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Zeno's Frislanda Is Not Iceland, but the Færoes; An Answer to Admiral Irminger

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or shorter time on the heated floor. As no cold water was to be found in the neighbourhood, the water from the hot springs was led to a basin somewhat distant, where it was cooled.

Coffee cooked with the water had no bad taste whatever, and cattle drinking the water thrived very well.

Zeno had without doubt heard of similar places in Iceland; certainly never in Greenland.

It is to be regretted that the original narrative of Nicolò and Antonio Zeno has not descended to posterity in its integrity as penned by themselves, as it would certainly in that case have been a more precious geographical document than it is in its present state. Zeno the younger, the editor, himself confesses that he, when a child, had torn many of the letters in pieces, and that the 'Carta,' when it was edited, was rotten with age.

VII.—*Zeno's Frislanda is not Iceland, but the Færoes; an Answer to Admiral IRMINGER.* By R. H. MAJOR, F.S.A., Secretary, R.G.S.

It was truly said by the learned John Pinkerton, in his 'History of Scotland' (vol. i. page 261, note), "that Zeno's book is one of the most puzzling in the whole circle of literature." In my edition of that book in 1873 I believed, and still believe, that I had solved all the puzzles therein contained. This belief is based upon the fact that I had demonstrated by the geography of to-day that the Frislanda of the Zeno was the Færoe Islands; and that by the happy discovery of a passage in Torfæus, to the effect that "in the year 1391 the Earl of Orkney slew Malise Sperre (his Norse rival to the earldom) in Shetland with seven others," had been able to correct the date of the map from 1380 to 1390, and, in so doing, to bring the *dramatis personæ* and events described into perfect historical harmony, both as to time and place. Of these two main points the former is the only one to which we are now called upon to direct our attention. I also took great pains to bring into prominent light two stumbling-blocks, over one or other or both of which all my predecessors had tripped, and consequently failed. They are both of them absolutely and unavoidably necessary to be borne in mind if the Zeno book is to be duly criticised, but both one and the other are essentially obnoxious to severely matter-of-fact minds. The first is, the non-recognition of the reality that when proper names are written down

by a foreigner from the lips of natives of whose language and country he is otherwise entirely ignorant, such proper names must be recognised not by their literal rendering, but by their sound, in connection with the circumstances under which they were dictated. So difficult of recognition is this reality by many minds, that I have known persons who have acknowledged the principle in theory stumble at the very first example propounded to them in practice.

The second is the non-recognition of the real or apparent exaggeration—sometimes more apparent than real—almost universally prevailing in narratives of medieval voyages and travels. It is obvious that if the commentator of to-day endeavours to bring down such narratives to the dead level of his own present experiences, making no allowance whatever for the changes which have taken place in the lapse of time, he must either come to wrong conclusions, or else reject the whole story as worthless.

Now it must be confessed that, in finding a remedy for both these difficulties, speculation has to be resorted to, but happily, always within the wholesome check of following the track of the narrative in faithful sequence from a well-recognised beginning to a well-recognised termination. Where this can be done under the light of the historical and geographical knowledge of to-day, we can without hesitation accept the phonetic instead of the literal rendering of the proper names which fall within the track, while we can with equally good conscience, in a proper antiquarian spirit, look back to the habits and style of expression peculiar to the early period under consideration.

Where a subject is so puzzling as that of the Zeno, it is no wonder if propounders of new theories should arise; but if they will not avail themselves of the elucidations I have already given, it is no duty of mine to repeat them. When, however, an honoured veteran like Admiral Irminger propounds a new theory, and adduces *primâ facie* plausible arguments in its favour, I willingly make it a duty to listen respectfully to what he has to advance, and to answer him as clearly as I may.

The phonetic principle Admiral Irminger seems to accept, but he has not, I fear, made due allowance for the changes incident to the lapse of time.

