



## PART SEVEN — NEW DISCOVERY OF AMERICA AT THE END OF THE 14th CENTURY

### CHAPTER UNIQUE — SINCLAIR 1388-1404

**Sinclair family — Its origin and accession to the earldom of the Orkneys. — Henry Sinclair’s conflict with his competitors. — Arrival of Nicolo Zeno in Frisland. — Conquest of Frisland. — Arrival of Antonio Zeno. — Excursions to the Shetlands against the pirates. — Excursions to Iceland and Greenland. — Story of an old Frisland mariner about his voyages in America. — Sinclair establishes himself in Estotiland (Newfoundland or New Brunswick).**

One of the French lords William the Bastard [1] took to the conquest of England was named, according to the Chronicle of Bromton, *Seynt Cler*,<sup>1</sup> according to the lists of Leland, *Lords of S. Clere* “a retainer of the lord of Moisin”<sup>2</sup>; this name was translated in Latin as *Sanctus Clarus*,<sup>3</sup> in Scottish as *Sanct Clare* or *Sinclare*,<sup>4</sup> in modern English as *Sinclair*.<sup>5</sup>

After the conquest, Sinclair found that William was not paying him based on his merits and left to go seek his fortune in Scotland. In this country he met with a courteous reception. Having won the confidence of the prince and the esteem of the people, he rose quickly in fortune and honors. His descendants, heirs of his loyalty and virtues, obtained high offices and filled them to the advantage

<sup>1</sup> *Rerum Anglic. Script.* T. 1, col. 963, ed. Selden.

<sup>2</sup> *Collectanea de rebus britannica*, ed. Hearne, vol I, pp. 202-206.

<sup>3</sup> *Diploma, or deduction, concerning the Genealogies of the Ancient Counts of Orkney, from their First Creation to the Fifteenth Century; Drawn up from the most authentic Records, by Thomas, Bishop of Orkney, with the Assistance of his Clergy, and others, in consequence of an Order from Eric King of Denmark, to investigate the Right of William Sinclair to the Earldom.* Ap. Barry, pp. 401-409. This piece is written in Latin and dated 4 May, 1403.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish translation of the *Diploma* of Thomas, made in 1554, by Deine Thomas Gwle, monk of Newbothill, for William Sinclair. Ap. Barry, pp. 410-419. — *From Sir James Balfour’s Catalogue of the Scottish nobility, ms in the Advocat’s Library*, Edinburgh. He was Lord Lyon King at Arms in the Beginning of King Charles the First’s Reign. Cap. of the Orkney. Ap. Barry, pp. 420-424.

<sup>5</sup> *History of the Orkney Islands*, etc., by the late Rev. Dr. Barry, 2nd ed., with corrections and additions by the Rev. James Headrick; Book II, chap. IV, p. 202. London, 1808.

of royalty and themselves. In the 14th century, this family was represented by William Saint-Clare or Sinclair, baron of Roslin.

From 1343, date of the death of Magnus V, last earl of the line of Rognald, to 1369, date of Sinclair's nomination as earl of the Orkneys, these islands were, so to say, without administration. They were partitioned among several lords who claimed to be descended, through the female line, from ancient Norman princes: William Sinclair was of that number. These chiefs, who kept at a distance because of their own interests, allowed the people to waste the energy needed to protect themselves from pirates, especially Scottish pirates, in their useless disagreements.

Henry Sinclair, William's son, who had the same rights over the Orkneys as Weyland de Ard and Malis Spere, seized the first favorable opportunity to signal to King Hakon the state of the islands and to request complete possession of them.

This favor, contrary to feudal rights but conforming to the interests of the people, was accorded without difficulty.

At the request of the new earl, the King of Scotland forbade his subjects, under the most severe pain, to go pirating in the Orkneys. This interdiction having had, it seems, the desired effect, Sinclair could use all his forces for the repression of the attempts that Malis and Weyland or their heirs used ceaselessly to get back their ancient rights.

Having finally prevented the return of anarchy and strengthened his position by removing his competitors' hopes, in 1379 he solicited from the King of Norway the confirmation of his rights. The King acceded to his demand, but with strict conditions, because he was the subject of a foreign prince. It is believed that the 1,000 gold nobles he offered contributed appreciably to the proving of his merits and the justice of his cause.

Nevertheless, Malis Spere and Weyland de Ard's son, Alexander, never gave up harrying him. The latter, to whom the King of Norway had given the earldom for a year, was made even more dangerous by his piracy. In making war with this representative of royal power, Sinclair could appear to be attacking the Crown. That was the way the King left it until 1379, four years after the nomination of Alexander, probably because of the strength of the conflict, when he confirmed Sinclair in the possession of the earldom.

In 1388, Malis was again in the Shetlands where, according to Barry, he probably plotted against Sinclair again, interfering in the administration perhaps by collecting revenues. "On these grounds, or the likelihood," the two cousins came to arms; Malis Spere was routed with seven men, and the rest of his companions, escaping with difficulty, reached Norway by boat.

The illustrious earl, says Barry once again, first married a daughter of the King of Denmark, who gave him no children; he took a second wife, Jean,

daughter of William Haliburton Lord Irelton, who gave him several children, including a son who succeeded him as Henry II.

Henry II seems to have taken possession of the Orkneys quite soon after the death of his father. If so, he would be the victor over Malis. He was, like his father, a brave and intelligent man, and he reigned with glory.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1388 and 1390, at the moment of Malis's defeat, Nicolo Zeno, from an illustrious Venetian family, armed a ship with hand-picked men and set out to visit England and Flanders.<sup>7</sup>

A terrible storm caught him, and ended by throwing him onto an island which bears the name of Frisland or Frislandia on old maps. The islanders were at the point of doing him harm when the prince of the Orkneys took him under his protection.

In the story published by Marcolini and reproduced in the *Tales* of Ramusio, Nicolo gave the prince the name of Zichmni.

We have before us the list of sovereign earls of the Orkneys since Rognald, father of Rolf, duke of Normandy, to John III, Lord Sinclair, who lived in the middle of the 18th century: the name Zichmni is not found there.<sup>8</sup>

It is certain that, toward the end of the 14th century, Henry Sinclair was earl of the Orkneys; it is equally certain that today we know nothing of how, in that era, men of the North pronounced Sinclair or its equivalent, and how an Italian would hear and translate the name. Writers of high standing, notably Forster<sup>9</sup> and Major,<sup>10</sup> see in Sinclair and Zichmni one and the same person.

