

NORTH ATLANTIC RIM, BARRIER OR BRIDGE?

Suzanne O. Carlson

Wide and far they fared

Needing sustenance

Over ice and wastelands

To Vinland they came

Wealth weighs little

For those who die early

Rune stone from Hønen, Norway.

Translation by Suzanne Carlson

For Sea rovers, the highways are marked by waves below and clouds above. Aided by the sun and the stars, we can guess that the earliest skippers followed the icy rim edge in wooden dugouts or skin clad craft. Food was abundant on the edge of the pack ice: seal, walrus, fish, big and little, birds and their eggs. As the rebounding land emerged, other ocean-loving mammals followed the fish, otters, and the great white bear appeared. Arctic berries clung close to the ground while millions of cawing sea birds clung to bare rocky cliffs.

Historians and archaeologists talk of immigrants moving north into the newly exposed rich northern Tundra both in Europe and North America. But it was not until Guthorm Gjessing, Norwegian archaeologist and ardent diffusionist, noticed a striking similarity between the cultural remains in Norway and the Maritime Archaic or red paint people of Maine and the Canadian Maritimes that the Atlantic rim connection was made. Style and technique of worked stone and the use of skin boats for deep-sea fishing and red ochre in burials were common. Impossible some say, but others—usually those with salt in their blood—think otherwise and see the fish-laden pack ice as a bridge not a barrier to traveling around the North Atlantic rim.

In the Nova film, *Secrets of the Lost Red Paint People*, director Ted Timreck explores conditions, similarities, motives and the artifacts—leaving us intrigued by the possibility of circumpolar sea migrations. I was delighted when, in a discussion about the Vikings, Ted looked at me with a grin and said, “maybe the Vikings were the last, not the first of the early visitors to our side of the Atlantic. What do you think?” Certainly not the first, but I don’t think that they were the last either.

Among the first to test the icy boreal waters was the astronomer, Pytheas of Marseilles, who ventured to Ultima Thule and witnessed the sea “turning into thick cold gray sludge”. Roman merchants no doubt ventured into the North Atlantic, but only Tacitus left an account of Agricola’s men subduing the Orkneys. Caesar commented on the construction and sea-worthiness of Gaelic ships. But it was 925 AD before Dicuil, an Irish monk, records that his brethren had been visiting Thule for many years. He gives a description of that barren land that leaves little doubt that he is referring to Iceland. Saint Brendan’s sixth century Atlantic shuttles are set down in the twelfth century *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbati*. Even Farley Mowat’s latest speculation in his book, *the Farfarers*, of the westward trail of his fictitious Albans presents very plausible candidates for the white robed men of Vitramannaland, also known as Albania or Ireland the Great which lies somewhere near Vinland..

Viking lore tells of long migrations of Germanic tribes into Scandinavia and the eventual melding with the native heirs of the red paint people. I believe that Norse mythology reflects folk memory of real events. The united body that would one day be known as the Vikings, took to the sea very early and they traveled far and wide. The Swedes went east down the Russian rivers to Miklagård—the great city of Constantine. Ingvar took his East Vikings as far as the Caspian Sea. His story is recorded in a series of memorial rune stones in Södermanland, Sweden. The West Vikings, the scourge of Europe, swarmed over all the islands of the North Atlantic, North Sea, and up the Seine to Paris. By 874 Iceland had been “discovered”. Soon inhabited, it was pronounced “fully settled” by 930.

The North Atlantic voyager who should be considered the discoverer of the New World was Gunbjorn, who fell afoul of Iceland and emerged from the fog on the rocky skerries off the east coast of Greenland sometime in the late ninth century. North American settlement, for Greenland is certainly geologically and geographically part of North

America, began with the arrival of the outlawed Eric the red, with his band of settlers in 985 in the fjords of the west coast of Greenland. This settlement, known as the “Eastern Settlement” spawned another outpost three hundred miles to the north which was known as the “Western Settlement”. The two settlements struggled to survive until the Western Settlement was abandoned around 1340 and the “east” settlement disappeared during the little ice age of the mid-16th century. The fate of Vinland the Good is not so clearly documented.

