

# DISCOVERY OF AMERICA BY THE NORSE

IN THE 10TH CENTURY

by Gabriel Gravier

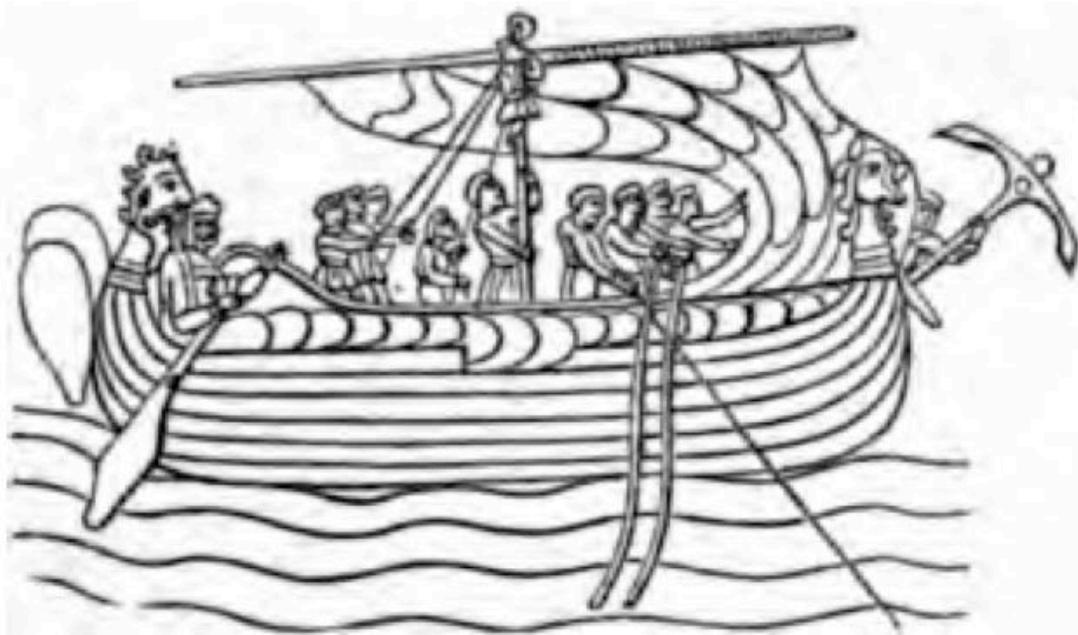
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PARIS ROUEN

1874

Translated with notes by  
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## INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Gravier was a French cartographer and geographer who lived from 1827 to 1904, spending many years in Rouen, France, and dying there. He founded La Société de la Normandie and belonged to numerous other historically-oriented French groups (as you can see under the title before his **Preface**). Among his many works on discovery and exploration is his most well-known, *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, published in 1874. He also wrote *La Route du Mississippi* in 1878 and *Les Voyages de Giovanni de Verrazzano sur les Côtes de l'Amérique avec des Marins Normands* in 1898, to mention only a few. He drew the first map of Madagascar, published in 1904.

As far as we've been able to discover, *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X<sup>e</sup> Siècle* has never been translated into English, nor have any of Gravier's other works. We became interested in *Découverte* when Jan translated Luka Jelic's 1891 work, *L'Évangélisation de l'Amérique*, in 2006 (that translation is available on this website and in NEARA Journal, Winter 2006), since Jelic, also writing in French, referred constantly to Gravier in his notes.

Jelic, a Franciscan friar from Dalmatia (now Croatia) tackled the problem of early North America from a religious point of view. Somewhere along the way, he must have read Gravier; then he plumbed the depths of the Vatican Archives and came up with an impressive amount of information - on the Greenland Church, the amounts of tithes, Peter's Pence, and Crusade tax the Greenland diocese had paid in 1326-27, who collected the goods, and for approximately how much and in what currency the goods were sold in Europe, from which he hypothesized the population of Greenland itself. He listed the dioceses grouped in 1152 under the Archdiocese of Nidaros (now Trondheim, Norway) starting with 1192 and some succeeding years, and appended that information as well as Papal letters concerning Greenland to his scientific paper. His researches could very well have been kicked off by what he'd read in Gravier.