Sinclair was brave, warlike, a very clever seaman. He did not want his people robbed by pirates and undoubtedly hoped to make his name glorious.

<sup>6</sup> Barry, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-203.

<sup>7</sup> Assaitto in quel mare da Tramontana con animo di veder l'Inghilterra e la Flandre. (Ramusio, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*. — *Dello Scoprimto dell'isola Frislanda, Eslanda, Engrovelanda, Estotilanda, et Icaria. Fatto per due fratelli Zeni M. Nicolo il Cavaliero, et M. Antonio*. T.II, in Venetia, 1606, f. 230r.

Ramutio (*op. cit.*, f 230r) fixed the date of Nicolo's departure at 1380. But Cardinal Zurla (*Diss. intorno ai viaggi e scopert settentr. di Nicolo e d'Antonio fratelli Zeno*, in the second volume of the work *di Marco Polo e degli altri viaggiatori veneziani*, 1809, pp. 6-94, proves that Nicolo departed between 1388 and 1390. Ramusio's editor could write *mille, e trecento*, and *ottanta* for *mille, e trecento, e novanta*, or even to omit the adjective *otto* after *ottanta*. In any case, the best writers accept the date established by Zurla.

<sup>8</sup> *Table of the Ancient Earls of Orkney, according to the Genealogical Series above stated, also of the Line of these Earls down to this day. A Succession so long continued, and so well vouched for, that no Family in any Nation can boast of the like; Having for its Foundation these concurring Authorities; first those followed by the Little Parliament of this country, in their Genealogical Series before mentioned; Secondly those followed in the Orcades of Torfaeus, and the Orkneyinga Saga; and lastly, the Authority of that great Antiquary, Sir James Balfour, King at Arms, in his Catalogue of the Scots Nobility* (Ap. Barry, App., V, pp. 426-428).

<sup>9</sup> J.R. Forster, *History of the Discoveries and Voyages made in the North*, Translation Breussounet, Paris, 1788, t. I, pp. 328-331.

<sup>10</sup> R.-H. Major, *The Site of the Lost Colony of Greenland Determined, and pre-Columbian discoveries of america confirmed* (Abstract). Ap. Slip of meeting of the royal Geographical Society of 9th June, 1873. — Registered for transmission abroad and published July 11, 1873 (communication of M. d'Avezac).

In this era, northern Europe was overrun by piracy. This intensity of this blight on society can be judged by these examples: Four most important Swedish fortresses were governed by pirates; Archbishop Arendt Clemmensen practiced piracy; the King of four kingdoms, Eric of Pomerania, openly plied this hateful trade.

Under these conditions, a valorous man such as Nicolo Zeno was a valuable acquisition for Sinclair. The prince, recognizing that the Venetian seaman was a clever warrior and a good sailor, hastened to take him into his service and made him captain of the fleet he intended for the conquest of Frisland. Was this island group in anarchy like Scotland and the Scandinavian countries? Did it serve as a hideout for pirates? Whatever it was, the conquest took place and was simple, and Sinclair doubtless counted on his liege lord, the King of Norway, to approve of an accomplished fact.

The admiral [Sinclair] ordered nothing without Nicolo's advice. Sinclair took command of the land army. The fleet and the army, working together, maneuvered near the west coast and were so successful that the whole island was brought to heel in one campaign.

They returned victorious and laden with booty.

They had found to the east fisheries that furnished fish to Flanders, Brittany, England, Scotland, Denmark and Norway. The whole sea around Frisland was full of shoals and rocks; without the Venetians, said Zeno, the fleet would have been lost completely.

Sinclair, "who knew himself to be among valiant men, especially good sailors," made Zeno a knight and rewarded all his companions generously.

Nicolo, happy with his new station, then wrote to his brother Antonio: "If you'd like to see the world, experience various nations, make an illustrious name and a great place for yourself, follow the long route I traveled in the midst of dangers from which I emerged safe and sound; I'll welcome you with the greatest pleasure because you're my brother in valor and in blood."

Antonio received this call from his brother and lived in Frisland for 14 years.<sup>11</sup>

The Isle of Frisland, which Sinclair had just joined to his principality, has been the object of a good many hypotheses. The best geographers agree, however, with reason it seems, to identify it as the Faeroes.

The root of Faeroe is *Fara*; from *Fara* is made successively *Far-Or*, *Faer* and *Fair Island*,<sup>12</sup> a name easily rediscovered as Frisland, which became the

<sup>11</sup> Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t II, ff.230r, and 231r.

<sup>12</sup> Communication from M. d'Avezac. — *Far*, in Danish means battering ram, *Oer*= Isle (Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 318 and 327). So *Far-Oer* can be translated as the Isle of the Battering-Ram [water-hammer], a name describing the Faeroes perfectly.

Frislandia of the Italians.<sup>13</sup> Forster,<sup>14</sup> and Buache<sup>15</sup> have found in the actual names of islands and ports of the Faeroes group a good part of those given by the Zeno brothers.

These islands are shown under the name of Frislandia on the *mappamundi* of Bianco (1436) and Fra Mauro (1459); they are found as well, under the same name, on the maps of Juan de la Cosa (1500), Ruscelli (1561), Mercator (1569 and 1634), Sigurd Stephanius (1570), Michaël Lok (1582), and Gudbrandus Torlacius (1606).

To these authorities, for the most part of considerable weight, may be added that of Christopher Columbus. [see *Historia del Almirante (History of the Admiral)*, by Hernan Colon, translated by Don Devereux, for the text of Hernan's Chapters III and IV at [www.chronognostic.org/resources](http://www.chronognostic.org/resources)]

"In the year 1477, in the month of February, I sailed," he said, "more than 100 leagues beyond Tile [Thule], whose southern part is separated from the Equator some 73° and not 63°, as some geographers claim, and Tile is not located inside the line which ends (embraces, includes) Ptolemy's west. The English, mainly those of Bristol, go with their goods to this island, which is as large as England. When I was there, the sea was not frozen, although the tides were so strong that they rose to 26 brasses and fell as much. It is true that Tile, of which Ptolemy speaks, is found where he places it and today is called Frisland." This passage, observes Humboldt, is doubly remarkable because of the name Frisland, made famous by the voyage of the Venetians Nicolo and Antonio Zeno who, from 1388 to 1404, explored in the North. "Columbus," adds the eminent writer, "certainly did not know of the handwritten journal of Antonio Zeno which, as we know, lay forgotten in the family until 1558, when Marcolini's edition appeared, 60 years after the death of the Admiral and 18 years after that of Fernando who, as a consequence, made no insertions. It is not the Zeno brothers who invented the name Frisland, which we do not confuse with Codfish Island (Stockfish Island,