In the Zeno narrative is a description of the formal taking possession, both by land and sea, of Frislanda, which I have shown to be the Færoe Islands, by the chieftain Zichmni, whom I have shown to be Henry Sinclair, Earl of the Orkneys and of Caithness; the taking possession of the *coasts* and *islands* being committed by him to Nicolò Zeno. With reference to this expedition Admiral Irminger makes a long extract from

the Zeno text, including the following passage :—"This fleet of Zichmni sailed to the westwards, and with little trouble gained possession of Ledovo and Ilofe, and other small islands in a gulf called Sudero ; where in the harbour of the country, called Sanestol, they found Zichmni, who came *by land with his army*, conquering all the country as he went;" and the admiral's comment is, "As Zichmni *came by land*, Sanestol (Major's Sandoe) must have been continent with the place from which he has come directly." And some lines afterwards he says :—"From whence he came is not said, but *by land it is not possible to come to that little island*." No one more ready than myself to acknowledge that one does not generally come to an island by land, whether that island be small or great, but it is quite possible to come by land to a bay in an island, though that island be small ; and this is all that the text requires, viz. "In the harbour of the country, called Sanestol [*i.e.* the harbour of Sandsbugt], they found Zichmni, who came by land with his army." This explanation, however, does not neutralise Admiral Irminger's formidable statement, that by land it is not possible to come to that little island. I will venture an audacious conjecture. Suppose Earl Sinclair and his men crossed over to Sandoe in boats. Boats have been used for crossing from one island to another before now, while, as Admiral Irminger points out, there was a capital landing-place at Skaapen, on the north side of Sandoe ; and, in fact, the Admiral is "perplexed that Zeno was not at the outset directed to this landing-place in order to transport the army to Stromoe for the conquest's sake." Admiral Irminger has not realised that the so-called army—whatever number of men that might mean, probably the merest handful—was with Sinclair himself, while *Zeno had a special task entrusted to him*, which was, that while Earl Sinclair was making his triumphant progress *on land*, he himself was to take formal possession of the *coasts and islands*, for which purpose accordingly he proceeded with *the fleet* to the westwards and northwards.

These and other minor difficulties, to which I shall recur hereafter, force Admiral Irminger to the conclusion that the Frislanda of the Zeno cannot be the Færoe Islands. I will therefore address myself to this principal question at once, in order that a large hole being made for the cat, there may be free passage for the kittens, and so time may be saved. The first fact which confronts us is, that neither Nicolò nor Antonio Zeno, from whom the narrative and map are derived, is of the same opinion as Admiral Irminger ; for on the map we find laid down *both* Frislanda and Iceland, and, roughly speaking, for a map made 500 years ago, in their proper positions (sup-

posing Frislanda to be the Færoe Islands), with reference to Greenland, Norway, and Scotland. In order to elevate Frislanda to the dignity of Iceland, Admiral Irminger aims at treating the larger island of Islanda or Iceland as a myth; but this will not do, for on Islanda are laid down the names of the two Icelandic Bishops' Sees, Scalodin and Olensis (the adjectival form of Holum). It is manifest, therefore, that in the opinion of these two ancient Venetian voyagers, the authors of both narrative and map, we have two substantive realities, one Frislanda, the other Iceland, and that Frislanda is not Iceland, and Iceland is not Frislanda. Admiral Irminger is of a different opinion. I beg leave to side with the old voyagers. But it will be said that the Zeno map was sophisticated by Nicolò Zeno, jun., in 1558. True; in his guileless ignorance of the countries referred to, both in map and text, he misread "Eslanda" and "Le Islande," both meaning the Shetland Islands, for Islanda (Iceland), and accordingly endowed the latter island at its east end with a cluster of seven islands, bearing names mentioned in the text as really belonging to the Shetlands. In this we trace a blunder into which he could blamelessly fall, but there is nothing therein to warrant the extravagant supposition that he had evolved from his inner consciousness the island or group of islands named Frislanda, and had not only arbitrarily inserted it on the map, but, knowing no more of the Færoe Islands than the man in the moon, had invented and inserted in the narrative a story of events occurring therein, and agreeing in detail with the geography of the present day. If he could perform such a miracle as this, he would merit canonisation forthwith. But we have no need to resort to the supernatural. The most conclusive evidence that Frislanda and Iceland were transmitted in their entirety by Antonio Zeno, is given in the following words in a letter by him addressed to his brother Carlo. Speaking of a book which he had written, and which, in fact, he brought home with him to Venice, he says, "In it I have described the country, the monstrous fishes, the customs and laws of *Frislanda*, of *Islanda* (Iceland), of *Estlanda* (Shetland), the kingdoms of Norway, Estotiland, and Drogio."

