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<http://northernblue.ca/cblog/archives/102-Why-Did-the-Greenland-Norse-Die-Out,-While-the-Inuit-Thrived.html>

Why Did the Greenland Norse Die Out, While the Inuit Thrived?

“One chapter in Jared Diamond's new book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (Penguin Books), talks about the medieval Norse settlement of Hvalsey, in a remote corner of south west Greenland. Here, the Scandinavian settlers once "wrote in Latin and Old Norse, wielded iron tools, herded farm animals, followed the latest European fashions in clothing - and finally vanished". Diamond asks the question, why did the Norse die out and the local Inuit survive? Thousands of Vikings had made Greenland their home for almost 500 years. They were last heard of in 1410, when ship's captain Thomas Olafsson, brought news to Norway that a Greenlander called Kolgrim had just been burnt at the stake for witchcraft. After that, the colony was forgotten until 1723, when missionaries found the ruins of Hvalsey.

Historians have blamed The Black Death, global cooling, attacks by pirates and even an invasion by the Skraelings - the Inuit - for the decline of the Greenland settlement. But the true cause, suggests Diamond, was far more complex: "The Inuit survived... The Vikings disappearance was not inevitable." Societies that collapsed, like the Mayans or Vikings, were creative and energetic. Their people were not stupid or primitive. The 5,000 Greenland Norse used more sophisticated technologies than the Inuit, including iron-smelting, metal working and dairy farming.

Diamond highlights five key factors responsible for a society's disintegration. Each is enough on its own to trigger collapse, though usually two or more are involved. With the Greenland Viking people, all five factors figured in their demise. The factors are:

1. Attacks by neighbors - the Greenlanders came under attack from the Inuit, who arrived in 1200, and imposed a tribute of walrus tusks and polar bear skin for access to hunting lands.
2. Self-imposed environmental degradation - the Greenlanders stripped their land of trees and turf, ending up without wood to smelt nor decent fields to plant crops.
3. Social and political intransigence and stubbornness - they raised dairy cattle that could barely survive the winter while looking down on the abundant local shoals of cod and herring, because fish was "Skraeling food".
4. Loss of trade - they traded tusks and hides with Norway not for iron or wood, but for religious artifacts, stained glass and vestments for clergy.
5. Climatic change, loss of trade - the Norse starved to death when the medieval Little Ice Age set in, while the Inuit people thrived.”

Questions

-Which of the five factors was the most pivotal for the Viking's demise?

-Was the climate change the stressor for the rest of the factors?

-Why didn't the Vikings learn from the Inuits when they saw that they were dying out and the Inuits were not? This somewhat reminds me of the pilgrim's first winter in America and their learning from natives for survival.