<sup>13</sup> Lucas Jacobson Debes, who wrote a description of the Faeroes in Danish, in that country in 1670, examined the opinions of scholars on the origin of the name of these islands. He concludes from this study that Faeroe comes from *fare*, which, "in the ancient language of these islands, means the same thing as the word *ferrie*, in English, that is a passage of water; it is this word, doubtless, that should also recall the origins of the names *bosphore*, of *far* and of *fretum*, by which are designated straits. The Fer-oë are, as can be seen on the maps full of gulfs, straits, water passages; it is truly a land of straits. So, it is obvious that they can be called *Ferrie-land* in place of Fer-oë, that is, *land*, in place of *islands*, for the same reason *Shetland* is called *Hitland*, another group of islands similar to this, and which is quite nearby. From Ferrieland to Frisland, it seems to me the difference is not considerable, not to recognize one name in the other." (Buache, *Memoir on the Isle of Frislande* (read 9 July 1785) ap. *Memoires de l'Académie royale des Sciences*, 1784, vol. dated 1787, pp. 450, 451).

According to Gafferel, in the past the Faeroes were called *Fer ey land*, and by a substitution habitual to them, the Norse would change this name to *Fereyland* (Gafferel, *op. cit.*, p. 273).

"Frisland has often appeared as *Faira*, *North Fara*, *South Fara* or *Fara-land*." (Forster *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 286 n.a.)

<sup>14</sup> Forster, *op. cit.*, t. I, pp. 286, 325.

<sup>15</sup> Buache, *op. cit.*, pp. 447-450.

Stokafixa) on André Bianco's seventh atlas map, drawn in 1426."<sup>16</sup> [2]

Frislandia is much larger than any of the Faeroes island group. It is what the ancient geographers sometimes liked to consider as one single land, looking only at the exterior outlines without taking into consideration the channels that divided them. The same error occurs with the Shetlands. One notices on ancient maps, on the other hand, that Newfoundland, which formed a single huge land, is represented as a small island group.

On the maps cited above, Frislandia is placed too far to the west; Michaël Lok even puts it south of the meridian of Cape Farewell. On the other hand, it is always found at the latitude of the Faeroes. This fact is strange only because latitudes are calculated with a fair amount of precision, whereas the mapmakers only knew how to estimate longitudinal distances. Moreover, it is known that the position of a land which has not been determined astronomically can vary very considerably in its proportions.

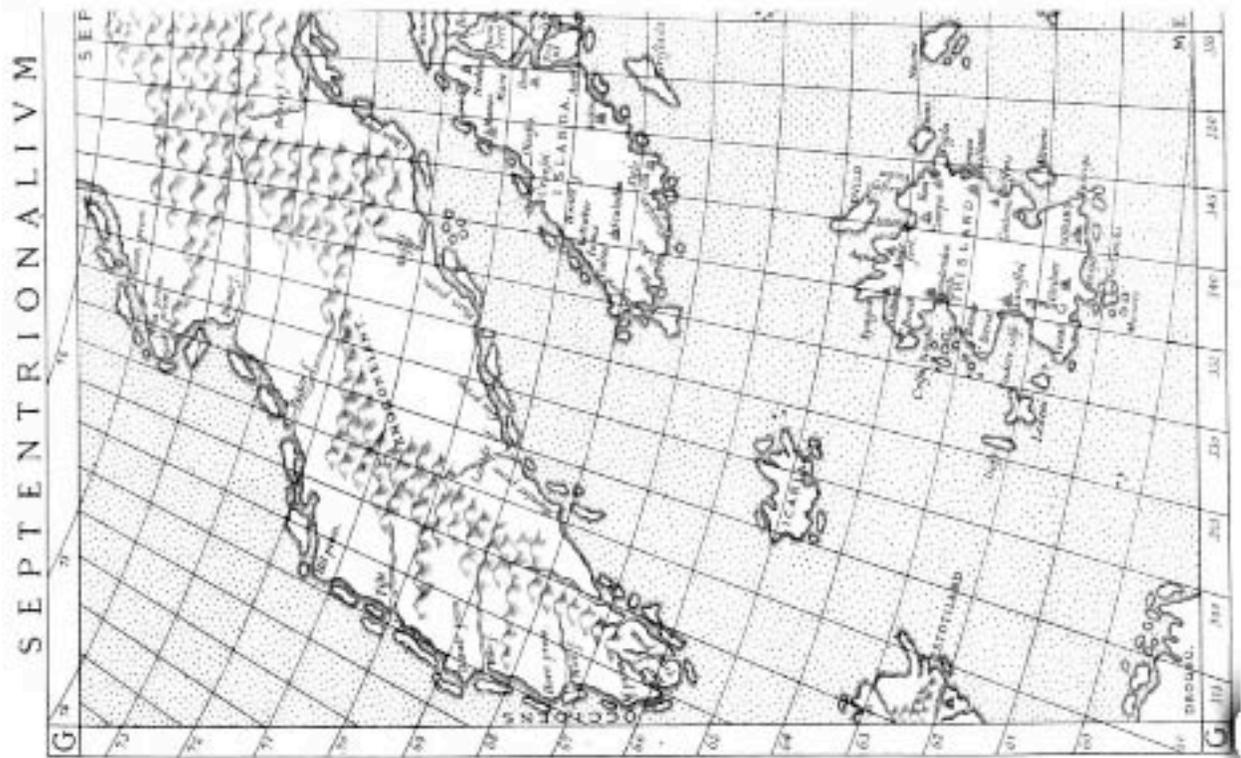
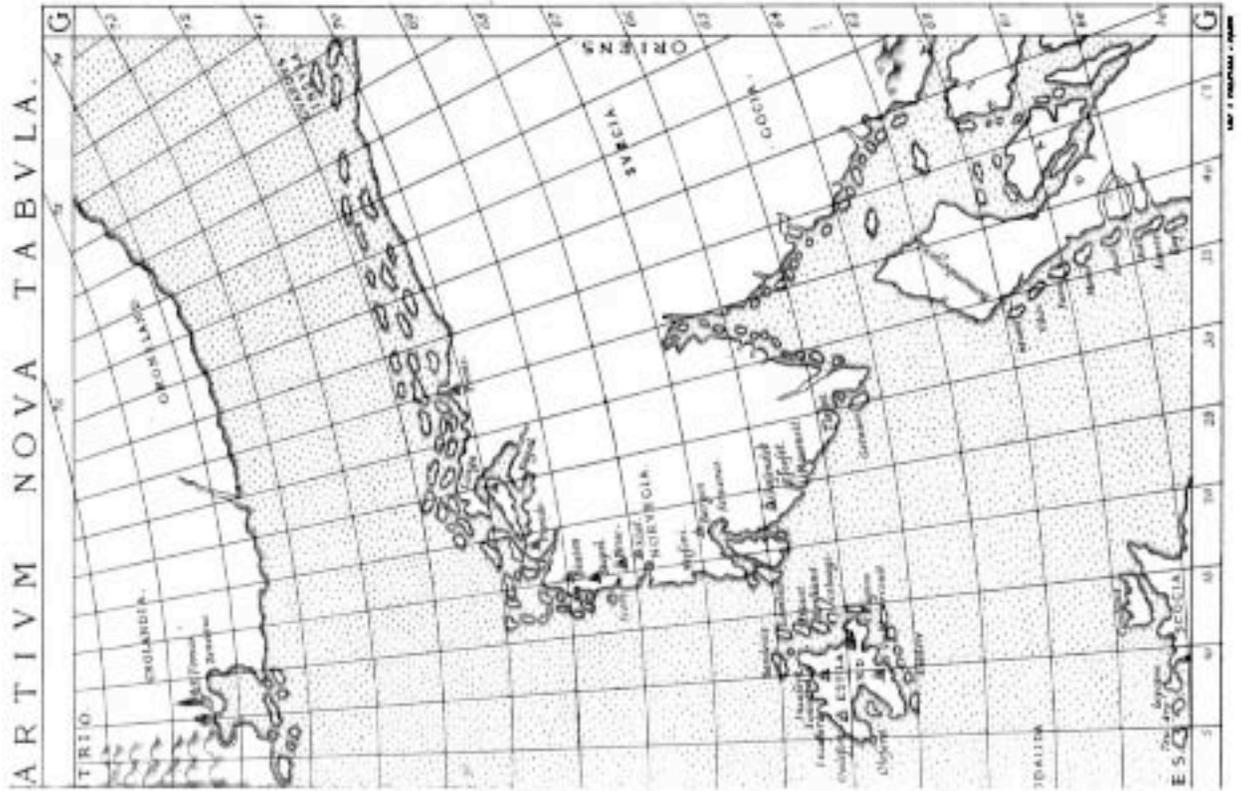
On the portolan maps [3] of the 14th and 15th centuries, coasts were drawn with admirable precision, according to the rhumb lines of the winds, which were indicated by a multitude of lines crossing in all directions but with no mention of latitude or longitude.

