

THE EVANGELIZATION OF AMERICA BEFORE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

L'ÉVANGELISATION DE L'AMÉRIQUE AVANT CHRISTOPHER COLOMB

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FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CONGRESS IN PARIS, JANUARY 6, 1891, LATER PUBLISHED AS *COMPTE RENDU DU CONGRESS SCIENTIFIQUE*. TRANSLATION BY JANET F. BARSTAD, CHRONOGNOSTIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION AND ROSLYN STRONG, NEARA. IN HER RESEARCH ON SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE RECENT EXCAVATION AT THE NEWPORT TOWER, JAN BARSTAD FOUND THIS TANTALIZING DOCUMENT BASED ON PAPAL BULLS FROM THE VATICAN ARCHIVES. DESPITE OBVIOUS ERRORS AND DIFFICULTY INTERPRETING THE UNFAMILIAR NORSE ORIGINAL REPORTS RENDERED INTO CHURCH LATIN AND THEN FRENCH, WE FELT THAT AN ENGLISH VERSION WOULD BE A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY VIEW OF PRE-COLUMBIAN AMERICA.

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 Plato², 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 sixth century A.D., Irish monks under the rule of St. Brendan searched for the transatlantic world, considered until 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 (1112-1137)⁴ and Gervais de Tilbury (1211)⁵ 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 tenth 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 in the last 25 years of the ninth century and colonized at the end of the tenth; the neighboring regions, Helluland, Markland, Vinland and Hvitroamannaland⁷, already known at the end of the tenth century, would be visited and colonized in the eleventh century. These lands would have been converted to Christianity at the beginning of the eleventh 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.

- 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 Xe 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. 215; 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 thirteenth 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."

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, auf. Gotha, 1880, no. 63.

Moreover, we had several historical documents about this question. But until 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 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 fifteenth 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 Gnuþsson], consecrated regional bishop of the Americas (1112-1113), who 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 first, the ancient Mexican manuscripts;¹³ second, 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, third, the fact that in the documents relative to the receipt of revenues of the Papal Court in the thirteenth 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

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.

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, Estotilandia 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.

seventeenth 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 seventeenth 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 Thorssohn, 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 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 twelfth 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).

18 Jaffé-Ewald, o.c. no. 7622 (5453).

19 Card. Boson 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 Farcie. Sutrhare et Islandensem et Grenelandie, Episcopatus tanquem 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.

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.

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 thirteenth 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 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 products.³⁰ 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, Arnius, priest and bishop of Gardar, was sent to establish his 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

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

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 tertiodecimo." 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°" 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.

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.

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] in silver. 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 in silver (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 — $\frac{1}{3}$ for each year — and 6 marcs for the annual Peter's Pence.

Now, the six-year tithe was imposed on the clergy at the rate of $\frac{1}{10}$ 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 $\frac{1}{49}$ of the tithe collected in the whole province of Trondheim and that it is, by comparison to the diocese

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 quietiontonis domini Bernardi Ortolis pro pecunia decime sexennalis in regno Norwegiae et Svetie*, 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 "sol tournois" of silver [?]; so that 1 marc of sterling silver was equivalent to 3 marcs of the ordinary coinage, and 1 marc of silver "tournois" [?] to 4. *Arch. Vat. Collectoriae regni Norwegiae Svetiae, Ungariae, etc.*, a. 1282, 213, fol. 19; *Rationes collectoriae Svetiae, Norwegiae, etc.*, 227, fol. 22 v.

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, $\frac{1}{30}$ 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

35 The annual contribution of each diocese of the province of Trondheim was in marcs of ordinary Norwegian currency: Trondheim 701 $\frac{1}{2}$, Bergen 450, Stavanger 249, Hammer 259, Orkney 25, Høla[?] 333 $\frac{1}{3}$, Greenland 56 $\frac{1}{3}$, 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 solveere debent pro censu ecclseie 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 XXIVm dentium de roardo, computatos pro XII marcis cum dimidia parve pecunie qui dentes fuerunt venditi pro XII marcis parvi pecunie noricane." *Rationes coll. Svetiae 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, Faroes 1 $\frac{1}{3}$, Skalholt 5, Høla 51, Greenland 6; total 168. L. c. fol. 7 s.

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 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 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. ■

DOCUMENTATION NOTE

For a list of documents referred to in the text or footnotes, or cited as references, please see the translation at the Chronognostic website: http://www.chronognostic.org/pdf/jelic_translation.pdf

39 *Masur s. musurire veteres dixere accris quamdam 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.

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.