Both the Greenlander’s saga and Erick’s saga tell of Bjarne Herjolfsson’s wind and fog-swept coasting west of his intended Greenland landfall. Leif Erickson later followed his wake but naming his own landfalls, Helluland, Markland and Vinland the Good. Members of the Erickson clan continued exploring and his sister-in-law with her second husband, Thorfinn Karlsefni attempted permanent settlement at Hop in Vinland. Constant skirmishes with the natives contributed to the abandonment of Hop after three years and the saga record retreats into relative silence on the Vinland activities.

Other than brief references by the saga men and rune carvers, we are left with a few Atlantic coast clam shells found in a Danish midden, a chunk of Rhode Island anthracite coal found in Greenland, a Norse penny in a native context in Maine and a Norse spindle whorl in the artifact collection unearthed at L’Anse aux Meadows, in Newfoundland for verified physical evidence.

The “context for controversy” emerged back in the 1830’s when Carl Christian Rafn, Danish antiquarian, scholar, professor, Royal Councilor and possessor of formidable knowledge of the repertoire of Old Norse literature, published his *Antiquae Americanae*. In it, he presented a forceful case for Norse presence along the New England coast which included the Dighton writing rock and the Newport Tower. This enthusiastic support set off a flurry of interest, explorations, discoveries and proofs in a search for Leif’s Vinland. Armed with this or that theory, amateurs and professionals alike scoured the countryside looking for clues, especially runic inscriptions. Since those days words, phrases, pleas and prayers have been discerned carved on stone in a myriad of languages from a myriad of times to bolster the faith of diffusionists.

The longest journey and the longest debate centers on a stone found in Douglas county, Minnesota. Olaf Ohman and his son said they had extracted a marked stone from between the roots of a poplar tree while grubbing land. The newly settled Swedes in the area were quick to recognize the marks as the runic letters of their forefathers, and a translation soon appeared. It tells of eight Goths and twenty-two Norwegians, out on a voyage of discovery from Vinland, who returned from camp after a fishing trip and found ten of their fellows red with blood and dead. It also states that they had another ten men by the sea looking after the ship that was fourteen days’ journey from the sea. This date was translated as 1362.



Figure 1: Kensington rune stone

The inscription, on what is now known as the Kensington Stone, was soon declared a fake by notable runologists and linguists on both sides of the Atlantic. The prime candidate for the hoaxer was the Swede Ohman himself. Disgusted by the publicity, Ohman placed the stone face down as a doorstep in his barn. Hjalmar Holand, a young journalist, became interested and, in 1907 acquired the stone from Ohman. Holand devoted the rest of his life to defending the authenticity of the inscription. The most likely tie to the inscription is the expedition of Paul Knutson who embarked for Greenland and lands west at the behest of King Magnus of Norway in 1354 to bring apostatic Christians back into the fold, and, no doubt catch up on back payments of Peter’s pence. The theory is that Knutson’s crew made its way through Hudson Bay and up the Nelson River where a reconnaissance party traveled overland to meet its fate.

The notorious stone now has its own museum in Alexandria Minnesota, but its authenticity is still fiercely attacked or stoutly defended by a new generation of stone watchers. Sanity was introduced into the debate by Robert Hall in his slim 1982 volume, *The Kensington Stone is Genuine*.

Hall, then professor emeritus and former chair of the language department of Cornell University, methodically sifts

through the evidence and concludes that the stone must be genuine based on philology, circumstances of the find and meticulous comparison of the conflicting data.

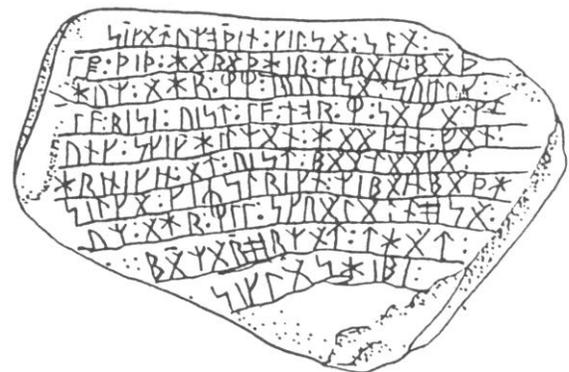
The Old Viking routes were not exclusively for raiding and rapine. The anonymous author of the 13th century King's Mirror, using the device of a father (the King) instructing his son on the ways of the business, presents a reliable text book on early medieval trade in northern realms. The power of the King and his agents increased with their control of that trade. An additional twist was added when the church demanded ever-greater payments. Church records, even in far away Greenland mostly consist of payment ledgers and inventories of church property (movable and fixed).