The original map of the Zeno brothers, which had to have been made using the same procedures, contains, as does their report, no indication of latitude or longitude. Thus, one cannot attribute to these sailors the errors on the *Carta di navigar* published by Marcolini and reproduced by Girolamo Ruscelli, in his *Geographia di Tolomeo* (1561) under the title *Septentrionalium partium nova tabula*.<sup>17</sup> [4]

---

<sup>16</sup> Humboldt, *Critical Study*, t. II, pp. 105-107.

<sup>17</sup> We give here a *facsimile* of the reproduction of Ruscelli.



Since Frislandia is not found in the place indicated by ancient maps, one might conclude that it is a fantasy, or that floods engulfed it. According to the conjectures of some historians, Vankeulen put this annotation on his maps: “This land is submerged and today is only a quarter of a league around, when the sea is high; a long time ago, there was a large island named Frislandia, which was 100 nautical miles around, and on which there were several villages.” P. Coronelli published a map specifically of Frisland under the title, *Frislandia scoperta da Nicolo Zeno, patricio Veneto, creduta favulosa, o nel mare sommersa*. And yet, he said in his *Isolario*, that the history of the Venetian’s discoveries is held to be authentic. How to square the Venetian tradition with the *creduta favulosa* of the map?

Buache [6] rightly observes that the submersion of so large an island would postulate a terrible turmoil which would have been far-reaching in its effects. Yet, among those who know in their smallest details the ravages the sea caused on the islands near Jutland around AD 800, and those who have the date of the main events on Iceland in the 9th century, one finds no mention of the total submersion of Frisland, which would have had to take place after 1400. “Assumption for assumption,” says the wise geographer, “it seems to me much simpler and more natural to assume an error on the geographic maps, than to accept gratuitously so astonishing a turmoil.”<sup>18</sup>

It has been seen that, according to Nicolo Zeno’s report, Frisland’s waters were well stocked with fish and full of shoals. Today, as in Zeno’s time, fishing is very successful and, each year, many ships travel there.

Frisland, which is now believed to be identified as the Faeroes, became the center of Sinclair’s subsequent expeditions.

Although the prince had conquered the Faeroes, pirates were still ravaging the Shetlands, shown in the Zeno map and reported as a large island named Estland or Estlanda, located between Frisland and Norway. The chronicler says that Nicolo, sent to take them, had to flee before a large fleet of the King of Norway; that this fleet was destroyed in the shoals by a storm, and that Nicolo, after serious losses, had to take refuge on a deserted island called Grislanda, located on the eastern margin of Iceland.<sup>19</sup>

As has been said, history makes no mention of any war between the King of Norway and the Earl of the Orkneys. By the same token, Sinclair was lord of the Shetlands and could have defended them, not conquered them. It is probable that Malis Spere, the loser in 1388, had started his depredations again, that the “Norwegian” fleet actually was manned by Spere’s companions, Alexander de

---

<sup>18</sup> Buache, *op. cit.*, p. 434

<sup>19</sup> Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, f 231R.

Ard, former earl of the Orkneys, or Scandinavian pirates.

Realizing that his enemy's fleet was destroyed and that his own was within sight of Iceland, Sinclair attempted to land there.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Zeno map and report, the Orkney Islanders recognized seven islands on the Icelandic coast, named Talas, Broas, Iscant, Trans, Mimant, Dambert, and Bres. Sinclair left Nicolo, several sailors, and munitions on Bres.

It is rightly objected that Icelandic annals say nothing about this invasion; that there are no islands at the place indicated; that the names given by Antonio are not Nordic.

It would be foolish to contest the gravity of the first objection. However, one can answer: that many of the Icelandic chronicles are lost or no longer known by scholars; that Antonio was mistaken about the goal of the expedition; that Icelanders, Frislanders, and Orcadians were originally related by blood and connected by trade; that historians of the Faeroes claim that their country and Iceland were often at war.

