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THE EVANGELIZATION OF AMERICA

BEFORE COLUMBUS

BY

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[front matter]

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Translator's Preface

Since we first translated *l'Évangélisation de l'Amérique avant de Christophe Colomb* and added it to the Chronognostic Research Foundation's web site, it has also appeared in the Winter 2006 issue of *NEARA Journal*. At the time of the translation, we weren't able to find English translations of two Papal letters included in Jelic's Appendix. Since then, however, translations of the letters concerning Greenland from Pope Nicolas V and Pope Alexander VI were found and excerpted from The Norroena Society's 1906 publication, ***The Flatey Book, and recently discovered Vatican manuscripts concerning America as early as the Tenth Century***, published by the Society in 1906, and located in Google Book Search at books.google.com. Many thanks to Google Book Search for having made these translations available to the general public. Other Latin text has not yet been translated (in many Footnotes and some of the Appendix) but will appear in due time.

It is often asked, why bother translating material from the 19th century, much of which is colored by incomplete information or mistaken beliefs? We've made these works available for the first time in English because they relate to questions writers, historians, and explorers were beginning to ask about knowledge of North America before Columbus hit the Bahamas with a thud heard 'round the world. Luka Jelic made constant references to a work by Gabriel Gravier, *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X^e siècle*, written in 1874, as you'll see in Jelic's footnotes.

That brought up the question, "What did *Gravier* know and when did *he* know it?" Then, as Gravier's original French began to yield its meaning, more footnotes provided material even further back in time. One has to keep hoping that, the further back in secondary sources we travel, the closer we come to the primary sources, written at the time of the action. It's every historian's dream to travel back in time and *experience* the action. Primary sources are the only way to do that, considering that time travels in only one direction in our part of the universe (science fiction notwithstanding), and we can't actually walk the streets of 12th-century Dublin or sail the Northern seas. Would that we could.

Luka Jelic had access to true primary sources regarding Norway and the islands of the North Atlantic, including - especially including - Greenland. He was a cleric and, from his reading of Gravier, he searched the extensive archives of the Vatican to find *actual* references from the *actual* time period of the Greenland church - and (to use a

lovely French expression) *Voilà!* - there they were! The Vatican sources provided details of the products, taxation and, by inference, the population of Greenland, along with hypotheses on what might have happened to the Greenlanders and what action two Popes took, or at least tried to take (mostly without success) to help them. This is the use of primary source material at its best.

Gravier also had primary sources at his disposal and may well have been the first to write a popular history to publicize them. He had the *Icelandic Sagas*, and he reports on the Icelanders' life ways, saying that the Sagas are clear and simple; for Gravier, they were really the only way to experience early life in Iceland, Greenland, and elsewhere in North America. The Chronognostic Research Foundation web site now includes Gabriel Gravier, who will yield up what he knew as we gradually translate the chapters of *La Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X^e siècle*.

Footnotes in *The Evangelization of America before Christopher Columbus* have not been added; they are the author's original footnotes. Translation questions or comments are in [brackets] and in a sans-serif font if needed for clarity. Publication titles in the footnotes either have not been translated or include the original title.

Typesetting conventions have been changed to standard American. Pagination does not follow the original which numbered the footnotes from 1 for each page. In this translation, footnotes are numbered in sequence throughout the whole document.

—JFB

THE EVANGELIZATION OF AMERICA

BEFORE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

By Dr. Luka JELIC

Of Spalato (Dalmatia).

That America was known to Europeans before its discovery by Christopher Columbus is a point generally acknowledged. But that Christianity was spread in America before Christopher Columbus is a question that demands precise proofs.¹

The tradition, as old as Egypt, about the existence of an immense continent beyond the Atlantic Ocean, a tradition upheld by Plato,² was always sustained during the Middle Ages. This is a fact of no small importance for giving the tradition a foundation of certainty. In the 6th century A.D., Irish monks under the rule of St. Brendan searched for the transatlantic world, considered till then a myth. They discovered this world, lived there for some years, then returned to their own country.³ In times afterward, several attempts to rediscover the transatlantic islands visited by the Irish monks were unsuccessful. However, the memory of this discovery was not lost. Cosmographers Honoré d'Autin (1112-1137⁴) and Gervais de Tilbury (1211⁵) are there for the proof of it. Moreover, we have the testimony of the cosmographic maps of the Middle Ages.⁶

True, we find there only a vague idea of the existence of a world beyond the Atlantic, an idea into which is mixed a legendary element emerging from the myths of antiquity. But we have other sources that tell us that the American continent was not only known, but even colonized by Northern Europeans of the 10th century. The Norse Sagas form a group of historical testimonies that do not lack value and by which Greenland would have been known to Norman explorers

¹ One of the best works which treats these two questions with enough length is by G. Gravier, *Découverte de l'Amérique par les Normands au X^e siècle* [Discovery of America by the Norse in the 10th century]. Paris-Rouen, 1874.

² *Timée*, edited by Didot-Schneider, t. II, p. 202; *Critias*, edited by Didot-Schneider, t. II p. 2151; see *Schol. Platon. Tim.*, Didot-Mueller. *Fragmenta histor. graec.*, t. IV, p. 443, fragm. I; Poseidonios, l.c., III, p. 281, § 6; Strabon., I. II, c. 3 § 6; Seneca, *Medée*, v. 375-79.

³ *Acta S. Maclovii*, c. 5, 6 & 7. *Acta sanctorum*, 16 May; vol. III p. 600, edited by Venet.