I have been sleuthing the documentary treasures found in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (available on the Internet) which include customs records, bills of lading in addition to the endless church and royal decrees. In addition to exotic Greenland fare, timber, fur and fish galore was finding its way to southern markets. The King grew rich, traders prospered, the church expanded and the great monastic houses sent brothers and sisters north to help build a new earthly order. Bishops were dispatched further and further west.

Beginning in the twelfth century, Baltic merchants carried northern goods down the great rivers of Europe to an ever growing market. Gradually German merchants established posts in nearly all northern ports and were knit into the Hanseatic League, a merchants union centered in Hamburg and Lubeck. The hegemony created by the Germanic Hansa bit into the pockets of both church and crown, to say nothing of ordinary traders, leading to endless quarrels, embargoes and retaliations for real or perceived wrongs on both sides. Stockfish (cod) was often at the center of sea-born actions. The age of the "Cod wars" was long and bitter and particularly affected Iceland, and no doubt, reached toward Greenland. It is hard to imagine that the North Atlantic bridge linking the North Sea cod fisherman to The Shetlands, Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland did not extend to the fish-rich shallow banks to the southwest. (Now the Grand and Georges Banks)

Although trade continued throughout the medieval period in the eastern settlement of Greenland, the western settlement seemed more remote and isolated. It was said that the folk there had abandoned their Christian ways and that the Eskimos were encroaching into their territory. At the behest of Bishop Haakon of Bergen, Ivar Bardsen made a reconnaissance trip to the western settlement in 1342 and to his dismay found it abandoned. The existence of cattle and sheep still grazing indicated that the departure had been recent and hurried, but there was no indication of hostilities with the encroaching Eskimos. Several theories have been advanced explaining the demise of the western settlement, but no acceptable solution has been accepted. The eastern settlement struggled on and thrived after a fashion, at least according to a 1380's document recording a trail of two Norwegian traders who were hauled before the king for doing business without a license, thus cheating Magnus out of his tariffs. From then on, the voice from Greenland becomes fainter and fainter.

The runic battle was still raging in 1972 when three mysterious stones were found on state land at the edge of Spirit Pond, in Phippsburg, Maine. About six by eleven inches, one stone clearly featured a rough map and runic words placed randomly on one side, and a few runes and crude drawings on the other. The second stone bore a dozen letters on one side, and the third contained a long message of sixteen lines neatly inscribed on both sides of the stone.



The finder, a Maine carpenter named Walter Elliott, took the stones to the Bath Maritime Museum, where director Harold Brown suggested that the marks might be runic. Subsequently the stones found their way to Einar Haugen, Distinguished Harvard professor of Scandinavian languages and history. In his published evaluation, he was adamant in crying fraud, hoax, modern artifact, "a few Norse words in a sea of gibberish". The rank and file of Scholars stood behind the Haugen

pronouncement. Only Professor Cyrus Gordon, Orientalist at Brandeis and New York Universities, joined proponents in his 1974 book *Riddles of the Past*. A few committed researchers continue to probe the meaning of the stones, which are sequestered in the Maine State Museum, in Augusta.

My interest in the stones began eleven years ago when they were discussed at a NEARA meeting in Portland Maine. Although I had been intrigued with the development, use and meaning of the runic alphabet for many years and prided myself on translating the “Haakon raised this stone for his mother Thora and Bjorn carved it” standard monumental formula, I was propelled into studying not only the runes but soon the intricate grammar and syntax of Old Norse in earnest. My teacher was Dr. Haugen through his fine textbooks on Old Norse. A chance whim led me to wonder if the sixteen lines might be verse of two stanzas of the standard eight line poems of the Norse Skalds.