One can respond to the second objection that the south of Iceland is indented with numerous fjords and long rivers such that careless observers could mistake that part of the island for a small island group. Such an error, we have already seen, is produced by Newfoundland.

As for the improbability of the names, it has been noticed that travelers distort sounds in languages they do not know, especially, says Humboldt, when false knowledge guides interpretations.

In place names cited by the natives of Haiti, Cuba, Veragua [6], Columbus believed he recognized those of towns whose marvels were described by Marco Polo.<sup>21</sup> The Zeno brothers were no better than the illustrious Genoan and could have rendered the Scandinavians names unrecognizable.

The following July Nicolo left the fort on Bres and headed north, in hopes of discovering new lands.

He landed in a country named in the report Engroveland, on the map Grolandia. There he found, at 69° north latitude,<sup>22</sup> a monastery of the Preaching Friars and a church dedicated to St. Thomas. In the vicinity was a mountain that spouted flames, like Vesuvius or Etna, and a source of hot water used to heat the monastery and the church, and feed the kitchen and garden. [7]

The monks were Norwegians, Danish, especially Icelandic. They usually spoke Latin. The natives, marveling at their skills, took them for demigods, recognized them as lords, and provided for their needs.

<sup>20</sup> Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, f231r.

<sup>21</sup> Humboldt, *Critical Examination*, t. II, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> Due to a defect of the projection, all the parts of the Carta di navigar are 5°30' trop far north. The map indicates 74°30" instead of 69°.

The hot water source kept the small bay which lay before the monastery constantly liquid and full of fish. Ships from all the countries of the North came and exchanged European products for furs and dried fish. In winter, late-leaving ships were imprisoned by the ice.<sup>23</sup>

With incredible ease and audacity, the native got around in skin canoes resembling the kayaks described by X. Marmier<sup>24</sup> [8] and Doctor Hayes.<sup>25</sup>

No one has returned to the monastery of St. Thomas and its church. However, their existence is no less certain for all that.

Past authors on the North claim that in 1244 a monastery was founded on the Greenland Coast [9]. Mercator, who summarized the Venetians' report, says, "We know of two settlements in Greenland: Albe and the monastery of St. Thomas."<sup>26</sup> On his map of the North Pole, whose projection is more accurate than Ruscelli's, Albe and St. Thomas are located at 70 N latitude.

In 1564, when the leader of Iceland collected revenues from the convent of Helgaffoël, an old monk, who claimed to have lived at St. Thomas, gave a description of the monastery that conformed to that of the Zenos. The same year, 1564, a ship was ordered to verify the monk's report. With great difficulty, the seamen scaled the ice wall that bordered the mainland. This difficulty behind them, they found themselves in the presence of a group of white bears and suffered from incredibly intense cold. Failing to complete their mission, they returned straightway to Iceland.<sup>27</sup>

The difficulties which stopped the Icelanders did not prevent the wanderings of the Eskimos. One of their bands that came into the Danish colonies, probably to trade, claimed that they had seen ruins of settlements farther north on the east coast of Greenland. These ruins, says, Malte-Brun, [10] are perhaps those of the monastery of St. Thomas.<sup>28</sup>

Scoresby [11] found, at 70° N, in long, deep fjords, settlements like those of Eskimos, and land covered with grasses and medicinal plants.

Moravian brothers saw, in old eastern Greenland, undulating open country and gulfs which, like the bay at St. Thomas, stay open behind enormous masses of drift-ice, which polar currents push from the northern darkness to the Gulf of Mexico. They also met tribes that maintained relations with other tribes much

---

<sup>23</sup> Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, f. 231, r. and v.

<sup>24</sup> X. Marmier, *Letters from Iceland*, pp. 29, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Doctor Hayes, *Voyage to the free sea of the Arctic pole. (Le Tour du Monde, t. XVII, pp. 118 and 121).*

<sup>26</sup> *Atlas minor Gerardi Mercatoris à J. Hondio plurimis-aeneis Tabulis auctus et illustratus: denuo recognitus additisque novis delineationibus emendatus. Amsterdam, 1634, p. 22.*

<sup>27</sup> Gafferel, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>28</sup> Malte-Brun, *Glance of the geographical discoveries which remain to be done and the best way to do them. (Nouvelles Annales de Voyages, t. I, 1819, pp. 95-97).*

farther north.<sup>29</sup>

From 1828 to 1830, Captain Graah, a Danish seaman, encountered, at the 69th parallel, around 600 people of European type.<sup>30</sup> This small tribe had been subjected to wars, epidemics and excessively rigorous winters; it can be considered as a fragment providentially conserved to attest to history the existence of European colonies in these countries.

The hot springs of the small Onartok [Unartoq] Island are not the only ones in Greenland. Malte-Brun identified two others but without noting their positions. On 11 June 1783, during the period of the horrifying eruption of Krapta-Syssel [12], between the 67th and 77th parallels, in the midst of huge masses of snow, a volcano sent up three immense columns of fire that could be seen from Iceland.<sup>31</sup> Whalers felt shocks at sea and saw masses of floating pumice which seemed to indicate the existence of volcanos around 75 ° N latitude.<sup>32</sup>

The bay at St. Thomas is now inaccessible, but in earlier times it could have been open for several months of the year. The continuous growth of the glaciers causes the climate to be more and more rigorous, the country less and less habitable. For this reason alone, the east coast, like the west coast, was in much better condition than it is today and could have possessed (granted, 500 years ago), the convent of monks of which Antonio Zeno speaks.

There is no reason to deny the existence of this convent or to suppose, contrary to the precise text of the report, that it was located on a coast farther south.

Nicolo was no longer of an age to leave easily the lagoons of Venice and the confines of the habitable world. The rigorous climate of St. Thomas became fatal to him. He tried in vain to find a gentler temperature in Frisland. He died a short time after his return. For four years, he had worked usefully for Sinclair's success in the Northern Seas.

\* \* \* \* \*

In that time [late 1300s, early 1400s], an old Frislandian seaman claimed to

<sup>29</sup> *Nouvelles Annales de Voyages*, t. XX, 1823, p. 421.

<sup>30</sup> *Nouvelles Annales de Voyages*, t. XIII, 1822, p. 287.

<sup>31</sup> Malte-Brun, *op. cit.*, liv. CIII, t. v. p. 55.

