



The forged map: 'Vinland' on the left represents the part of North America visited by tenth-century Norsemen.

Who forged Vinland map?

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ferred at first to believe the map genuine: the university press sold ten thousand copies of the map and related works and contracted for another 40,000 with the Book of the Month Club. Their text included no hint that there were sceptical views.

Mr Witten, in turn, was an old friend of Mr Thomas E. Marston, former curator of renaissance and medieval literature in the Bienecke collection. Marston, too, is understood to contest the McCrone findings. But he is on holiday in the Caribbean, and was not available for comment.

Now comes the complex and curious question of how the Vinland Map was authenticated. In his preface to the magnificent volume, 'The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation,' Dr Marston recounts how Witten showed him in 1957 the volume consisting of the Relation and the map. Immensely exciting as the map seemed, it could not be dated, or surely associated with the other manuscript. It stayed with Mr Witten, who gave the volume to his wife. But then, in 1958, Dr Marston bought 'from a London bookseller' among other things a fifteenth-century copy of Vincent de Beauvais' 'Speculum

Historiale.' He showed the manuscript to Witten.

That evening, Witten phoned him back. 'I measured his manuscript and mine, and they were of identical size. Even more exciting, the wormholes in the map corresponded with the wormholes at the front of the *Speculum*, and the wormholes at the back of the *Speculum* corresponded with the wormholes of the 'Tartar Relation.' There was no doubt in my mind that the three were originally bound together in that order.'

Here, suddenly, was apparent proof that the Vinland Map was genuine: a fifteenth-century copy of older maps which confirmed the legend of the Eddas (Icelandic Sagas) and the skimpy archaeological evidence to reveal the landing of the Norsemen in the New World.

Dr Marston, after much thought, gave the 'Speculum' to Mrs Witten, although the three parchments had now become immensely valuable, financially and in terms of history. Dr Marston hoped, as he recorded, that 'this generosity would give Yale Library some element of control over the disposition of the map in the event that Mrs Witten should decide to sell it. . . . This hope was fully realised.'

But there remained a mystery about the provenance of the map. This mystery, never quite cleared up, encouraged doubters to persist with their inquiries. These were searchingly expressed at a symposium on the Vinland Map held at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington in 1966.

There were also doubts at the British Museum. The great celebration volume on the Vinland Map published by Yale contains three contributions by two British scholars: Dr R. A. Skelton, then superintendent of the Map Room, and Mr George Painter, assistant keeper of early printed books at the museum. Neither expressed any doubts about the map in what they wrote. But, in fact, the museum laboratory had already done a visual analysis of the map by infra-red exposure and other methods and had discovered something odd: there was no iron in the ink of the map.

Since then, a systematic search for fifteenth-century manuscripts from the Upper Rhine which did not use iron compounds of some kind in their ink has proved fruitless, and it was one of the factors which finally persuaded Yale library, egged on by the always-sceptical History Department, to hand the map and manuscripts over to McCrone.

Dr Skelton is now dead. His successor, Dr Helen Wallis, said yesterday: 'He began with doubts, but then decided that it was authentic.' Other details about the map's provenance, however, are coming out.

It was, in fact, seen by the British Museum in 1957. According to Dr Wallis, it was at one time in the hands of the Hampstead booksellers, Davis and Orioli, though it is not clear whether they ever acquired it. In 1957, Mr J. I. Davis persuaded the then owner to come to the museum and show the map to experts. This owner was Enzo Ferrajoli de Ry, an Italian bookseller resident in Barcelona, who sold it to Laurence Witten.

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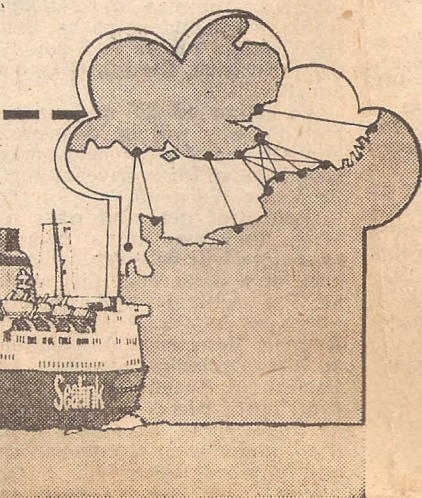
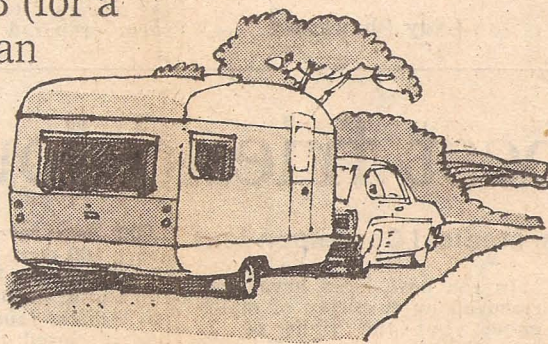
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Both Mr Davis and Signor Ferrajoli are now dead. But Ferrajoli had form—he was imprisoned in Spain on charges that he had stolen manuscripts from the cathedral library of La Seo at Saragossa and sold them to Yale. He was later released when the charges were dropped. Mr Witten says that it was his understanding that Ferrajoli had not owned the manuscript for long, but had bought it from a Spaniard who said that it had been in his family for some time. Adding that he paid only \$3,500 for the volume, Mr Witter argues that the Saragossa episode does not affect the authenticity of the map: he refers to a list of the missing Saragossa manuscripts published in Spain which does not include anything identifiable as the map or the 'Tartar Relation.'

It remains a remarkable coincidence that the booksellers who handled the map and the 'Relation' for Ferrajoli were none other than the booksellers from whom, apparently by utter chance, Mr Marston acquired the *Speculum* that very same year: Davis and Orioli. According to his own account, Mr Marston had not the slightest idea that the *Speculum* copy had anything to do with the Vinland Map. Both the *Speculum* and the 'Relation' seem to be genuine. If the map is not, then the coincidence of the wormholes must also be the result of forgery.

Who was the forger? Dr Wallis discovered that the world map on which Vinland appears fits almost precisely in parts over a little-known map projection known as the 'Aitoff Projection' published in the United States in 1921. The forger may have traced this projection on to a blank sheet of genuine manuscript, perhaps even a page which he had washed or scraped clean of writing.

The western 'Vinland' details, and especially the captions, were partly his own invention, though Greenland shows features unknown until the nineteenth century. He, or they, clearly had an immense scholarly knowledge of Norse colonisation. Experts in London would be interested to have a talk with Luka Jelic, a Croat who wrote a volume on the evangelisation of North America before Christopher Columbus, and was prone to references to documents nobody else had seen. Unfortunately, the book came out in 1897. Mr Jelic, too, is dead.

Fascinated cartographers and historians are gathering in the Royal Geographical Society in London next week for a symposium. Walter McCrone will be present, to explain his spectrographic evidence of forgery. The title of the meeting is 'The Strange Case of the Vinland Map.'

It looks, indeed, as if the world of science has been fooled. But Dr Wallis offers a charitable last word: 'You know, whoever did it just possibly may have drawn that map from a genuine source which hasn't come to light...'