After intensive (and intense) study, a number of elements emerged about the inscription. The entire sixteen lines did indeed follow required precepts in alliteration, rhythm, stress and beat, and line length to qualify as sound Norse poetic meter. The language, although somewhat archaic bears a large number of medieval elements and indicates that it could not be earlier than the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The anomalous letters remain without explanation. The plea to Pagan references is out of context with medieval Christian values.

The narrative is not clear and numerous other interpretations are possible, even probable but I feel sure that this translation is very close to expressing the original intent.

*See- pay heed to (this)—Odin cries
 To see seventeen dead—praise them
 We prayer our prayer—year twenty
 The company picked twelve companions
 Twelve began west
 Ten north, they tell of young
 bearded doomed man that Haakon
 found surrounded in the water
 they man adrift was handed over as a hostage
 We prayer our prayer—year twelve
 A gale breaks forth, wind blows up
 On the sea. Oh! Fainthearted those that sail the
 ship
 From Ægir, seventeen made red with blood
 Gushing, cut the course that caused death
 Praise them
 We prayer our prayer—year M-two*

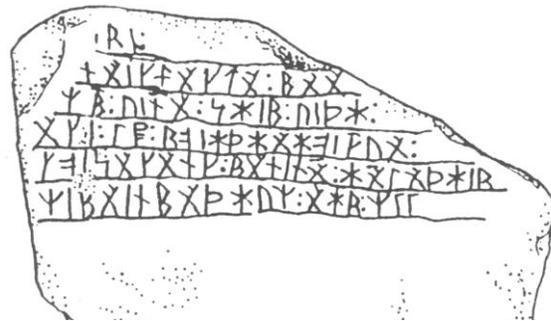


Figure 2 Spirit Pond inscription stone

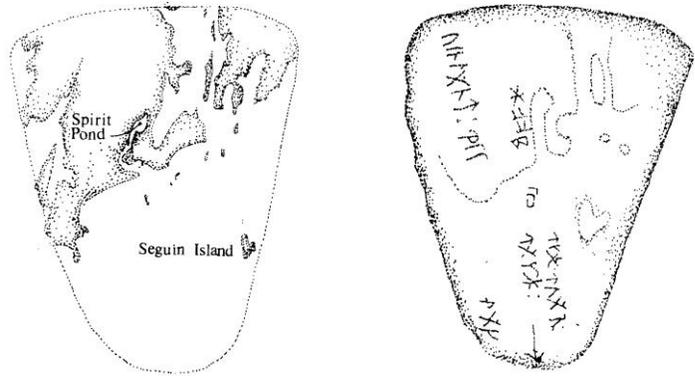


Figure 3 Spirit Pond map stone

Lawrence M.C. Smith, who had given the land to the state where the stones were found, admits to “being somewhat lacking in complete objectivity” in a memo discussing the stones. But as the donor of the Smith cartographic collection which forms the base of the Osher Map Library at the University of Southern Maine, Smith was passionate about maps. Following Gordon in accepting an early 12th century date, he posits two questions concerning motives for forgery: “Why would a forger portray a situation that probably existed in 1123 AD but does not today...Why would a forger make a map at all if he was interested in merely creating the idea that Vikings had been in Maine”. He points out other significant factors including accurate locations and configuration of Seguin and the Heron islands

which can only be discerned by boat, way beyond the mouth of the Kennebec. Smith, also a sailor, did not find the Ocean a barrier. I might add that the name of the pond on the map-stone is *Hop*, which means in Old Norse a pond that is salt water at flood and fresh at ebb tide, just the condition of Spirit Pond before the existing dam was built.

Several numbers appear on the inscription referring to dates, Year 20, year 12 and year M2. The two symbols clearly representing “10” have been interpreted as meaning the year 1010 which led Dr. Haugen, properly so, to argue that such numeration was not possible in the early eleventh century. I read the numbers as meaning twenty, twelve, etc. Focusing on the twenty, I wondered twenty of what? A recent clue from the *Diplomatarium Nowegicum*, where many of the documents are dated according to the year of the reign of King Magnus, led me to check the year of the year twenty of Magnus’ reign. This brings us to 1339, just two years before Ivar Bardsen visited the abandoned western colony; just when folks were saying the Westerners had reverted to their heathen ways. Linguistic forms would be consistent with Greenlandic use, which was less “advanced” than the evolving mainland languages. Might these circumstances lead to the conditions described in the inscription encountered by a party settling or exploring? The excavation of two small houses on the edge of Spirit Pond in 1974 yielded only Colonial artifacts but produced a carbon-14 date of 1405 +/- 70 years and no possible candidate has been offered as a forger. The evidence of runic style and language use weighs heavily on the side of the stones being authentic 14th century artifacts deposited in Maine.