⁴ *De imagine mundi*, Lib. I, c. 36; Migne, *Patrol. lat.*, t. 172, c 152.

⁵ *Otia imperialia*; G.G. Leibnitz, *Scriptores rerum Brunsvicarum*, Hanoverne, 1707, t. I, p. 919.

⁶ Jomard, *Les monuments de la géographie* [Monuments of geography], pl. XIII, nos. 2, 6; pl. XIV, Mappamundi of the 13th century conserved in Herefort: "Fortunate Insule sex sunt insule Brandani;" Pl. XV, Map. of Martin Behaim, 1492: "Insula Antilia genannt Septeritade. Nach Christe Gebruth 565 kahn S. Brandon mit seinem Schiff auf diese Insel der dasselbst vil wandersbesabe und über sieben Jahr deruch wieder in Land zoge."

in the last 25 years of the 9th century and colonized at the end of the 10th; the neighboring regions, Helluland, Markland, Vinland and Hvitramannaland⁷, already known at the end of the 10th century, would be visited and colonized in the 11th century. These lands would have been converted to Christianity at the beginning of the 11th century; in the following centuries, the religion did not fail to spread and at the same time to advance civilization. Modern travelers have found the ruins of numerous monuments testifying to this prosperity and confirming the accounts of the Sagas.

Moreover, we had several historical documents about this question. But till now, we have always searched for more precise information; we almost completely lacked details on such interesting regions. We were especially in quest of documents that could establish with certainty that which touches on the introduction and duration of Catholicism in America, all the more because certain anti-Catholic historians are not content with doubting but absolutely deny the existence of this historical fact.

We have had the good fortune to discover, in the Vatican Archives, documents that can satisfy this justified desire, at least in part.

Our intention today is not to discuss the religious history of the American lands that were known and evangelized by Europeans before the discovery of Christopher Columbus. We will limit ourselves, for the moment, to the clarification of some facts about the history of the diocese of *Gardar*, a diocese which had jurisdiction over Greenland and northeastern America.

The Norse Sagas attribute the discovery and colonization of Greenland to the Norse explorers Gunnbjorn (887) and Eric the Red (983), and the discovery and colonization of the coasts of northeastern North America to Bjorn Heriulfson (986) and Leif the Lucky [Erickson] (1001). With regard to the conversion of Greenland to Christianity, according to the Sagas, this was the work of the King of Norway, St. Olaf II the Great (1015-1030), to whom also goes the honor of having consolidated the Christian faith in Norway.⁸ This account of the Sagas finds its confirmation in the Bull of Nicholas V of the year 1448, whose original text remained unpublished until now.⁹ (See document at the end of this report.) In this Bull, the Pope, according to the account the Greenlanders made to him, speaks of a tradition kept alive among “the natives and the colonists” of Greenland. According to this tradition, the country had been converted to Christianity about six centuries

⁷ Today Labrador, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the coast of the United States as far as Florida. See Spruner-Menke, *Hand-Atlas der Geschichte des Mittelalters und der neuerer Zeit*, III, aufl. Gotha, 1880, no. 63.

⁸ See Gravier, o.c., pp. 32 sq., 48 sq., 56 s.

⁹ Beamish, *The discovery of America by the Northmen in the tenth century*, London, 1841, pp. 152-154, gives the translation of an extract of this bull made by Paul Egedes Efterretninger.

before by priests from the king St. Olaf, and afterward remained faithful to the Catholic religion and subject to the Holy See. The phrase “*annis fere sexentis*” causes us to go back at least a century further than the time of St. Olaf, because the Bull dates from the middle of the 15th century. But we should not take these statements as an indication of strict chronology. It is likely that this tradition is composed of two distinct facts and pertains to different times, facts which make two separate periods in the history of Greenland. On one hand is the first discovery of this land by Gunnbjorn; on the other, the conversion of the inhabitants, who were in place at least a century later. On the whole, the bull furnishes us with a new argument against the authenticity of the bull of Gregory IV (831-32), which places the evangelization of Greenland in a period much before that of St. Olaf.¹⁰

We cannot precisely time the the introduction of Christianity onto the American continent as easily as that of its preaching in Greenland. We have only vague accounts on this subject. In 1050, the Saxon bishop Jonus went to Vinland to preach the Gospel to the natives who already had intimate relationships with the Norse colonists to the point of contracting marriages with them. This attempt was met with his martyrdom.¹¹ Since that time, similar tries were made, of which history allows us no exact memories, until the Irishman [sic] Eric-Upsi [Eric Gnupsson], consecrated regional bishop of the Americas (1112-1113), succeeded in bringing the light of the Gospel to the natives of the continent. In 1121, he went to Vinland and renounced returning to Greenland, in order to consecrate himself entirely to the evangelization of this new land.¹² His ministry produced abundant fruit, attested by 1st, the ancient Mexican manuscripts;¹³ 2nd, the written communication at the end of the fourteenth century by Antonio Zeno, whose companion had lived several years among the natives of Vinland and remembered “*in the library of the chief Latin books which they (the natives) could no longer understand*”¹⁴; and finally, 3rd, the fact that in the documents relative to the receipt of revenues of the Papal Court in the 13th century and the following centuries, we see on the rolls, in the diocese of Gardar, products from Vinland; we will hark back to this fact later. But an even stronger proof of the happy effects of Eric-Upsi’s ministry is given to us by the account of Christian Le Clerq, a missionary for 12 years in the Gaspée [sic] (today Acadia and Nova Scotia) in the

¹⁰ Jaffé-Ewald, *Reg. Rom. Pontif.*, no. 2574 (1959).