“See the excellent report by Magnus Stephenson, in Hooker's Travels in Iceland, p. 423. The assumption of a distance of 156 miles, viewed from the horizon, gives to this luminous phenomenon a height of 20,000 feet. One knows of basalts and dolorites, as well as trachytes and active volcanoes in Greenland, searched for by Giesecke and other naturalists. Is it certain that the luminous eruption did not come out of the sea, and therefore nearer to Iceland? However, the fires that rose in three immense columns, on 11 June, 1783, near the Skapta and HwerfisfliUot rivers, were also seen, according to Magnus Stephenson, at the distance of 56 nautical leagues.” (Hooker's Tour, p. 409, cited by Humboldt, *Critical Examination*, t. II, p. 93, note 2).

<sup>32</sup> Malte-Brun, *op. cit.*, liv. CIII, t. v, p. 55.

have seen rich and populous lands in the west.

Twenty-six years before [about 1326?], he said, four fishermen were sailing at sunset. Hit by a terrible storm, they were lost for a long while in the torrents. With the return of good weather, they found themselves a thousand miles from their own country, near an island called Estotiland. A crew of six men picked up the islanders and took them to a very pretty, very populous town. The chief summoned several interpreters, but none knew the Northern language and would not have been able to speak to them if a person from the Mediterranean had not arrived in the area via the luck of the sea. When the chief found they were Frislanders and were sailing for fish, he decided to keep them. They submitted voluntarily, not being able to do otherwise, staying five years in the country and learning the language.

One of them remembered that Estotiland is somewhat smaller than Frisland but more fertile; that it is watered by four rivers that have their source in a mountain; that the inhabitants are smart and appear to have had connections with Frisland long ago, because they practice all the arts, especially because there are, in the chief's library, some Latin books which they no longer understand.<sup>33</sup> Their language and alphabet differ from Frisland's. The country is rich in furs, sulfur, and pitch. It is said that to the south are found populous countries rich in gold.

The inhabitants grew grain and made beer. The country was covered with forests, towns, and large houses. There were boats but the use of the compass was not known.

The Frislanders, held in high esteem because of their nautical knowledge, were sent to Drogió, a southern region, with a dozen ships. A terrible storm, which the *Gulf Stream* often causes in those areas, threw them onto an unknown coast, frequented by cannibals. Some men were saved only because one of them taught the chief how to fish with a net.

Their reputation spread far. A neighboring chief captured them in his turn. The Patagonians even argued over the possession of the unlucky Guinard, whose superior intelligence they admired, and they wound up making a martyr of him.

They came to a very great country, and like a new world,<sup>34</sup> of uncouth people who went naked unless covered with the skins of animals they killed, not having metal points, with wooden spears and bows, fighting ferociously and eating their prisoners.

But farther along, toward the southwest, said the old fisherman, is found better manners because of the gentleness of the climate. There are cities, temples,

---

<sup>33</sup> ...e credili, che altri tempi havessero commercio con i nostri, perche dice d'aver veduti libri Latini nella libreria del Re, che non vengono hors da lors intesi. (Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, f.323 a.)

<sup>34</sup> Et dice il paese essere grandissimo, et quasi un nuovo mondo. (Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, f. 232b.)

and idols to whom men are sacrificed and later eaten. Something is known about the use of gold and silver there.<sup>35</sup> [13]

The fisherman resolved to return to his country. His companions did not dare attempt the same adventures and let him leave alone. He fled through the woods, and went back to the chains of his old masters, who no longer had awaited his return, and ended by getting to Drogio. He was there for three years when he was picked up by a ship from Estotiland.

He sailed for some time with the seamen who had taken him on board and became rich enough to equip a ship with his earnings and to return to his own country, “carrying to his lord news of the discovery of this incredibly rich land.”

\* \* \* \* \*

On the basis of this story, whose accuracy was confirmed by the sailors, Sinclair decided to attempt the conquest of these distant countries. He armed a large fleet for this purpose.

“Our preparations for departure to Estotiland, said Antonio, were made under poor auspices. Three days before we left, the old fisherman, who was to have been our guide, died. Not wishing to abandon his project, Zichmni replaced him with some of the sailors who had seen Estotiland.”

After adventures at sea which put the fleet in danger, Sinclair came into a good port; “but a people, numerous and quite willing to defend themselves, did not let him land.” All his efforts to land at any point on the island failed before the watchfulness and courage of the natives.

Antonio calls the island Icaria, and to the chief of Icaria, whom he believed descended from the so-called Dedalus, king of Scotland, he gives the name Icarus.

Sinclair realized that he could accomplish nothing in this country and that to persist in his project would mean that he would run out of supplies. He raised anchor in good weather and sailed for six days to the west; the sea became rough and the wind, turning to the southwest, put wind in his sails for four days, when land was sighted. Sinclair sent several men to reconnoiter this land, who returned with good news, that the land was very beautiful and the anchorage excellent. He took his ships in and landed.

He found waters well stocked with fish, a coast frequented by masses of sea birds. Thinking that the land was not inhabited, he called the port and the promontory *Trin*.

Seeing in the distance a mountain that was smoking, he sent 100 men to

---

<sup>35</sup> Ma piu che si va verso Garbino, vi si trova piu cvilité per l’aera temerato, che v’e: di maniere, che si sono città, templij a gli idoli, et vi sacrificano gli huomini, et se li mangiano poi, havendo in questa parte quaiche intelligenza et uo dell’oro, et dell’ argento. (Ramusio, *op. cit.*, f. 232 c).

scout it. After being gone eight days, the men apprised him that the smoke issued from a large underground passage and from a fountain which ejected a tar-like substance toward the sea; that there were numerous people there, partly savage, of small stature, who hid in caves at their approach; that a large river flowed close by and there was a good harbor.

The Norman captain learned these details with pleasure. Finding an additional salubrious harbor, with plenty of rainfall, and fertile, he decided to found a settlement.

But his men were tired after the length and uncertainties of the voyage. Many wished to return to their families. Some were afraid to spend the winter in a country they did not know. Sinclair could do nothing to hold them. He gave his admiral Antonio command of some vessels and all those who wished to return to Frisland with him.

“I left there,” says Antonio, “but against my better judgment. I sailed to the east for 20 days. Finally, turning to the southeast, I arrived at Neome Island [14], where I realized that I had passed Iceland. I took on supplies on that island, which had submitted to Zichmni; returning to the route with a good wind, I made Frisland in three days, where the people, believing that they had lost their prince because of the length of his absence, gave evidence of the greatest joy.”<sup>36</sup>

Sadly, the rest of the story is lost, along with various works. Antonio told his son Carlo *il Grande* about the natural history and laws of the Northern Countries, about Nicolo’s expeditions and the life of Zichmni. This loss is infinitely regrettable because the admiral may have given in these works precise, decisive information on the expeditions made in his time in northern and western regions.