And now that I have shown on the highest possible authority that Iceland is not Frislanda, nor Frislanda Iceland, I will proceed to show what Frislanda is. If we look at the Zeno map, the first thing which strikes our eye, standing at the extreme south of Frislanda, like a sentinel keeping watch and ward over the group, is the Island of Monaco (Venetian for "Monk"). If we turn to a modern map of the Færoe Islands we see the same monk standing as sentinel in precisely the same

position. For five hundred years and more has that monk stood there patiently on guard, and if he could speak the name of the territory over which he kept ward, that name, whether uttered to-day or five hundred years ago, however the dialect might differ, would virtually be the same. A sturdy and imperturbable sentinel that, whom I venture to think that not even Admiral Irminger will succeed in upsetting. But let us now revert to the already quoted passage from the text, which says (page 6), "Zichmni being anxious to win renown by deeds of arms, had come with his men to attempt the conquest of Frislanda, which is an island somewhat larger than Ireland.* The fleet under the charge of Zeno, consisting of thirteen vessels, sailed to the westwards, and with little trouble gained possession of Ledovo and Ilofe, and other small islands, in a gulf called Sudero, where in the harbour of the country called Sanestol, they captured some small barks laden with salt fish." Now be it observed that both here in the text, and in the Frislanda of the map, the Gulf of Sudero is mentioned; and if the reader will look at the modern map of the Færoe Islands, he will find between the Island of Sudero, the southernmost of the larger islands of the group, and the Island of Sandoe, the Sanestol of Zeno, Sudero-Fiord, which is the Gulf of Sudero. So that in three independent places we have the Gulf of Sudero, common to the text, the Frislanda of the map, and the Færoe Islands of the map of to-day. The identity is then unavoidable.

From Sandsbugt, in Sandoe, where Sinclair met Zeno, the text says that the fleet, making its course still westwards, came to the other cape of the gulf, and then turning again they fell in with certain islands and lands which they brought into possession of Zichmni. This sea was in a manner full of shoals and rocks, so that had Messire Nicolò and the Venetian mariners not been their pilots, the whole fleet would have been lost. By the advice of Messire Nicolò, the captain now determined to go ashore, at a place called Bondendon, and there they heard that Zichmni had put to flight the army of the enemy; in consequence of which ambassadors were sent from all parts of the island to yield the country up into his hands. Here they awaited his arrival, when Zichmni having complimented Messire

* Had Admiral Irminger done me the honour to read a note which I made on this passage in my book, he need not have insisted on this evidently blundering use of the word "Ireland" by Nicolò Zeno, junr. The note runs thus:—"From the Zeni's utter ignorance of Ireland, as shown in a subsequent part of the narrative, I have reason to suspect that the word rendered here 'Irlanda' was in the original text 'Islanda or Æslanda,' as written elsewhere in the text for 'Shetland.' The proportions of Frislanda and Estland (*i.e.* Shetland) on the Zeno map, are in accordance with this conclusion."

Nicolò on his great zeal and skill, conferred on him the honour of knighthood, and rewarded his men with very handsome presents. "Departing thence," the text goes on to say, "they went in triumphant manner towards Frislanda, the chief city of that island on the south-east of it, lying inside a bay, in which there is such great abundance of fish, that many ships are laden therewith to supply Flanders, Brittany, England, Scotland, Norway, and Denmark, and by this trade they gather great wealth."*

A glance at the map of the Færoe Islands will show how accurately this track of the fleet accords with the localities, and if at the same time the Frislanda of the Zeno map be consulted, it will be seen that Bondendon lies opposite to the town of Frislanda, the capital of the whole group, *i.e.* Thorshavn,† while on the modern map, Norderdahl, on the west side of the island of Stromoe, of which Bondendon is the phonetic representative,‡ occupies the same position opposite Thorshavn, on the south-east of Stromoe, as the text describes.