Gravier was a well-known writer in Jelic's time. He was also very French, writing about French explorers such as René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle (1643-1687), also from Rouen, and Giovanni di Verrazzano who, though he was Italian, lived in Dieppe most of his life and sailed for the King of France. Gravier

was also a product of his own time, the 19th century: well-read, well-traveled (even to the United States) and trained in the Classics.

Because of this last, *Découverte* teems with classical references and comparisons. Gravier's references also include writers of his own time. Because so many of us moderns are unversed in the Classics, and many of the famous writers and scientists he knew have been forgotten, these references are hard to understand even when translated in context. Actually, background information on them isn't that hard to find - it's all over the Web these days, and much is found in standard encyclopedias. The best reference to almost everything in the Preface is included in a small book by Barry Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*. What on earth (pun intended) do you suppose Gravier would think of the World Wide Web - not to mention Google Book Search and Google Earth? He'd be stunned - but we think he'd turn into an avid user very quickly.

Nonetheless, he was writing in the 19th century, and we must enter his world to understand what he was trying to convey. This means that we'll have to work hard to suspend judgment on a writer who was fishing around for early references on exploration in the Northern Seas, remembering that he didn't have the tools at hand that we have today; in many cases (such as his discussion on the *Popol Vuh* of the Maya), he didn't have adequate translations.. But he deserves a lot of credit for having searched for information, dismissing nothing as spurious if he could track its sources. Would that certain elements of Academia would do the same today.

To facilitate the reading of *Découverte*, we've brought together as much information on Gravier's sources, words, geographic locations, and concepts as we can find. Yes, we've all heard the names Plutarch, Pliny, Strabo, von Humboldt - but can we say, right off, when they lived and what they wrote and accomplished? And if you know who Brasseur de Bourbourg or Franz Bopp were, you're a whole lot further ahead than we were when we started the project. Rather than clutter up a text already heavy with Gravier's notes, we've indicated ours in bold, with brackets, i.e. [1] and listed them in order of appearance, at the end of each chapter.

A lot of Gravier is tough sailing, even in smoothed-out English. He believed that Atlantis would be found, probably in the Sargasso Sea; he thought that Mexico and Central America were peopled by descendants of Egyptians, Greeks and Asians; he tells stories from Greek mythology, suggesting that the places to which they refer might be real.

Again a supposition: it appears that Gravier came upon the Icelandic Sagas rather suddenly, either because they had been "rediscovered," or because new translations were available. Whatever the case, he was thrilled with them, finding them pragmatic, telling only what they knew - much more trustworthy, he thought,

than old myths and the monkish reports of the Middle Ages. *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X<sup>e</sup> Siècle* is primarily about the Icelanders and their explorations and settlements, based on the material Gravier found in the Sagas. He makes a case for a rediscovery of North America in the 14th century by Prince Henry Sinclair, clearly believing that Prince Henry, as the “count” of the Orkney Islands, was not only Scottish but Norse as well and traveled widely in the North Atlantic, perhaps as far south as New England.

We've begun with a translation of the Table of Contents, Preface, Chapter 1, and chapters concerning Bishop Erik Gnupsson and Prince Henry Sinclair. In Gravier's book, the Table of Contents appears in the back - not a 21st-century convention but certainly a 19th-century one; since we put our Tables of Contents in the fronts of our books, we've done the same with Gravier, so that readers can see what chapters occur and in what order, even before the translations appear. The earlier chapters on the settlement, growth, and decline of Greenland will come in due time. The original *Découverte* can be reached in Google Book Search at <http://books.google.com>, where you can check the French if you wish.

Herewith enormous thanks to Google Book Search: it made the translation of Jelic possible, and now the original of *Découverte* has shown up on that web site as well.

If anyone can add insights on *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, better translations of certain parts, or constructive comments, please let us know via our email addresses on the Chronognostic Research Foundation website. We welcome your help.

We commend you to Gravier and his time. He and his contemporaries may have been wrong (or misguided, at any rate) about many things, but they were traveling, peering around, asking questions, craving knowledge of their world, deeply curious about the unknown, trying to fill gaps in their knowledge. While the world of the 21st century is vastly (one might say woefully) different, it's fascinating to read an early source such as Gravier and see where he was coming from, where he was trying to go, and how his work was colored by his time. We hope that anyone who takes the trouble to sail into this translation of *Découverte* is prepared for slightly rough waters but also as deeply curious as Gravier was to discover what lies beyond the horizon. *Bon Voyage!*