Nonetheless, certain of the facts just recounted allow a glimpse of the truth.

The names Dedalus and Icaria are but mythological reminiscences. Antonio, like all the patricians of the noble class of Venice, was very lettered. Imbued with poetic memories of Rome and Athens, unused to Northern dialects, he believed he had found in the sounds he heard badly the familiar sounds of his boyhood. The presence, on the frontiers of America, of Scottish or Irish colonists, would not have been all that surprising. The only impossibility regarding Isle of Icaria is its name.

Ruscelli’s and Ortelius’s maps place it between Iceland, Greenland, and Estotiland, in a location where no lands was known. But it is known, says Buache, that the position of an island not fixed by astronomical observations can vary from two to three hundred leagues. Maps given in the journals of navigators and the estimates of pilots produce errors that make the estimates suspect. In the time of

<sup>36</sup> Ramusio, *op. cit.*, t. II, ff. 231 v. - 233 v.

the great navigators and the first discoveries, these errors were quite considerable. It happened that an island seen by three navigators was regarded by each of them as a new discovery, and placed on maps in three different positions under different names. The *Georgia* of Cook, for examples, is the same as *St. Peter Island* of Duclos-Guyot, and the *Land of La Roche* of Captain de la Roche. In 1708, the knight Hébert gave his name to the islands of Tristan da Cunha, which he believed to be at 400 leagues.<sup>37</sup> “We have had occasion to notice,” says M. d’Avezac, “speaking of the Trinity Islands and of Martin Vas, that Ascension Island, shown on the old maps 100 leagues to the west of Trinity is simply a doubling, a second rendering of the same Trinity Island. Such errors, as enormous as they are, were common in earlier times; the Portuguese, even in their best estimations of their routes, assumed a distance of 120 leagues between Trinity and the Islets of Martin Vas, and we know quite well that his distances is only nine leagues.”<sup>38</sup>

Icaria could have been the object of a like error and found much closer to the coast than is indicated on Ruscelli’s map. Zurlas and von Eggers make it correspond to Newfoundland, and this hypothesis seem closer to the truth.

It is probably in the Estotiland of the old fisherman that one ought to look for the new settlement of the earl of the Orkneys.

The word *Estotiland* appears to be a literal translation of the Nordic *East-outland*, outlying land of the east, a true name when compared with the location of Labrador, New Brunswick and the Newfoundland.

According to the story, Estotiland is mountainous, with much rainfall, covered with vast forests; Latin books were found in the library of the chief and the inhabitants, initiates into the arts of Europe, appeared to have connections with men of the North; Markland is mountainous, with good rainfall, and must be the name given to its forests by Leif the Lucky; the Latin books recall the martyrdom of Jonus, the preaching of Bishop Erik and the nation of Cross-bearers; the knowledge of our arts brings to mind the memory of the Norse colonists.

On the other hand, the name Estotiland suits Newfoundland better than it does Labrador or New Brunswick: the old fisherman said that Estotiland is an island a little smaller than Iceland, and the English found of this island the remains of stone walls and Flemish money that seem to bespeak the passage of Sinclair.

Forster<sup>39</sup> and Malte-Brun<sup>40</sup> who, besides placing Vinland wrongly in Newfoundland, think that this latter land is the Estotiland of the Frislanders.

The distances noted in the story allow us to affirm that Estotiland is in

<sup>37</sup> Buache, *op. cit.*, pp. 435, 436.

<sup>38</sup> d’Avezac, *Les Iles d’Afrique (The Isles of Africa)*, Part 3, p. 299. (Coll. de l’Univers).

<sup>39</sup> Forster, *op. cit.*, t. I, pp. 322, 323.

<sup>40</sup> Malte-Brun, *op. cit.*, Book XVIII, t. I, p. 208.

America, but they are too vague to allow us to measure them on the map.

According to the old seaman, Estotiland was 1000 miles from Frisland. These 1000 miles, estimated in relation to 200 leagues (Norwegian or Danish) correspond to 350 of our nautical leagues. The distance from the Faeroes to the coast of America being around 500 leagues, we are left with a difference of 150 leagues. But besides the fact that the seaman, who was carried by the current, could have been mistaken in his estimate, it is possible, as Buache observes, that he reduced the distance in order to cause Sinclair to rediscover the land of his own discovery more readily.

Antonio tells us that, leaving Cape Trin, he sailed 20 days to the east; that having left the cape to the southeast he arrived in five days at Neome Island, which was part of the Faeroes. It results from these details that it is necessary to count 20 days "marche" from Cape Trin to the meridian of the Faeroes. One day's navigation under sail in good weather represents no less than 24 or 25 leagues, and 200 days around 500 leagues, to be the distance from the Faeroes to the coast of America.

Drogio, which came after Estotiland, is barely touched on in the story. Lelewel, and after him the scholar Kohl, confuses it with Vinland or New England.<sup>41</sup> This opinion rests only on the *Carte di Navigar*, but it is quite sustainable from the moment one admits to the authenticity of the Zeno brothers' story.

As for the land to the southwest, which had cities, temples, and idols, which sacrificed human victims to its gods and knew gold and silver, that can only be Florida. Several authors lean toward Mexico, but wrongly, it seems, because this province is separated from the east coast of North America by obstacles that one man alone would not know how to overcome.

In summary, it is incontestable that, at the very beginning of the 15th century, the Norse once again planted their standard on the coast of America, be it in New Brunswick or be it Newfoundland. [15]



---

<sup>41</sup> Kohl, *op. cit.*, p. 105, 106.

