

Vikings brought Amerindian to Iceland 1,000 years ago: Study

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The viking replica ship the Fyrdraca is dwarfed by a cruise liner as it leaves the fishing village of L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland July 27, 2000. The first Native American to arrive in Europe may have been a woman brought to Iceland by the Vikings more than 1,000 years ago, a study suggests.

Photograph by: Shaun Best, Reuters

MADRID - The first Native American to arrive in Europe may have been a woman brought to Iceland by the Vikings more than 1,000 years ago, a study by Spanish and Icelandic researchers suggests.

The findings boost widely-accepted theories, based on Icelandic medieval texts and a reputed Viking settlement in Newfoundland in Canada, that the Vikings reached the American continent several centuries before Christopher Columbus travelled to the "New World."

Spain's CSIC scientific research institute said genetic analysis of around 80 people from a total of four families in Iceland showed they possess a type of DNA normally only found in Native Americans or East Asians.

"It was thought at first that (the DNA) came from recently established Asian families in Iceland," CSIC researcher Carles Lalueza-Fox was quoted as saying in a statement by the institute.

"But when family genealogy was studied, it was discovered that the four families were descended from ancestors who lived between 1710 and 1740 from the same region of southern Iceland."

The lineage found, named C1e, is also mitochondrial, which means that the genes were introduced into Iceland by a woman.

"As the island was virtually isolated from the 10th century, the most likely hypothesis is that these genes corresponded to an Amerindian woman who was brought from America by the Vikings around the year 1000," said Lalueza-Fox.

The researchers used data from the Reykjavik-based genomics company deCODE Genetics.

He said the research team hopes to find more instances of the same Native American DNA in Iceland's population, starting in the same region in the south of the country near the massive Vatnajökull glacier.

The report, by scientists from the CSIC and the University of Iceland, was also published in the latest edition of the American Journal of Physical Anthropology.

The journal said 75 to 80 per cent of contemporary Icelanders can trace their lineage to Scandinavia and the rest to Scotland and Ireland.

But the C1e lineage is "one of a handful that was involved in the settlement of the Americas around 14,000 years ago.

"Contrary to an initial assumption that this lineage was a recent arrival (in Iceland), preliminary genealogical analyses revealed that the C1 lineage was present in the Icelandic mitochondrial DNA pool at least 300 years ago.

"This raised the intriguing possibility that the Icelandic C1 lineage could be traced to Viking voyages to the Americas that commenced in the 10th century," said the journal.

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