Another lithic clue appeared at the end of the Atlantic bridge. The pecked remains on the “Indian stone”, a flat exposed piece of bedrock in Westford Massachusetts reawakened the rancor of a new faction of fans of North Atlantic Voyages. Although a well-known local focal point, it was amateur archaeologist Frank Glynn who began to study the stone seriously in the 1950s. His correspondence with renegade, but notable head of the archaeology department of Cambridge, Thomas Lethbridge reveals the slow process involved in trying to determine the nature of the carving. The sequence of Glynn’s examinations, the material sent to Lethbridge, and Lethbridge’s consulting authorities on heraldry make it impossible to imagine that this was a hoax conjured up for either the fun of it or as a boon to the Gunn Clan. For the shadowy shield pecked into the effigy of the Knight in armor seemed to be that of a member of the Clan Gunn, perhaps Sir James Gunn, late 14th century Scottish knight. Certainly both Glynn and Lethbridge wondered why a Scotsman would be wandering around northern Massachusetts at that time, a time not very long after the voyage of Paul Knutson.

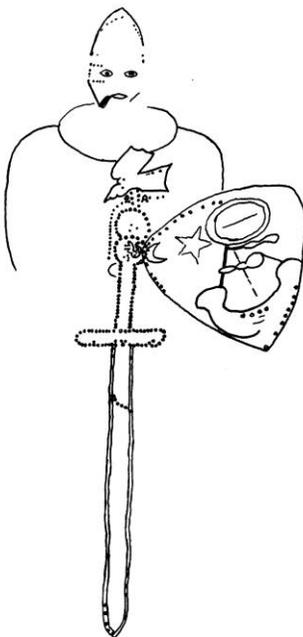


Figure 4 the Westford Knight

One answer came from an unlikely time and place. Sometime in the early 16th century, a little boy playing in the attic of a Venetian Palace tore a bundle of old letters into pieces. As an adult, the remorseful Nicolo Zeno found them once again, pieced them back together and accompanied by an explanatory sea chart, published the posthumous report of his great-great-great grandfather’s (also called Nicolo) travels in the north. Called the *Discovery of the Islands of Frislandia, Eslanda, Engroneland, Estotilanda, and Icaria; made by M. Nicolas Zeno, Knight and M. Antonio, his brother*. The Venetian adventurer, probably with a cargo of luxuries to sell, was driven off course and shipwrecked somewhere in the north sea. Happily he and his crew were rescued by the Earl of the realm who was delighted to have this knowledgeable mariner cast upon his shore. After a series of adventures on nearby islands, Nicolo was joined by his brother Antonio. The Zeno narrative, though lengthy, with lots of sailing directions, vivid descriptions and details of time spent traveling hither and thither, establishes that the expedition reached North America. The name “Zichmni” hardly rings with a Scottish burr, but was deemed a muddled rendering of Sinclair as early as 1796 by Johann Reinhold Foster proposing the late 14th century Earl of the Orkney Islands, Henry Sinclair as the Zichmni of the Zeno narrative. This suggestion was enthusiastically adopted by the Clan Sinclair members who continue to present a strong case in favor of their ancestor. I found it amusing to find ‘Sinclair’ spelled ‘Zinkler’ in one important 1389 document and was even more confounded to find that ‘Powell Knudzøn’ was the name of Magnus’ envoy in the oft-referred-to 1354 document on Paul Knutson’s

voyage as examples of the capriciousness of Medieval spelling. Before attempting to correlate Zichmni with Henry Sinclair, we must reconsider the feasibility of Henry's having made such a trip.