¹¹ See Mallet, *Introduction a l’histoire du Danemark* [*Introduction to the History of Denmark*], t. I, p. 254.

¹² See Gravier, o.c. p. 167; Gams, *Series episc.*, p. 334.

¹³ *Lettre de M. Aubin du 19 juin 1839*, dans les *Mém. de la Société royale des antiquaires du Nord*, 1840-43, pp. 9-12.

¹⁴ *Della scoperta dell’isola Frislanda, Eslanda, Engroelanda, Estotilanda et Icaria fatto par due fratelli Zeni, M. Nicolo il cavaliere e M. Antonio*, chez Pietro Amat di S. Filippo, *Gli illustri viaggiatori italiani*, Roma 1885, p. 49.

17th century. He recognized everywhere among the natives savages called “Cross-bearers,” traditions from the heart of the Bible, a prayer that seemed to be an echo of the “Pater Noster,” and the cross which was the most venerated object of the culture, whether in meetings, on tombs, on clothing, and on furniture; it was the sign of their superiority over other natives. Le Clerq concluded, “In this particular, I found around certain natives, whom we call Cross-bearers, enough evidence to conjecture and believe that these people had not closed their ears to the voice of the priest.” With regard to the religious situation and the natives of the 17th century, the missionary resorted, by way of explanation, to the following hypothesis: at one time instructed in the Christian faith, in the course of time these people fell back into ignorance and idolatry, because they lacked Catholic priests; they could neither improve their religious education nor maintain the purity of the faith.¹⁵

With regard to the Greenland colonies, during the first century that followed their conversion, following the arrangements of Benedict IX (1044), they were attached to the province of Hamburg-Bremen, which comprised all the northern countries of the European continent,¹⁶ and they were entrusted to the care of the bishops of neighboring Iceland. When the first regional bishop of the American countries, Eric-Upsi, decided to live in Vinland, without thinking of return to Greenland, the colonists held, in 1123, a diet [Thing] and, at the suggestion of Sokke Thorerssohn, they expressed a desire for an episcopal seat to be established in Greenland. The country did not have the required number of inhabitants to form a diocese. Nonetheless, because of the distance and the difficulty of communications between Europe and Greenland, the desire of the Thing was successful. The first bishop, Arnold, appointed in 1124 and consecrated by the Archbishop of Lund, fixed his seat, in 1126, at Gardar, which became the capital of the whole region as well.¹⁷ This new diocese continued under the jurisdiction of Hamburg-Bremen until the middle of the 12th century.¹⁸

Following the establishment of the ecclesiastical province of Norway, the Gardar diocese was attached to this province. In 1148, Pope Eugene III delegated Cardinal Nicolas, bishop of Albano (who later became pope under the name of Adrian IV), in the capacity of *legate a latere*, to establish a regular hierarchy in the kingdoms of Sweden and Norway. Among other things, the legate organized the province of Drontheim (Nidrosia, Trundum) [Trondheim] and assigned eight

¹⁵ Ch. Le Clerq, *Nouvelle relation de la Gaspésie qui contient les moeurs et la religion des sauvages gaspésiens*, etc. Paris 1691, pp 99 sq., 169-171.

¹⁶ Jaffé-Ewald, o.c. no. 4119. See Spruner-Menke, o.c. no. 65 *Ersbisthum Hamburg-Bremen*.

¹⁷ Gravier, o.c., p. 166 sq. W. Bentheim, *Grönland*, dans l'*Allgem. Encyklop. der Wissenschaftem und Künste*... H, Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1872, t. 92, p. 132.

¹⁸ Jaffé-Ewald, o.c. no. 7622 (5453).

episcopal seats to this city.¹⁹ One of these was Gardar. The work of Cardinal Nicolas was confirmed by Pope Anastase IV, successor of Eugene III, by a bull of 30 November 1154,²⁰ the text of which is also found inserted into that of Innocent III, from the year of 1206.²¹ Certainly, from the middle of the 12th century the diocese of Gardar is always mentioned as being subject to the metropolitan church of Trondheim in the census books of the Holy See; likewise, in the *Provinciale Vetus* of Albinus, written up from older sources in 1183²²; in the *Liber Censum* of Cencius Camerarius in the year 1192 and, later, in the *Libri Taxarum*, derived from the *Liber Censuum* (see Document I).

The concern of the Sovereign Pontiffs for the deliverance of the Holy Land gives us documents concerning the diocese of Gardar in greater numbers during the second half of the 13th century than for the preceding era. In that time, the Crusade was preached and tithes collected for the Holy Land, from as far as the most distant regions of the known world, indeed from as far away as boreal America. Already, in 1261, the Norwegian bishop Olaf made a voyage with this aim into these distant regions and led the Greenlanders (who until then enjoyed a republican regime) to recognize the authority of the Norwegian king Hakon Hakonson, and to contribute help by means of men and money for the work of the deliverance of the Holy Land.²³ In the following years, the faithful of the diocese of Gardar continued to pay tithes collected for this purpose.

Among the diverse pontifical bulls addressing the tax collectors for the Apostolic Office in the kingdom of Norway, there are some which include fairly

¹⁹ Card. Boso in Anastasium IV, See Ducesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis*, t. II, p. 388; Baron. *Annal. ad a.* 1148; *Pagi ad a.* 1148 (ed. Venet, 1740, t. XII, c. 424, 1379).