In the course of this track there are two points to which Admiral Irminger raises objections. One is, that there are rocks but no shoals, where Zeno described the latter to be, but the expression occurs in a passage where there is much vaunting of the nautical skill of the Venetian mariners, and whether there are shoals there or not, rocks and shoals are not infrequent companions, and we must not be surprised at vanity exhibiting itself in a little braggadocio. Admiral Irminger's second objection is, "That there is no anchor ground at Norderdahl, but often a strong current and heaving of the sea." "The beach," he says, "in its whole length from Norderdahl to the southernmost part of Stromoe is a somewhat steep-to and rocky coast." Perhaps on this occasion there was no strong current or heaving of the sea, and, as there was a beach, we may reasonably suppose that Sinclair was able to communicate with Zeno, as the text describes, before his triumphant departure for Thorshavn, *alias* Frislanda.

While thus treating of the coasts and rocks in this part of the Færoe group, it is well that I should advert to another occasion, much later in the narrative, when great preparations were being made for an extensive voyage to the west, to a country called Estotiland. "Steering westwards," says Antonio

* In this sentence there is unquestionably much apparent exaggeration.

† In mediæval times it was a frequent custom to apply the name of the whole country to the capital.

‡ I observe that Admiral Irminger speaks of Bondendon as "Mr. Major's and Admiral Zahrtmann's Norderdahl;" and of Sanestol as "Major's and Zahrtmann's Sandoe." I find no trace whatever of Admiral Zahrtmann having made these identifications. I alone am responsible for them.

Zeno, "we discovered some islands subject to Frislanda, and, passing certain shoals, came to Ledovo, where we stayed seven days to refresh ourselves, and to furnish the fleet with necessaries. Departing hence, we arrived on the 1st of July at the island of Ilofe." The reader will recollect the mention of these islands in the Gulf of Sudero in Nicolò Zeno's expedition. In the modern map of the Færoe Islands will be seen in Sudero Gulf the islands of Lille Dimon, Store Dimon, and Skuoe. It is not difficult to understand how Zeno, hearing Lille Dimon uttered by a northerner, should give to the sound that he heard the form of Ledovo, and it has been suggested by Bredsdorff, in his article on the Zeno voyages in 'Grönland's Historiske Mindesmærker,' that the "I" in Ilofe has been mistakenly written by Nicolò Zeno, jun., for an "S," and thus we may see that Skuoe easily becomes, when written down by the southerner, Slofe. We will now see what Admiral Irminger says with respect to Lille Dimon, apropos of the above quotation from Antonio Zeno—"Let us examine," he says, "that island 'Little Dimon,' of which I subjoin a sketch. Little Dimon rises steep out of the almost constant heavy seas of the North Atlantic, is 1299 feet high, its greatest diameter at the level of the sea about half a mile. No port, no anchorage, no leese side; almost always breakers more or less against that almost perpendicular rocky coast; very often, through the strong tide, races whirling round the island, increasing in violence. The island is aboardable only at one single point, and this only in calm weather; it is, besides, so steep-to that one ought to be accustomed to climb almost perpendicular rocks to get ashore, and no fresh water is to be found. *Certainly the fleet stayed not here at this uninhabitable spot for refreshment and necessaries, where nothing is found but rock and a little grass.*" I sincerely sympathise with Admiral Irminger in his view of the inhospitable nature of this well-proportioned and elevated rock. Small prospect there of a comfortable turn-in over night, and a dressing-gown and slippers and hot water in the morning, and yet I think Antonio Zeno was quite right after all. He says nothing about going on the rock, but as the fleet were bound for a far distant land in the west, it was absolutely necessary to take in ample provision of fish, and *off* that island they may well have spent seven days in catching or procuring the needful supplies. But to sum up—whatever may be Admiral Irminger's opinions respecting the adaptability of the Zeno narrative of events to the Færoe Islands, the inexorable, unavoidable fact will still remain, that the names of Monaco, Sudero Golfo, Streme (evidently Stromoe), and Andeford (evidently Andafer), are given on the Frislanda of the Zeno map, and that they, and all the

names relating to Frislanda, mentioned in the text, correspond in position with the geography of the Færoe Islands of to-day. So that it would be perverseness to deny the identity of the two.