As Earl of the Orkneys, Henry was in close collaboration with Queen Margaret, daughter-in-law of King Magnus and daughter of Valdemar, King of Denmark. Margaret as Queen of Norway and Denmark, brought Sweden into the fold with the Kalmar Union in a 1389 attempt to crush the power of the Hansa. The correspondence in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* establishes her ties with Henry Sinclair and hints at Margaret's exploiting his sea power and ties to Scotland, and makes a very convincing case for their trying to regain dominance over the North Atlantic. The Helluland, Markland and Vinland of the sagas were not yet myths. The Icelandic "cod wars" have been well documented, showing how Iceland was perennially caught in the crossfire between mainland Scandinavian, English and Hansa interests. It is inconceivable to me that fishermen caught in the accompanying blockades would not have found the fish rich banks and shoals of the Atlantic coast, and the Earl of Orkney was not aware of them.

A glance at a map of the north Atlantic makes vivid the strategic position of the Orkneys and the Shetlands in the affairs of the North Atlantic rim, where fish reigned. In addition to the craving for fish, Europe craved luxury items, especially walrus tusk ivory and falcons. Control of these Atlantic trade goods meant riches and was a powerful incentive for far-flung exploration.

The maneuvering and parrying for power among northern bishops was exacerbated by the schism leading to an alternate pope in Avignon. Even the remote diocese in Greenland came under papal scrutiny, usually demanding the immediate payment of tithes and inventories of church possessions. The annual trading ships that came out from Norway, until the ice and economic strain in Norway closed the sea-lanes to Greenland in the fifteenth century, are well documented. In North Atlantic ports, Hansa traders, fishermen from all nations, North Sea pirates, petty princes claiming disputed patrimonies and sea rovers converged to mingle and share their lore. Could the Earl of Orkney have been left out of this loop? The potent mixture of secular ambition and papal greed convinces me that Henry's making or sponsoring a voyage to the New World was not only possible, but also inevitable.

The Westford knight is a Johnny or Jamey-come-lately in the Sinclair story. The pecked outlines are too eroded



to tell us much anymore. The case rests with the reliability of Glynn's recording methods and Lethbridge's sleuthing. There is certainly nothing in the correspondence that would suggest that a hoax was under construction. The identification of Henry's cousin James Gunn as the 'effigy Gunn' is pure speculation, but it is certainly plausible.

The last of our lithics in the context for controversy has raged around a "rude heap" of stones too large to have been forged, or even a hoax, but the name of its builder and the date of construction has bred more controversy than the other smaller artifacts.

Situated on a knoll above Narragansett Bay in Newport Rhode Island, the Newport tower has aroused passionate partisans since the early 19th century. The "Sinclair theory" is only the latest in the peregrinations to discover the true builder of the Newport tower, an unusual and to many a distinctly medieval structure in the center of Newport Rhode Island. Since this battle began in the 1840's, again set off by Carl Christian Rafn, the enemies were lined up on two sides—the "Arnoldist" side and the anyone-but-Arnold side, although heavily tilted toward a Norse origin. The first accepted reference to the open arcaded circular tower was in the will of the first Rhode Governor and prosperous merchant, Benedict Arnold's, which included reference to "my stone builte tower." The descendants of Rafn's theories were sometimes on

Figure 5 Newport Tower

shifting sands, dealing in speculation and circumstantial evidence. The Arnoldist claims seemed confirmed in 1951

with the publication William Godfrey's Harvard doctoral dissertation in *Digging a Tower and Laying a Ghost: The Archaeology and Controversial history of the Newport Tower*. Phillip Ainsworth Means promotes the Viking theory in his 1942 book *The Newport Tower*. New efforts and new investigations were renewed in 1994 by the Danish Committee for Research on Norse Activities in North America- AD 1000- 1500. According to the report of the Danish committee prepared by Johannes Hertz of the National Museum in Copenhagen, all evidence pointed to Arnold as the builder. The case seemed to be closed. New carbon dates and photogrammetric analysis leading to a study of its measurements and Godfrey's excavations lead to a date of circa 1667.

Upon closer study, In my opinion however, the material presented sound evidence that the tower could not have been built by Arnold at that date. I hang my case on three of the pieces of scientific evidence presented by Hertz.