**PART SEVEN**  
**Chapter Unique: 1388-1404**  
**NOTES**

- [1] **William the Bastard** William I of England (1027-1087), illegitimate and only son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy (hence the name William the Bastard), who named him as heir to Normandy; also known as William the Conqueror; Duke of Normandy from 1035 and King of England from 1066 to his death; to claim the English crown, William invaded England in 1066 with an army of Normans against Anglo-Saxon forces of Harold Godwinson (who died in the conflict) at the Battle of Hastings; suppressed subsequent English revolts in what has become known as the Norman Conquest; his reign brought Norman culture to England and had an enormous effect on the subsequent course of England in the Middle Ages – political changes, changes to English law, a building and fortification program, changes in the English language and the adoption of French that lasted nearly 300 years, and the introduction of continental European feudalism into England; his heir to the English throne was his second son, William Rufus, who died without issue and was succeeded by his third son, Henry.
- [2] **“In the year 1477...”** Although cited by Gravier as having been found in a work of Alexander von Humboldt, this quotation of Christopher Columbus originally came from a biography of him written over 1537-1539 by his son, Hernan Colon, entitled *History of the Admiral*, where von Humboldt must have seen it; unfortunately, confusion reigned along the way, and Gravier incorrectly assumed that it was Columbus himself who said, “It is true that Thule, of which Ptolemy speaks, is found where he places it and today is called Frisland”; but it was Columbus’s son who actually wrote the particular line about Thule being where his father (not Ptolemy) placed it, and it was also Columbus’s son who then mistakenly identified it as Frisland; Frisland, of course, is a group of small islands north of England presently called the Faeroes; while it is now widely accepted that Columbus’s Thule indeed is Iceland, it was the Admiral himself who was wrong about its distance from the Equator – the southern coast of Iceland really is only about 63°N latitude, just as some other geographers had claimed; finally, Columbus’s curious report of immense tides of 150 feet still has scholars scratching their heads.
- [3] **Portolan maps** Sea-charts; portolans were critical documents in the emergence of modern mapmaking appearing in the late 13th century in the two

maritime centers of northern Italy and eastern Spain; characterized by accurate, empirically-based cartography, they were secular, working documents showing only what mariners observed and could rely on.

[4] **Septentrionalium partium nova tabula, by Girolamo Ruscelli (1561)** To view the map, rotate it 90° (north is to the left); the break in the center represents about 5°, probably lost in the gutter during the printing of Gravier's book. Ruscelli (1500-1566) was an Italian humanist and cartographer.

[5] **Buache** Phillippe Buache (1700-1773), French geographer and cartographer, became royal cartographer in 1729, elected to the Academy of Sciences in 1730; his physiographic system divided the Earth's surface into four basins, separated by a scaffolding of mountain ranges over land and beneath the oceans; he applied this theory particularly to the geography of North America and the Pacific Ocean; from Russian discoveries in the Bering Sea, he deduced the existence of Alaska and the Aleutians; he was also a pioneer in the use of contour lines to express relief on maps published *Atlas Physique* in 1754. Along with many geographers of the time, he believed in the existence of a southern continent, a hypothesis that was confirmed by later discoveries. Robert Wilde says, "His 1739 map [of Antarctica] is part of a European-wide attempt to explore and record the shape of the world. Maps were made, records examined, and many theories were proposed which, even if they proved wrong, were still part of a grand intellectual effort...."

[6] **Veragua** Name of five territorial entities in Central America, beginning in the sixteenth century during the Spanish colonial period, based on an indigenous name for the region.

[7] **a monastery of the Preaching Friars and a church dedicated to St. Thomas** Poul Nørlund ("Viking Settlers in Greenland and their Descendants during 500 Years," 1936) says, "... both a nunnery and a monastery were built, the former on a mild and fertile plain right opposite the island Unartok [Unartok], where the only hot springs in Greenland are to be found, the other hidden away among enormous mountains in a grey valley in deep Ketilsfjord (Tasermiut). They were founded in the course of the 12th and 13th centuries. In any case they were there in 1308." Aage Roussell ("Farms and Churches in the Medieval Settlements of Greenland," 1941) describes and pictures the monastic church at Ketils-fjord, a small church with a door in the south wall and surrounded by an irregular, six-sided dike. Since this monastic church was

back in the mountains (but still in the Eastern Settlement), the Benedictine convent at Uunartoq is very likely the St. Thomas described by Gravier.

[8] **X. Marmier** Xavier Marmier (1808-1892), novelist, traveler, translator of Nordic literature, editor-in-chief of *Revue Germanique*; conservator, then administrator general of the Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève.

[9] **Greenland Coast** As the world began to rediscover the early Norse colonization of Greenland, there initially was confusion about the locations of the Norse Eastern Settlement and Western Settlement, the former first thought to have been on Greenland's east coast, facing the ocean; in fact, however, the Eastern Settlement founded by Erik the Red in the late 10th century really was low on Greenland's west coast, just around and up from Cape Farewell, while the Western Settlement was located some distance to the northwest, farther up the same coast; accordingly, the monastery of St. Thomas would have been in the Eastern Settlement but not on the east coast of Greenland, as subsequently placed by Gravier and others.

[10] **Malte-Brun** Conrad Malte-Brun (1755-1826), Danish-French geographer, supporter of the French Revolution and freedom of the press; founder of *Les Annals des Voyages* in 1807 and *Les Annales des Voyages, de la Géographie et de l'Histoire* in 1819, which encouraged observations and reports as a basis for research; served as first secretary of the new Société de Géographie from 1822 to 1824.

[11] **Scoresby** William Scoresby, English Arctic explorer, scientist and divine; traveled first with his father on the whaler *Resolution*; in 1807 began the study of meteorology and natural history of polar regions, and made original observations on snow and crystals; as captain of the *Resolution*, during his voyage of 1813, he established for the first time that Arctic waters are warmer at depth than on the surface; was first to search for the North-West Passage.

[12] **Krapta-Syssel** Apparently a volcano, which Gravier thought was in Greenland, but not found.

[13] **There are cities, temples, and idols...** This is the first mention of lands to the southwest; one has to assume from Gravier's text that the old Frislander did not actually see these places, but it would seem to confirm that reports of places to the southwest in the New World certainly were beginning to filter

north by the 14th century if not sooner; as will be seen later in Gravier's text, he believed that the southwestern location in question must be Florida, not Mexico as indicated by some others; in retrospect, however, compelling suggestions can be found in the work of Fra Luka Jelic and elsewhere - not to mention the description alone - that Mexico best fits the bill, even including hints that information about Mexico actually could have reached Europe as early as the 12th century.

**[14] Neome Island** Looking at Google Maps, one can make the case that if Zeno "passed Iceland" he may have stopped at Jan Mayen Island, which is the only island north of Iceland, unless he actually made Spitzbergen; readers can take their pick here; either Zeno's sailing directions are not clear, or Gravier reported them incorrectly.

**[15] ...New Brunswick or Newfoundland** To the contrary, some Sinclair scholars now believe that he might have reached as far south as Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay in the late 14th century; in that event, his Estotiland and the earlier Norse Vinland might prove to be virtually synonymous, ranging from Canada's Maritime Provinces in the north down along the seaboard of New England in the south; and that in turn would place Drogió even farther south, possibly somewhere along the coast of the U.S. Mid-Atlantic states.