Greenland survived for half a millennium. *The Saga of the Greenlanders* and *Eirik the Red's Saga* describe attempts to colonize the North American continent in Vinland, including the first unhappy encounters between Europeans and Native Americans. Archaeologists have found the site of the failed Norse colony at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland.

Our sources for these experimental communities are collectively known as the *Íslendingasögur* 'Sagas of Icelanders', which preserve oral memories of the founding settlers in terse prose narratives written down and elaborated in the thirteenth century. These sagas were cultivated by descendents of the original founders as they competed for power in a violent society of scarce resources and even scarcer opportunities for social advancement. One exception is the rise to power and political reversals of Hrafnkel Priest of the god Freyr, who arrived in Iceland as a poor immigrant long after the good grassland close to sea level had been taken. We will also examine the fraught relations between wealthier families and the rulers of Norway, epitomized by the saga of Egil Skallagrímsson, perhaps the most talented (and obnoxious) of all Icelandic Vikings—a poet, pirate, mercenary captain, and farmer. These family histories are written in an elegant, laconic prose, which is distinguished by its vivid realism, subtle characterization, dramatic dialogue and dry humor. Unlike the aristocratic and hyperbolic Arthurian romances composed during the same period on the Continent, the Icelandic family sagas are understated in style and demotic in ethos. These are not triumphal narratives of national destiny or chivalric quest, but rather searching studies of ordinary human beings in desperate circumstances. They are the very place where Icelandic authors found their sense of national identity and difference from the societies from which they came. These texts thus both celebrate and critique the institutions of medieval Iceland, especially as these came under increasing pressure from foreign powers in the later thirteenth century. Students of American history and culture will find many useful analogies to contemplate in this course, while those interested in language and literature will experience a distinctive genre of historical fiction, as well as its unique world-view and value system. All these texts explore human relationships in an egalitarian but by no means equal society and are especially effective in depicting relationships between men and women, parents and children, relatives and neighbors, in an intense face-to-face society.

**Requirements for a "Schein"**

Daily reading and discussion of the sagas in class

Final critical essay or research paper

**Required Texts:** *The Sagas of Icelanders: A Selection* (Penguin 2000), ISBN 0141000031

Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jean I. Young (UCal Press 1954)

ISBN 0520012313 or trans. Anthony Faulkes (Dent 1995) ISBN 0460876163

<b>Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:</b>	<b>t.b.a.</b>
---	---------------