



LOST WORLDS OF ANCIENT AMERICA

By Frank Joseph

By mid-21st Century, history textbooks in the United States will no longer describe Christopher Columbus as “the discoverer of America.” He lived at a time when the transatlantic passages of his forgotten predecessors had been almost totally obscured by Dark Age authorities devoted to purging the past of all non-biblical references. Only in the context of his post-medieval era, when such earlier crossings were virtually unknown, can his expedition be considered a “discovery.”

In truth, it was the latest in a long series of such voyages, most recently undertaken by Basque fishermen, who were known to cast their nets off the coast of Labrador at least thirty years before the Admiral’s three ships left Spain. An old nursery rhyme of uncertain provenance, and hinting at something hidden regarding his achievement, is still familiar to children throughout the English-speaking world: “In fourteen-hundred-and-ninety-two/ Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Far less famous is its next line: “To prove that the old maps were true.” What “old maps”? How could he have possessed any charts to a territory yet to be discovered? What did the anonymous poet know that modern historians do not?

Perhaps it was something referred to in our time as the Vinland Map. It was discovered bound in a mid-15th Century history of the Mongols, the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, or “Description of the Tartars” (sometimes called “The Tartar Relation”), composed during 1445. The map it enfolded between two pages was created for a church council at Basel,

Switzerland, five years earlier, and re-drawn from a 200-year older compilation of several, earlier maps indicating extensive knowledge of what is now the eastern United States, going back 1,000 years ago. A landmass portrayed by the map farthest to the left, identified as *Vinilanda Insula*, encompasses an area from Maine in the north to the Carolinas in the south; from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Susquehanna River in central Pennsylvania. The large region represented here must have been experienced by many Norse explorers over a protracted period of time. No, single discoverer could have undertaken such extensive journeys during the course of just one lifetime.

"Vinland" had been coined by the famous Norseman, Leif Eriksson, in 1001 A.D. Seventy-five years later, the German geographer, Adam of Bremen, wrote of Eriksson in *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis* ("Description of the Northern Islands"), "he has also reported one island *discovered by many* (Joseph's italics) in that ocean, which is called *Winland*, for the reason that grapevines grow there by themselves, producing the best wine." Two later sources --- the Icelandic sagas of Eric the Red and "Of the Greenlanders" --- also told of Vinland. Appropriately, the entire coastline of Greenland appears on the Vinland Map in details supposedly unknown until the late 19th Century, when it was officially circumnavigated for the first time. Moreover, Greenland is represented on the Vinland Map as an island, a fact likewise unappreciated until as recently as 1896, only after it was thoroughly surveyed for the first time.

The *Hystoria Tartarorum* was acquired by Lawrence C. Witten II, an antiquarian book dealer, in 1957, when he offered it for sale to Yale University. Witten's asking price was higher than his alma mater could afford, although another Yale alumnus, the wealthy philanthropist, Paul Mellon, agreed to purchase the book for his school, but only if the map it contained could be authenticated by independent experts. For three years, it was secretly subjected to the ruthless scrutiny of two curators from London's British

Museum and Yale's own head librarian. In 1965, the outside world learned of the Vinland Map for the first time, when they proclaimed its Medieval authenticity, and Mellon purchased it for Yale, where it was insured for \$25-million, and is still preserved at the University library. Notwithstanding Yale's academic prestige or the professional credentials of its examiners, America's archaeological establishment unanimously pounced on the Vinland Map as a transparent fraud. Their vituperative condemnation was based on little or no counter-evidence, but stemmed almost entirely from their unalterable supposition that the Map was, *ipso facto*, a fake, because Columbus was the first and only discoverer of America.

Their position was finally laid to rest in 2009 by world-class experts in document authentication at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Results of the Danes' exhaustive study at Copenhagen's International Conference on the History of Cartography were announced by Rene Larsen, rector of the School of Conservation: "We have so far found no reason to believe that the Vinland Map is the result of a modern forgery. All the tests that we have done over the past five years — on the materials and other aspects — do not show any signs of fraud."

Additional hard proof of the Norse impact on pre-Columbian North America followed soon after by fresh research of the Kensington Rune Stone, a runic-covered granite boulder found in north-central Minnesota during 1898. Subjected 107 years later to unprecedented scrutiny by state-of-the-art technology, professional geologist, Scott Wolter, demonstrated conclusively that the inscription revealed previously unnoticed letter-forms dating it to the mid-14th Century. "1362 A.D." carved on one side was confirmed as the year in which the rune stone had been engraved by Swedish visitors to America's Upper Middle West, 130 years before Columbus landed at San Salvador.

Wolter went on in 2010 to score another triumph for cultural diffusionism with unprecedented testing of an entirely different artifact. Discovered inside a prehistoric Indian burial mound by a Smithsonian Institution archaeologist just one year before the Kensington Rune Stone came to light, Tennessee's Bat Creek Stone was dismissed by mainstream scholars as nothing more than a late 18th Century attempt by some unknown Native American at scratching out a written language. Their assumption was disproved during the 1970s, when a renowned Semanticist, Professor Cyrus Gordon, properly identified its one-line inscription as Hebrew, reading, "For Judah," and dated it from 70 to 135 A.D. For nearly forty years, orthodox archaeologists resisted Gordon's interpretation, until Wolter's geological testing showed mineralization of the object consistent with a 1st Century provenance.

Although these three examples unquestionably document the arrival of Viking Age Norsemen, Medieval Swedes and Roman Era Jews, they are only some of the overseas' travelers to North America centuries and even millennia earlier than 1492. Their hitherto neglected traces on the archaeological landscape are being progressively detected by technological advances in geology and related sciences, so much so, the old fashioned paradigm of "No Outside Contacts in the New World Before Columbus" is being replaced by a far richer, more deeply ancient legacy of transoceanic visitors.