²⁰ Jaffé-Ewald, o.c. no. 9941 (6816). “*Et ne de caetero provinciae Norvegiae metropolitani possit eura deese, commissam sibi gubernationi tuae Tudensem jusdem provinciae perpetuam metropolim ordinavit, et ei Asloensem, Hammareopiensem, Bergenensem [sic], Stawangriensem, insulas Orcades, insulas Guthraiae, insulas Islandensium et Grennelandis episcopatus tanquam suae metropoli perpetuis temporibus constituit sujacere...*” Migue, *Patrol. lat.*, t. CLXXXVIII, c. 1082.

²¹ Potthast, *Reg. Rom. Pont. no 2686s...* *Et ne de cetero Provincie Norwegeie metropolitana eura non possit deese, commissam gubernationi sue urbem Nidrosiam eiusdem Provincie perpetuam metropolim ordinavit, et ei Asloensem, Amatripiensem, Bargensem, Stavangriensem, Insulas Orcades, Insulas Fareie. Sutrhare et Islandensem et Grenelandie, Episcopatus tamquem sue metropoli perpetuis temporibus constituit subjacere...* Arch Vat. Reg. 7, ep. 214, 1° 66v

²² “*In regno Morweie, Metropolis Trundum hos episcopos suffraganeos habet: Bergensem, Strangrensem, Hamarchopensem, Hasslonensem; habet quoque in regione Grenellandia episcopum Horcadensem; et in insula Hyslandia episcopum Phare. Sunt igitur numero VII.*” *lat.*, t. XCVIII c. 469. — Here Albinus has confused the four bishops mentioned in the bulle of Anastese IV: “*insulas Orcades, insulas Gothraie, insulas Islandensium et Grennelandiae episcopatus,*” to the point of making them only two.

²³ See M.P. Riant, *Expéditions et pèlerinages des Scandinaves en Terre Sainte au temps des Croisades*, Paris, 1865, p. 384.

extensive information about the diocese of Gardar. These permit us to verify that the archbishop of Trondheim²⁴ and the bishop of Bergen,²⁵ were charged in various eras to collect, in person, tithes from the diocese of Gardar. Further, we see that the diocese comprised not only Greenland but the countries of the American continent as well, which gives an idea of the vast extent of this church. It is on precisely these grounds that in 1276 the Archbishop of Trondheim pleaded with Pope John XXI to be relieved of the obligation to travel through the diocese of Gardar to collect the census and the tithe; in his opinion, five years would not suffice to accomplish such a mission.²⁶ Now, according to another bull of the same year,²⁷ we know that he [the Pope] allowed six years for visiting the other dioceses of the same province, which corresponded to the whole of the kingdom of Norway. The result was that the diocese of Gardar was, by itself, nearly as vast as the kingdom of Norway. Also on these grounds Pope Nicolas II in 1279 accorded extraordinary power to the clerics charged by the archbishop of Trondheim to collect tithes in the diocese of Gardar.²⁸ In a bull by Martin IV in 1282, it happened that the tithe and the Census, in the diocese of Gardar, was paid in merchandise and natural products, namely cowhides and sealskin and whale teeth; all was transported to Norway and there exchanged for money.²⁹ We know that there were no cows in Greenland and that the people of that region paid the tithe in fish products³⁰ Cowhides, which were collected by agents of the Apostolic Office, were given by the faithful of another region of the diocese, which is to say Vinland and neighboring regions. And indeed, in the tithes of the year 1307, we see the appearance of products from Vinland.³¹

After the Council of Vienna (1311), charged with collecting the sexennial [six-year] tithe, Arnus, priest and bishop of Gardar, was sent to establish his

²⁴ Potthast, *o.c.*, nos. 21102, 21103, 21858.

²⁵ Unpublished Bull of Boniface IX, 16 September 1402. “Venerabili fratri Jacobo episcopo Bergensi in Nidroiensi, Bergensi, Stavanrensi, Pharensi, Scarensi et Gradensi (*sic!*) civitatibus et diocesisibus fructuum et proventuum Camere Apostolice debitorum Collectori,” — “Ex fideli, sollicita et diligenti” — Datum Rome apud Petrum sextodecimo kalendas octobris, anno tertio decimo.” Arch. Vat. Arm. 33, t.12, fol. 194.

²⁶ Potthast, *o.c.* no. 21192.

²⁷ Potthast, *o.c.* no. 21193.

²⁸ Potthast, *o.c.* no. 21524.

²⁹ Potthast, *o.c.* no. 21858.

³⁰ We conclude that with certainty from examination of the following sources of the epoch immediately afterward: 1st, the story already cited of the borthers Zeno, *o.c.*, p. 46 sq.; 2nd, a description, unpublished till now, of Norway and Iceland in the 14th century, contained in the mss. chart. in-4th of the 15th century “de la Bibl. Chigi I. VII. 262, fol. 287 v. et 31”; and in the other “Mss. chart.in-f^o” of the year 1586, Bibli. Corsini, 39, G. 2, fol.103 and 114; 3rd, the bull of Alexander VI of 1492-93, which we give in Appendix IV.

