*Venetians in America: Nicolò Zen and the Virtual Exploration of the New World**

by Elizabeth Horodowich

In 1558, the Venetian patrician Nicolò Zen published Dello scoprimento, *a text that suggested that his Venetian ancestors had made landfall in the Americas before Columbus. Generations of scholars have pored over Zen's text and accompanying map with the hopes of determining whether or not this voyage took place. Zen's text, however, cannot be classified as either history or fiction; like many other early modern travel accounts, it was a combination of both. Shifting the focus about what is significant from the text's truthfulness to its tactics, from the historicity of the voyage to the mechanics of the composition, reveals a series of fascinating textual strategies surrounding the European production of knowledge about the New World. Specifically, Zen followed well-established patterns for European travel writing, playing with quotation, pastiche, and temporality in order to depict his fellow Venetians as experts on the Americas and as viable contestants in the race to New World empire.*

1. Introduction

In 1558, the Venetian patrician Nicolò Zen (1515–65) published a brief but provocative account describing how his ancestors had discovered the New World before Christopher Columbus (1451–1506). According to Zen's remarkable narrative, accompanied by a *carta da navegar* (map) (fig. 1), his ancestor Nicolò Zen the elder (d. 1403?) left Venice in 1380, headed for England and Flanders. Caught in a storm, he was carried for several days until he was wrecked upon an island called Frisland. Here he met a prince named Zichmni, a Latin speaker who took Nicolò under his protection. Nicolò's brother Antonio (d. 1402?) soon joined him in Frisland, and Antonio eventually became the captain of Zichmni's fleet. The brothers

*Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Harvard University's Villa I Tatti (November 2010), the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting in Washington, DC (March 2012), and the University of Oregon (April 2013); it benefited from the comments of all of these audiences. The author would also like to thank Timothy McCall, Alexander Nagel, Monika Schmitter, and the two anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions. All translations are the author's, except where otherwise noted.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

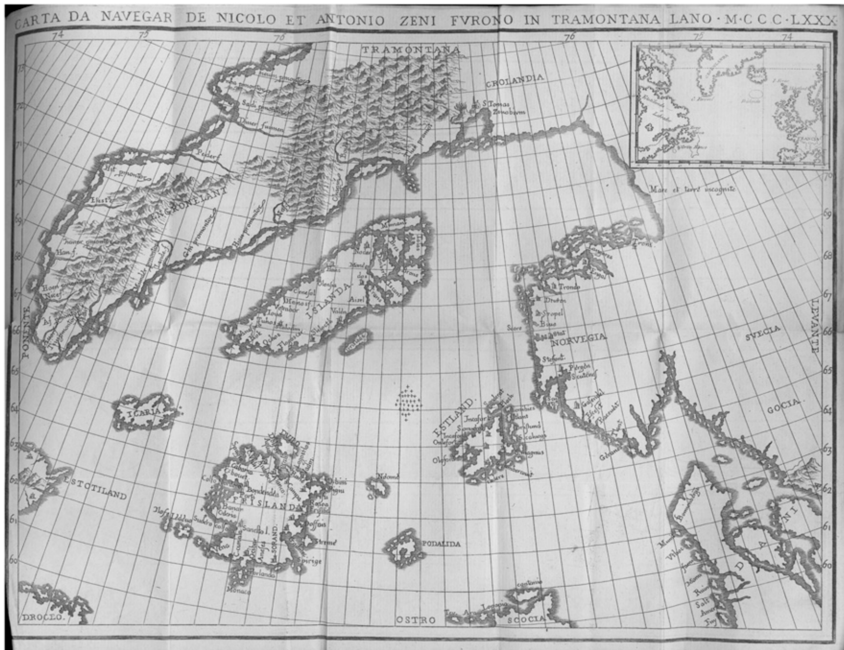

FIGURE 1. Nicolò Zen. *Carta da Navegar*, from *Dello scoprimento*, Venice, 1558. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

undertook extensive explorations of Greenland, but Nicolò eventually fell ill and died in Frisland. Antonio, however, had heard from a mysterious fisherman about hitherto unexplored islands to the west named Estotiland, Icaria, and Drogeo, where there existed gold, temples, the worship of idols, nudity, cannibalism, and, as in Frisland, the presence of Latin literature. Zichmni and Antonio went in search of this *nuovo mondo* (in Antonio's words), and some of Zichmni's men briefly landed on Icaria before being chased away by hostile natives and eventually returning to Frisland. In his sixteenth-century text, Nicolò Zen the younger (here referred to as the writer, as opposed to his ancestor, the traveler) claimed to know about these travels because when he was a young boy, he had found letters and a map describing these voyages amid the Zen family papers. Being a child and not understanding their significance, he tore them to pieces. As an adult, however, he later came to regret the destruction of these papers and attempted to reconstruct them, eventually publishing them in the

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hope of memorializing the travels of his ancestors, resulting in the 1558 text, *Dello scoprimento* (*On the Discovery*).[1]

Nicolò Zen the writer's account, and especially his map, had an immediate impact on sixteenth-century geography and cartography. Early modern audiences accepted his text unproblematically and the most significant mapmakers of his day immediately incorporated his *carta da navegar* into their work, including Ortelius and Mercator, who grafted the Zenian names of Frisland, Estotiland, Icaria, and Drogeo onto their depictions of the North American continent.[2] Nevertheless, doubts about the authenticity of the account eventually surfaced. In 1835, the Danish admiral Christian Zahrtmann proclaimed the Zen account to be nothing but "a tissue of fiction." The English geographer, cartographer, and editor at the Hakluyt Society Richard Henry Major disagreed with Zahrtmann and in 1873 argued that Zen's text represented an "authentic . . . genuine, and valuable narrative," while Frederick W. Lucas, after having reviewed the case, declared in 1898 that Zen was a shameless liar and that the text was "a contemptible literary fraud — one of the most successful and obnoxious on