1: Godfrey finds a boot print in the clay at the bottom of his trench convincing evidence of the date of construction. Along with the boot print are mixed willy-nilly thousands of pieces of mortar and sundry seventeenth century artifacts. As an architect, I suggests that if it were new construction, Godfrey should have found post holes from the wood staging required to erect the masonry tower. None were found. All evidence points to a trench dug around an existing structure. Godfrey himself wonders at the amount of mortar and concludes that work must have begun before the trench was backfilled. Based on the dimensions of the trench, this would have been physically impossible and a careful review of the documentation indicates that the trench must have been dug as part of an inspection, stabilization effort in the conversion of an existing stone building into a windmill in the late 17th century, unwittingly supporting an earlier construction date.

2: Continued attempts at finding the unit of measurement, including the work of the Danish committee, have advanced just about every known medieval unit of measure except the English foot. I have scoured the record and I have not found a single example of a 17th century English colonial structure that did not use English measurements. This seems another strong point in favor of another builder.

3: The recent carbon dating by the Danish Committee was based on a new and experimental technique of measuring the C-14 in carbon-dioxide bubbles in the mortar. The actual range of dates measured was between 1410 and 1970, which was conveniently calibrated to the late 1600s. The science of this experiment collapses under careful scrutiny. As a control, the committee selected the chimney base of the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, the only extant building and the only example of mortared stone construction in Newport from the late 17th century. This produced two C-14 dates of 1870 +/- 100 years and 1790 +/- 60 years. It is also significant that the standard lime mortar of the period was used in the chimney base, and the tower mortar is "tabby" mortar or mortar made directly from shells.



Figure 6 The lavabo at Mellifont Abbey, Ireland

There is another piece of scientific evidence which Hertz gives short shrift. William Penhallow, professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Rhode Island had long been pondering the meaning of his silent stone neighbor before he launched a serious study of possible astronomic alignments to and from the tower. He discovered that the seemingly random openings with their asymmetrically splayed jambs, framed the rays of very specific astronomical events—the rising and setting of the solstice and equinox sun and of lunar extremes. I have been working in collaboration with Penhallow on tracking down clues in the historical record which seems to validate the sophisticated use of this sort of observational astronomy by Medieval scholars, usually churchmen, in trying to fix the day of Easter and other movable feasts and the canonical hours of prayer for religious communities.

I leave it to the proponents of each theory to make a case, but I couldn't resist returning to an oblique observation by Rafn that the tower resembled the octagonal lavabo at Mellifont Abbey in Ireland. It does indeed, and it seems that open arced lavabos with an enclosed superstructure were found in a number of medieval Cistercian Monasteries. Though not baptisteries, the ablutions of the monks before meals echo the baptismal consecration. The purpose of the upper story, usually without a stair, door or other direct access remains a mystery. We suspect that it

may have served as an observatory marking calendrical events and canonical hours on the horizon. This unusual class of structure is the only one that bears a close correspondence with the Tower in Newport. Recently a number of tower watchers have been re-examining the 1398 voyage of Henry Sinclair, Earl of Orkney and the long term connection of the Sinclairs with a possible diaspora of the banished Templars. The Templars were also closely connected to the Cistercian Order. It is tempting to imagine surviving Templars assisted by Cistercian clerics trying to create a refuge in a new unknown world. That search may be the next Chapter in the mystery of the Newport Tower. The legacy of Carl Christian Rafn lives on.

I have been a student of Northern European history and prehistory for many years. The solid dirt-down evidence provided by archaeology forms a solid base. The written word is always open to interpretation or re-interpretation. New techniques of dating can be accepted as scientific truth or can be skewed to fit the evidence. The artifacts I have considered included the Kensington runestone, the Spirit Pond runestones and the Newport Tower. The players in this adventure were Leif Erickson and company, Ivar Bardsen, Paul Knutson and King Magnus Ericksson of Norway in the mid 14th century and King Magnus' daughter, Queen Margaret of Norway and Denmark and Henry Sinclair, Jarl of Orkney in the late 14th century with side excursions to consider cod-fish, the Hanseatic League, Templars and Cistercian monks.

With sharp eyes and keen vision, men have held the rudder steering westward across the North Atlantic—across time. Daring men, ready to risk everything for treasure, for power, for love—love of God or of the Sea. In trying to discern the wake of the ancient mariner, I feel secure that I am crossing a well-traveled bridge.

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