³¹ Gravier, *o.c.*. p. 178.

residency in 1315.³² In August 1326, Pope John XXII sent to Norway and Sweden two collector nuncios, Jean de Seron, prior of the Dominican monastery at Figeac near Cahors, and Bernard d'Orteuil, vicar of Novaux in the diocese of Alet, to collect this tithe.³³ The account of this mission is found in its entirety in the Papal Archives in the manuscript volume *Rationes Collectoriae Svetiae, Norwegiae, Gotiae et Angliae* 1316-1326, 227. It includes the statement of account of all sums received in each diocese for the six-year tithe and Peter's Pence; then their conversion into florins, the exchange operations with various bankers, the expenses of the trip and, finally, the exact figure presented by the two Nuncios on their return to Rome in 1329. We reproduce in the appendix some unpublished passages, which concern the diocese of Gardar (See Document II).

Nuncio Bernard d'Orteuil received from the archbishop of Trondheim, on 11 August, 1327, the six-year tithe of the diocese of Gardar for the Holy Land, in walrus tusks weighing 127 Norwegian lispons, and he sold them to the Flemish merchant Jean d'Ypres for 12 pounds 14 sols tournois [silver minted in Tours, France]. Half of the tithe was given to King Magnus of Norway as an indulgence from Pope John XXII, and the other half was converted to gold florins and sent to the Apostolic Office (II.1). This sum in gold florins is shown among the tithes of the other dioceses in the final accounting of the collector (II. 3). On the same day, the Nuncio received, for the annual Peter's Pence, for the diocese of Gardar, walrus tusks for the amount of six sols tournois (II. 2.). In reducing these two sums into present Norwegian currency,³⁴ after correcting for the rising costs of collection, we see that the diocese of Gardar paid 338 marcs for the six-year tithe, that is to say 56 marcs — 1/3 for each year — and 6 marcs for the annual Peter's Pence.

³² Th. Torfaeus, *Historia Groenlandiae*, p. 251, cited by Gravier, *o.c.* p. 178.

³³ There are several bulls relative to the mission of the two nuncios. We will mention only two of them specifically regarding the bishop of Gardar:

1326, 29 augusti. — “*Venerabili fratri... archiepiscopo Nidrosiensi et dilectis universis abbatibus, Prioribus, Decanis — constitutis. — Si uni membro patienti. — Datum Avenione IV Kalendas septembris anno decimo. — In eundem modum episcopo Grenelandiensi.*”

1326, 30 augusti. — *Archiepiscopo Nidrosiensi. — Cum nos dilectos filios Johannem de Serone. — Datum Avenione III Kalendas septembris, anno decimo. — In eundem modum episcopo Grenelandiensi.*” Arch. Vat. Reg. 133, fol. 374, ep. 2199; fol. 375 v. ep. 2203.

³⁴ Ordinary Norwegian coinage, *parva pecunia noricana*, was made of a silver inferior to that of sterling, as it is expressly said in the *Littera quietionionis domini Bernardi Ortolis pro pecunia decime sexennalis in regno Norwegiae et Swetie*, of 19 January, 1328: “*quod argentum est minori liga quam sterlengi argenti.*” Arch. Vat. Solut. Servit. com. 1326-33, 319, fol. 84. One marc of this ordinary coinage was usually equivalent, in 1327, to 3 sols of sterling, to 1 silver marc of Tours [France]; so that 1 marc of sterling silver was equivalent to 3 marcs of the ordinary coinage, and 1 marc of silver of Tours [France], to 4. Arch. Vat. *Collectoria regni Norwegiae Swetiae, Ungariae*, etc., a. 1282, 213, fol. 19; *Rationes collectoriae Swetiae, Norwegiae*, etc., 227, fol. 22 v.

Now, the six-year tithe was imposed on the clergy at the rate of 1/10 of church revenues. So the clergy of the Gardar diocese had an annual income of 563 marcs. This figure shows clearly that the clergy must have been quite numerous and quite well-off. And indeed, we see that it forms 1/49 of the tithe collected in the whole province of Trondheim and that it is, by comparison to the diocese of Trondheim itself, in the proportion of 1 to 12.³⁵ Basing our calculations on the annual sum of Peter's pence of 6 sols tournois, equivalent to 6 marcs of ordinary Norwegian currency, we can deduce approximately the number of people in the diocese of Gardar. In the kingdom of Norway, Peter's pence was fixed at 1 ordinary denier per household.³⁶ If the marc is equivalent to 162 deniers, we have the figure 972, which would represent the number of households in the Gardar diocese. But this figure is only approximate, and less than the actual number. In reality, the tithe was paid in goods. Now, we are correct in believing that these goods would have been sold for an inferior price, since that happened the same year in another case.³⁷ This is why we can say without fear of exaggeration that, in 1327, there were in the Gardar diocese about 1,000 households taxed for Peter's census [pence]. By a similar calculation on the sum collected in the rest of the province,³⁸ we can say that the eight other dioceses contain, in all, some 29,000 households. The diocese of Gardar represents, then, 1/30 of the households in the whole province. Supposing that there were an average of 10 people in a household, we conclude that there were, in 1327, about 10,000 faithful souls in the diocese of Gardar, and 300,000 in the whole province.

In addition to this information, which helps give us an approximate statistic of the diocese of Gardar in the 14th century, the collectors' reports furnish us with another interesting particular. This is the mention of a cup made from a nut from

³⁵ The annual contribution of each diocese of the province of Trondheim was in marcs of ordinary Norwegian currency: Trondheim 701 1/2, Bergen 450, Stavanger 249, Hammer 259, Orkney 25, Holar[?] 333 1/3, Greenland 56 1/3, total 2,719. *Rationes collect.*, cited fol. 2-5. — The tithe of the Faroes and Skalholt are not listed; but in calculating by means of Peter's Pence, we find that they paid together the same sum as the Gardar diocese alone (see n. 4).