And now let us see what is the result of leaving that which is real, to indulge in that which is fanciful. Admiral Irminger has of his own arbitrary choice elected to adopt Iceland as the representative of the Frislanda of the Zeni. In order to carry out his plan, he has been compelled to seek out spots in that island upon which he can foist the names applied by the Zeni to localities in the Færoe Islands. He finds no Monaco or Monk. He invents one. He finds no Gulf of Sudero. He invents one. He finds no Sanestol. He invents three queried ones, the two widest apart being some 50 miles distant from each other. It is true he finds a beautiful phonetic representative of Bondendon in "Budardalr"; but unfortunately not one of all these fits in with the requirements of the text. For example, he selects two gulfs on the west coast of Iceland, named respectively Brede Bugt and Faxe Bugt, and as the latter lies south of the former, he arbitrarily gives it the name of Sudero Golfo, and what is the consequence? The description of Nicolò Zeno's expedition, which tallied exactly with the modern map of the Færoe Islands, here breaks down altogether. Admiral Irminger's Sudero Golfo merely means Southern Gulf as distinguished from its northern neighbour; but the Gulf of Sudero of the text means the Gulf of the Southern Island, taking its name from the actual island of Suderoe in the Færoe Isles, the Gulf or Fiord of Suderoe lying between it and Sandoe, Zeno's Sanestol. The text says that "Zichmni's fleet sailed to the *westwards*, and with little trouble gained possession of Ledovo and other small islands in the Gulf of Sudero." Now I respectfully challenge Admiral Irminger to say whether he by a westward course *could* sail into his Sudero Golfo on the west coast of Iceland; and I would ask, where are the islands of Ledovo and Ilofe in said gulf? Simply nowhere. But, to be brief, we will suppose Zeno to have finally reached Admiral Irminger's Bondendon. We find that its position by no means tallies with that of the Bondendon in the Zeno map, whereas that of Norderdahl on the island of Stromoe exactly does, and then what follows? After the meeting of Zichmni and Nicolò Zeno, the former, with his followers, "departing thence went in triumphant manner towards Frislanda, the chief city of that island, on the south-east of it." Frislanda, *i.e.* the capital of the whole country, *i.e.* Thorshavn, does lie on the south-east of the island of Stromoe; but I would respectfully ask Admiral Irminger whether the chief city of Iceland lies on the south-east of that island? I had always

thought it lay on the south-west. I could comment on Porlanda, which, on page 5 of the Zeno text, is shown to lie near to Scotland, and without doubt represents the Orkneys, while Admiral Irminger transports them to 200 miles' distance, but I think I have already said enough on this subject.

Admiral Irminger has reasoned entirely from the data of to-day. His honest northern nature and his native common sense would revolt from the application to such small islands as those which compose the Færoe group, of such expressions as that "after Zichmni had put to flight the army of the enemy, ambassadors were sent from all parts of the island to yield the country up into his hands, taking down their ensigns in every town and village." And yet this apparent exaggeration may be more apparent than real. It must be remembered that this was 500 years ago. A so-called army then might be but a mere handful of men. "*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*" Moreover, it was no unimportant event which was taking place. Henry Sinclair, Earl of the Orkneys and Caithness, was taking personal possession of the Færoe Islands as an addition to his lordships, and when we read of his coming *by land* with his army, conquering all the country as he went, it is obvious that the chieftain's progress *by land* is there indicated as distinct from the taking possession of the *coasts* and *islands*, which was committed to the charge of Nicolò Zeno. It cannot be supposed that all this was done without a certain amount of formal ceremony, warranting in a considerable degree the apparently inflated language above quoted.

But Admiral Irminger has not confined himself to the endeavour to identify the Frislanda of the Zeni with Iceland. He denies that Zeno was ever in Greenland or the Engroneland of the text, which country he also endeavours to identify with his favourite northern island of Iceland. This is not the place to enter again upon the whole story. Suffice it that, as in the case of Frislanda, both the text and map distinctly bear their testimony to his visit having been made to Engroneland, or Greenland, while it is needless to say that Iceland, in both one and the other, has its own individual and separate existence, so that Admiral Irminger again places himself in opposition to the very authors of the narrative and of the map. By them it is plainly shown that they distinctly recognise the existence of two substantive realities, one Engroneland or Greenland, the other Iceland; and that, in their opinion, Engroneland is not Iceland; nor Iceland, Engroneland. Admiral Irminger is of a different opinion. Again I beg leave to side with the old voyagers.