

THE VINLAND MAP AND THE TARTAR RELATION. By R. A. SKELTON, T. E. MARSTON AND G. D. PAINTER. *New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.* (Distributed in Canada by McGill University Press). 11½ x 9 inches. 291 pages. Maps. \$20.00.

The publication of this impressive volume, compiled by scholars from Yale University and the British Museum, is certainly a noteworthy occasion for historians: it comprises a new account of Papal Legate Carpini's journey to East Asia together with the earliest map that shows part of North America.

It brings into focus the incredible gullibility of the mediaeval travellers to the Mongol capital with their tales of unipeds and shaggy-dog husbands, and the Vinland map, though unique as such, gives us no new arctic information that was not already in the literature — in fact does not try to identify some of the difficult points of the sagas.

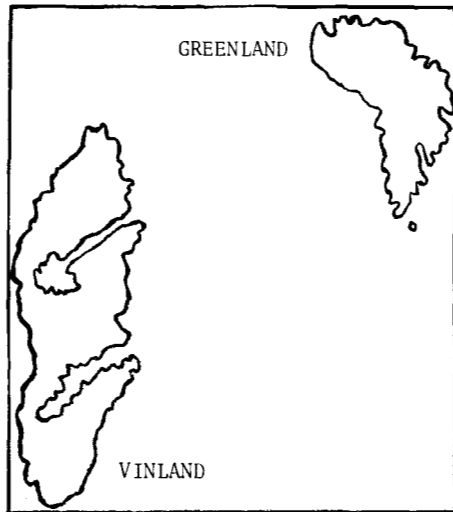
What amazes one is the reaction that this scholarly publication has aroused in the popular press — in North America and in Italy and Spain. Nowadays any successful man has to have a public relations officer behind him to "project his image" even if he is as caustic as the biographer of Lord Thomson of Fleet (Street). Every school boy or girl has heard of Columbus and Marco Polo. How many of them know of Bjarni Herjulfsson or Brother Carpini?

Columbus and Marco Polo have, through their public relations men — the historiopedants — held their field for many years, despite the knowledge for well over a century that the Norsemen were certainly the first Europeans to land somewhere in North America and that Carpini and William of Rubruck had visited the Great Khan before Polo made his journey. Columbus was a bold and original navigator with the keen promotional character that in this present age is capable of getting a large grant from NASA. But he never visited North America. He did however discover Cuba; today many Americans find this regrettable.

Various nations have reached a position of power and expansion at different

times in history, even if their expansiveness was caused by population pressure on a frail homeland or by religious or capitalistic persecution. Scandinavia held the field from the ninth to the twelfth century; Italy, Spain and Portugal from the fourteenth to the sixteenth. Britain and France later; the United States and Russia today. Why quarrel therefore, with the established facts that at certain periods in history nation X was tops but is not necessarily so today or in any given previous century?

The authors of this volume have established through a wealth of carefully examined evidence that the Relation and the Map were produced in about 1440 somewhere in the upper Rhineland area, and done by the same scribe.



It is of course the map that is of chief interest to readers of *Arctic*. The Atlantic is scattered with the usual mythical islands as well as more certain Canaries and Azores, but in the north west appear two islands — Greenland, complete in outline, and Vinland "as discovered by Leif and Bjarni together". The former has always been shown by mediaeval cartographers (almost up to the nineteenth century) as a land mass continuous with Spitzbergen with no visible northern boundary. Why then does this map give it an insular and reasonably correct shape, albeit the scale is much too small?

This leads to speculation that Greenland had been circumnavigated, if not by the Scandinavian settlers then by Eskimo and their information transmitted — eventually to Europe. We know that Eskimo sometime went around northern Greenland with boats. The umiak discovered by Knuth at the eastern tip of Peary Land appeared to date from less than three hundred years ago and contained iron nails. At that time we believe climate and ice conditions were worse than at present — in the eleventh century they should have been much better, and circumnavigation with or without dragging boats over the ice might have been achieved. Several Dorset culture sites have been found in far northern Greenland but these are the people most historians (excepting Tryggvi Oleson) believe the Scandinavians did *not* meet but whose relics they found in Greenland.

But Vinland is also marked as an island, so it may be pure convention that led our map maker to draw Greenland as insular. As stated earlier, the outline of this further *island* does not help us greatly in elucidating the much argued points in the Sagas — we have only the three promontories with bays between, and the latter are probably given a conventional outline. Baffin Island, Labrador, Newfoundland? — or could the southern bay be Hamilton Inlet? We are not greatly helped.

A lengthy legend in very minute calligraphy appears in the northwest corner of the map above Vinland which relates not only the voyage of Leif and Bjarni southward through the ice — “ad austru inter glacies byarnus et leiphus erissonius” (their names look queer in Latin), but the visit there of Bishop Erik in a year that from papal reference must be 1117. The latter trip has already been recorded in the Icelandic Annals but a date of 1121 was ascribed to it.

These two pieces of land and the legend make up the sum total of our Arctic information in this book. But it's the stuff that dreams are made of.

RUSSIAN SETTLEMENT IN THE NORTH. BY TERENCE ARMSTRONG. *Cambridge University Press (Macmillan of Canada)*. 1965. 9¼ x 6¼ inches, xii plus 224 pages, 16 plates, 12 maps. \$8.50.

Dr. Armstrong has been recognized as a leading authority on the Soviet north since the appearance of his book *The Northern Sea Route* in 1952. In turning his attention to the history of human settlement he has produced a work of no less scholarly value but more general appeal, since people generally are more interested in people than in ice and economics.

The book deals with Russian expansion in the north and particularly in Siberia, and traces the settlement pattern first in the Tsarist era and then under the Soviet regime. The longest and most fascinating sections of the book deal with the types of people — fur traders, cossacks, peasants, civil servants, miners, exiles and convicts, not to mention some most original religious sects — who opened up and to some extent peopled this vast area of northern forest. And an interesting assortment of characters they are.

It is interesting to compare the pattern of development described here with that in the Canadian North. One striking difference is the fairly large numbers of peasant settlers who followed the fur traders into at least the southern fringes of northern Siberia. Nothing of this kind happened in Canada until the opening up of the farming lands in the clay belt of northern Ontario and Quebec, and in the Peace River country, in the present century. This movement of peasants was possible in feudal Russia, where serfdom was not abolished until 1861, because on the one hand state-owned serfs could be and were deliberately re-settled in remote areas, and on the other the peasant himself was attracted by the absence of serfdom in Siberia. It is largely to this peasant settlement that Dr. Armstrong attributes the stability of occupation in Siberia, in contrast to Alaska, where there was little or no peasant settlement. It is an interesting point and no doubt an important contributing factor, though