³⁶ *Liber censum genninus* chez Migue, P.L. t. XCVIII, 486: "In Norogoeia: singuli lares I monetam eiusdem terre." See *Provinciale*, de Cencius Camerarius (App. no I, 1). Niculi card. Aragoniae *Regestum*, from the year 1352-1362; Arch Vat. Mss. pergam. Arm. XXXV. t. 70, fol. 58: "De censu regui Novergie solveudo ecclesie Romane. Omnes et singule domus totius regni Norvegie solvere debent pro censu ecclesie Romane singulos denarios monete curribilis in illo regno." The receipts of the apostolic accounting office were received in this ordinary currency "parva pecunia noricane" (see n. 1[~~struck out?~~]), and then converted into sterling silver. Potthast. *o.c.*, nos. 21195, 21859, 21860.

³⁷ "Item XXIV^m dentium de roardo, computatos pro XII marcis cum dimidia parve pecunie qui dentes fuerunt venditi pro XII marcis parvi pecunie noricane." *Rationes coll. Swetiae Norwegiae*, etc., 227, fol. 3 v.

³⁸ The dioceses of the province of Trondheim paid annually Peter's pence in marcs of *parva pecunia noricana*: Trondheim 27, Bergan 30, Stavanger 13, Hammer 10, Orkney 25, Faraoes 1 1/3, Skalholt 5, Holar 51, Greenland 6; total 168. L. c. fol. 7 s.

overseas, with a silver foot, valued at two gold florins, received as a donation for the Holy Land (II.3). This overseas nut certainly came from the American continent; was it a coconut? The coco palm does not grow farther north than Florida. One can speculate that this cup was made of maple wood, a tree that was found in Vinland in enough abundance to become, in the 11th century, an export for Europe.³⁹

In the following years, religious conditions in the diocese of Gardar always improved. In 1418, the diocese paid, for the tithe and Peter's pence, 2600 pounds of seal teeth⁴⁰ so more than double what was paid in 1327. The number of clergy and faithful, then, was considerably increased. From what we are learning from the descriptions of this period, Greenland itself counted a dozen parish churches, as well as a cathedral and a Dominican monastery.⁴¹ Modern travelers have discovered the ruins.⁴²

In 1418, Greenland was subjected to an invasion by barbarians, come from the American continent,⁴³ who landed on the coast, pillaged and burned all the inhabited places; the residents were taken into slavery. Only nine churches were spared from destruction because, located in the interior, they were protected by the rigors of the climate.

Thirty years later, the Greenlanders succeeded in escaping from captivity and returned to their country; they reconstructed some of their better churches on the coast and wrote to Pope Nicolas V to ask him to restore the Christian religion and to send a bishop and priests, of whom they felt strongly deprived; indeed, during the invasion, the priests had been massacred by the savages or had had to seek safety by fleeing. In the request to the Pope, the Greenlanders recounted in moving terms the catastrophe of which they had been victims and the suffering they had endured during their 30 years of captivity on the continent situated to the south of Greenland. The pope listened favorably to the Greenlanders' prayers and, in 1448, he charged the bishop of Holar [Holar] and Skalholt to restore the religion in Greenland (III). But, for reasons remaining unknown, this decision was never carried out. After half a century, the Greenlanders renewed their demand before

³⁹ *Masur s. musurire* veteres dixere accris quandam speciem, sive betulae nodosae, quae magui apud eos pretii habebantur, cantharis, poculis, cultorum manubris, aliisque rebus fabricandis apta." Snorre Sturlesons *Heimkringla*, t. I *Saga of Olafi*, cap. CVII, p 311, n.d. cited by Gravier.

⁴⁰ See Gravier, *o.c.*, p. 179.

⁴¹ Besides the description of the monastery which we find in Zeno, *o. c.*, p. 46, there is another in the unpublished description of Norway and Iceland in the 14th century already mentioned (see note 7, p. 175), which agrees with the first in the smallest details.

⁴² See Gravier, *o.c.*, pp. 34 s., 57, 198.

⁴³ Theory till now attributed the invasion to a band of English pirates. But it turned out from evidence from the bull of Nicholas V to be the work of savages who lived on the neighboring American continent.

Innocent VIII. Their situation was by then worthy of commiseration: abandoned to themselves for nearly a century, without a bishop⁴⁴ and priests to instruct them, many among them had fallen into ignorance and the oblivion of the faith of the fathers; the only remembrance they had kept was their communion cloth which was exhibited once a year at a public veneration; it was this communion cloth on which, 100 years before, the last Greenlandic priest had consecrated the body of Our Lord. Moved by this touching request, Pope Alexander VI, who had just succeeded Innocent VIII in 1492, sent to the seat of Gardar a Benedictine monk, Mathias, already promoted to the episcopacy by his predecessor. “He was a man filled with holy fervor for the salvation of the poor Greenlanders, who was willing to risk his life, if need be, to reach his diocese.” (See Document IV).

This happened precisely at the time Europe was receiving with admiration the first news of Columbus’s discovery.



⁴⁴ I have had the good fortune to discover the nominations of other bishops of the 15th century that had remained unknown till now, so that we know nearly the whole series. But these had only the [title] of bishop and did not live in their diocese.

DOCUMENTS

I

Dioceses provinciae Nidrosiensis a XIIo usque ad XVum saeculum.

1

a. 1192. — Census s. Petri in regno Norwegiae. Cencii Camerarii “Liber censuum”. Mss. autogr. 1192 a. Biblioth. Vat. Lat. 8486, fo 55 v.

NORWAY

In archiepiscopatu Nidrosiensi... [Nidaros, Trondheim]

In episcopatu Bergensi... [Bergen]

In episcopatu Stanuengrensi... [Stavanger]

In episcopatu Harmacopensi... [Hamar]

In episcopatu Hasslonensi... [Oslo]

In episcopatu Horchadensi... [Orkney Islands]

In episcopatu Sudrensi... [Sodor and Man]

Ecclesia sancti Colombi de Insula Ily [sic] II bixantos annuatim⁴⁵

In episcopatu Card(ar)ensi⁴⁶... [Gardar, Greenland]

Notandum quod singule domus Norwegie singulos dant
denarios monete ipsius terre.

2

c. 1400— Census S. Petri in regno Norwegiae. Cencii Cmerarii “Liber censuum”, Mss XV s. Arch. Vat. Arm. XXXV, t.18, fo 44.

NORWAY

In Archiepiscopatu Nodrosiensi... [Archbishopric of Nidaros, Trondheim]

In episcopatu Bergensi... [Bergen]

In episcopatu Stanuengrensi... [Stavanger]

In Episcopatu Hamauensi... [Hamar]

In Episcopatu Assloensi... [Olso]

In Episcopatu Horcadensi... [Orkney Islands]

In Episcopatu Sudereiensi aliter Manensi... [Sodor and Man]

Ecclesia sancti Columbi de Insula Ily [sic] II Bsiantios annuatim.

In episcopatu Scalotensi in Islandia... [Skalholt]

In episcopatu Holensi in Islandia... [Holar]

In Episcopatu Pharensi in Grotlandia... [Faeroe Islands?]

In Episcopatu Gardensi in Grotlandia... [Gardar, Greenland]

Nota quod singule domus Norwegie singulos sant denarios
monete ipsius terre.

45 Addition of the 18th Century

46 Mss., “In episcopatu Cardocensi” Cenius committed the error of tranporting the words: “In episcopatu Card[ar]ensi” from the heading “Norwagia” of which he left the end blank, to the preceding heading “Anglia”, folio 54v

3

c. 1460. — Episcopatus suffragane provinciae Nidroiensis. “Liber taxarum” Mss. a.c., 1460. Bibliot. di Bologna; edidit Döllinger Beiträge zur polit. Kirchlich. un Culturgeschichte der sechs letzten Jahrhunderten, II Bd. (1863), p. 293:

Archiepsicopatus Nidrosiensis hos habet suffraganeos: Archdiocese Niardos [Trondheim]

1. Bergnesem [Bergen]
2. Stavangrensem [Stavanger]
3. Hamerensem [Hamar]
4. Asloensem [Oslo]
5. Horcadensem [Orkney Islands]
6. Pharensem [Faeroe Islands?]
7. Sodrensem [Sodor and Man]
8. Grevelandiensem [Greenland, Gardar?]
9. Faensenum [?]
10. Scalorensem [Skalholt in Iceland]
11. Olensenum [Holar in Iceland?]
12. Grandensem⁴⁷ [Gardar, Greenland]
13. Neblandensem [?]

II

Ratines Collectoriae Svetiae, Norvegiae, Gothiae et. Angliae. 1316-1326. Cod. Chart. XIVs Arch. Vatic. N 227⁴⁸

1

Decima Terrae Sanctai anno 1327 collecta in Gardarensi dioecesi; fo 5 v. Grenellendensis. ...[untranslated]

2

Census S. Petri anno 1327 collectus in Gardarensi dioecesi ...[untranslated]

3

Computus introituum Camerai Apostolicae ex decima sexennali iin regno Norvegiae et ex legatis Terrae Sanctae in regno Swetiae annis 1326-30 perceptorum ...[untranslated]

⁴⁷ this is the second mention of Greenland

⁴⁸ (11-2)

FROM THE VATICAN LIBRARY.

English Translation of the Letter of Pope Nicolas V.

(NICOLAS V.)

(Sept. 20, 1448.)

9. Nicolas etc., to Our venerable brothers, the Bishops of Shaoltensus and Olensus, greeting, etc. Presiding over the government of the universal Church in virtue of the duty of Apostolic service enjoined on Us from heaven with the help of the Lord We so apply Our solicitous care for the salvation of souls redeemed by the precious labors of the Redeemer, that We endeavor to bring back to a state of the highest tranquility not only the souls now wavering in the storms of impiety and error, but also such as are overwhelmed by the calamities and whirlwinds of persecution. Indeed, as regards Our beloved sons, the natives and all the inhabitants of the Island of Greenland, which is said to lie in the province of Nidrosi, in the extremity of the Ocean, in the northern region of the Kingdom of Norway, We have heard with sad and anxious heart the doleful story of that same island, whose inhabitants and natives, for almost six hundred years, have kept the Faith of Christ, received under the preaching of their glorious evangelist, the blessed King Olaf, firm and unspotted under the guidance of the Holy Roman Church and the Apostolic See, and where for all succeeding time the people, inflamed with eager devotion, erected many temples of the Saints and a famous Cathedral, in which divine worship was sedulously carried on; but at length, thirty years ago, with the permission of Him Who, in the disposition of His inscrutable wisdom, afflicts for a time and chastises for their great good those whom He loves, the barbarians, gathering together in a fleet on the neighboring shores of the Pagans, attacked this entire people in a cruel invasion, devastating their fatherland and sacred temples by fire and sword, leaving in the island only nine parochial churches, these, it is said, extend into the farthest districts, which they could not approach conveniently because of the defiles of the mountains, and carrying away captive to their possessions the natives of both sexes, especially such as they deemed brave and fit to undergo the burden of perpetual slavery, just as if adjusted to their tyranny. As the same report subjoins, however, very many, after a time, returned to their own from said captivity, and, having thenceforth repaired the ruins of those places, desired to renew and extend the divine worship as much as possible after the pristine fashion but because, overwhelmed by the past calamities, and laboring under famine and want, they were unable to support priests and a bishop, they were deprived, for that entire period of thirty years, of the consolation of a bishop and the ministry of priests, except when anyone, in the desire of serving God, after travelling far and long, had succeeded in reaching those churches which the barbarian hand had passed unhurt; wherefore they have humbly petitioned Us to deign to meet their pious and salutary design with fatherly commiseration, and to supply their spiritual wants and impart Our benevolent approbation and that of the Apostolic See to the foregoing. We, therefore, favorably disposed towards the just and worthy prayers and desires of said natives and inhabitants of the aforesaid island of Greenland, but having no certain knowledge of the foregoing events and their circumstances, commit to and command your Fraternity, whom We understand to be one of the nearer bishops of the aforesaid island, that you, or one of you (nearer bishops), ordain fit and exemplary priests, provide parishes, and establish rectors, who will govern the restored parishes and churches, and administer the Sacraments; and, furthermore, that, if it will finally appear to you or one of you as opportune and expedient, you will, with the advice of the metropolitan, provide the distance of the place permit, ordain and establish as their bishop some practical and able person, in communion with Us and the Apostolic See, and impart to him the grace of consecration in Our name, according to the usual ecclesiastical forms, and deliver to him the conduct both of spiritual and temporal matters, having previously administered to him the proper and usual oath of allegiance to Us and the Roman Church; in regard to all of which We bind your conscience, and grant you or any one of you, by Apostolic authority, by the tenor of the present document, free and complete power, any apostolic regulations and constitutions, and those of the General Councils, and any others, to the contrary notwithstanding. Given in Rome, at the Church of St. Pontenciana in the year etc., one thousand four hundred and forty-eight, the twelfth day before the Calends of October, in the second year (of Our Pontificate).

GRATIS BY COMMAND OF OUR MASTER THE POPE.

FROM THE VATICAN LIBRARY.

English Translation of Letter of Pope Alexander VI.

(ALEXANDER VI.)

(IN THE EARLY YEARS OF HIS PONTIFICATE.)

10. Since, as We have heard, the Church of Garda is situated at the extremity of the earth in the country of Greenland, whose inhabitants are accustomed to use dried fish and milk because of the want of bread, wine and oil, wherefore and also on account of the rare shipping to said country due to the intense freezing of the sea no vessel is believed to have put to land there for eighty years back, or if it happened that such voyages were made, surely, it is thought, they could not have been accomplished save in the month of August, when the ice was dissolved; and since it is likewise said that for eighty years, or thereabouts, absolutely no bishop or priest governed that Church in personal residence, which fact, together with the absence of Catholic priests, brought it to pass that very many of the diocese unhappily repudiated their sacred baptismal vows; and since the inhabitants of that land have no relic of the Christian religion save a certain Corporale, annually set forth, upon which, a hundred years ago, the Body of Christ was consecrated by the last priest then living there;—for these, then, and for other considerations, Pope Innocent VIII, of blessed memory, Our predecessor wishing to provide a suitable pastor for that Church, at the time deprived of the useful solace of the same, at the advice of his brethren, of whom We were then one, appointed bishop and pastor to that place Our venerable brother Matthias; the latter was Bishop-elect of Garda, a professed member of the Order of St. Benedict, and had been announced, at Our urging, while We were still in Minor Orders, as intending to sail personally for said Church, inspired with great fervor of devotion to lead back the souls of the strayed and apostate to the way of eternal salvation, and to expose his life to the greatest danger, freely and spontaneously, to obliterate such errors. We, therefore, highly commending the pious and praiseworthy undertaking in the Lord of said Bishop-elect, and wishing to succour him in the above circumstances, because, as We have likewise heard, he is sorely pressed by poverty, at Our own instance and with the certain knowledge of the advice and approval of Our brethren, commit to and order, in a circular letter to Our esteemed sons, the scribes, solicitors, those who have charge of the seals, the registrars, and all the other officials both of Our Apostolic chancery and treasury, that, under pain of excommunication, "lata sententia," ipso facto incurred, all and each of the Apostolic Letters, about and concerning the promotion of said Church of Garda, to be forwarded for said Bishop-elect, be forwarded by them and caused to be forwarded in all and each of their offices, everywhere gratis, for God, and without payment or exaction of any tax, all contradiction ceasing; and to the clerics and notaries of the Apostolic treasury We commit and command, at like instance and knowledge and under said pain of excommunication, that they freely hand over and consign these Letters or Bulls to said Bishop-elect, without payment or exaction of any revenues, or even of small fees, or of the other claims usually paid in similar cases, anything enacted to the contrary notwithstanding. Let it be done everywhere gratis because he is extremely poor. R

AS. MA. VICE CHANCELLOR.

JNO. DATRARIUS (Secretary).

[Title page from *The Flatey Book*. See Translator's Preface.]

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