[1]Zen, 1558b. For a facsimile of Zen's text and map and an English translation of the text, see Lucas, 3–23, 161–78, and plate 11. The complete title of this compilation of two *relazioni* (accounts) is *On the Commentaries About the Journey to Persia of Sir Caterino Zeno The Knight and the Wars Undertaken in the Persian Empire from the Time of Uzun Hasan. Two Books. And On the Discovery of the Islands of Frislanda, Eslanda, Engrovelanda, Estotilanda, and Icaria made by two Zen brothers, Sir Nicolò the Knight and Sir Antonio, under the Arctic Pole. One Book. With a Particular Drawing with All the Said Parts of the West That They Discovered.* The first *relazione* recounts Caterino Zen's 1472 embassy to the King of Persia, and the second, the Zen voyages in the North Atlantic. While space does not permit a full consideration of both *relazioni* here, it is interesting to note the textual positioning of the Zen family between East and West in the age of discovery. Since this article focuses exclusively on the second of these two *relazioni*, it refers to the text under scrutiny here as *Dello scoprimento*.

[2]The list of contemporary writers and mapmakers who accepted *Dello scoprimento* as authentic and reprinted its contents in their own subsequent texts and maps is lengthy. Girolamo Ruscelli issued a version of Zen's map in his 1561 edition of Ptolemy, as did many other subsequent sixteenth-century quarto editions of Ptolemy. Gerardus Mercator showed the Zenian territories on his 1569 world map, including an inset map of Frisland on his map of the North Pole, depicting Estotiland as part of the North American continent. Abraham Ortelius similarly produced a map of the North Sea in 1570 in his *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* that clearly labeled Estotiland as part of America. Frisland appeared in numerous sixteenth-century Lafreri atlases, and the Zen voyages are mentioned in the work of cosmographers and geographers such as Lorenzo D'Anania, Giuseppe Rosaccio, Richard Hakluyt, John Dee, and others. For a complete list of early modern authors who accepted Zen's account, see Lucas, 212–24; Karrow, 600–02.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

record."[3] Numerous scholars exchanged similar attacks and rebuttals during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[4] They pored over hundreds of maps and travelogues to argue, for instance, that Zichmni was actually Henry Sinclair, a Norwegian nobleman and the Earl of Orkney (ca. 1345–ca. 1400); that Frisland was one of the Faroes Islands; or that Estotiland was actually Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, or Labrador.

The language peppering these studies, and in turn framing these debates, has hitherto both reflected and constructed a relentless focus on the veracity of the Zen narrative through the habitual use of words like *authenticity*, *probable*, *hoax*, *trick*, *fraud*, *mythological*, *fable*, *fact*, and *fiction*. The definitive scholarly account of the Zen text to date, the Venetian philologist Giorgio Padoan's meticulous 1989 analysis, argued that Nicolò Zen the writer was not a forger, that he did in fact possess a "real" map and five letters, and that Estotiland was Nova Scotia.[5] The most recent popularizing account of the Zen voyages by Andrea Di Robilant continues to replicate this search for the truth as well as the language that supports this quest.[6] Indeed, Di Robilant's *Irresistible North* is entirely based on the question of veracity: he assumes the fourteenth-century Zen voyage to be true and attempts to prove this by following in the travelers' footsteps across the Atlantic.

The Zen narrative has attracted the attention of scholars, including historians of cartography, for centuries. However, studies of this text appear stuck in the nineteenth century and seem to have completely ignored modern methods of analysis, including the ideas of the New Historicism, which posit that no text — literary or archival — gives access to the truth and that texts themselves are worthy of historical investigation. Scholars have remained remarkably attached to positivist interpretations, in part because segments of the Zen narrative seem incredibly accurate and truthful.[7] Nevertheless, the persistence of such traditional lines of

[3]Zahrtmann, 109; Major, 1873, iii; Lucas, 143.

[4]For an overview of the most significant contributions, in chronological order, see: Forster; Zurla; Elton, 154–68; Babcock, 124–43; Da Mosto, 1:296–300.

[5]Padoan, 61, 68, 71.

[6]Di Robilant's study, for instance, regularly uses words such as "forgery," "prank," "fake," "fraud," and "authenticity" to describe the Zen account; see, for example, Di Robilant, 6–7. See Padoan; and Di Robilant for the most complete bibliographies of Zen scholarship.

[7]For instance, many have noted Nicolò Zen's remarkably accurate description of Greenland, and have argued that in the mid-sixteenth century a description so precise could only have come from direct experience. See Hobbs.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

questioning is somewhat surprising since there exist much more productive questions to ask of Zen's narrative. Focused on separating fact from fiction, scholars to date have entirely overlooked the rhetorical and historical strategies of the text. What is interesting about Zen's *Dello scoprimento* lies not in its truth or falsity, but rather in the construction and implications of the narrative.

This study will sidestep entirely the centuries of detailed and painstaking debate about the veracity of the Zen account. It will not query if the Zen voyages happened, but rather, will examine the writerly techniques Zen used to build an authoritative Venetian travelogue about the New World. Focusing on the latter reveals the ways in which Nicolò Zen the writer used a variety of textual tools to build a specifically Venetian narrative about the Americas. Such an analysis exposes the politics of knowledge at work, revealing how subjective and politicized visions of discovery influenced how Europeans learned about the New World. Zen's text was not a trick, a fraud, or an empirical account of events, but represented the methodical creation of a skillful and patriotic author. In the end, it cannot be classified as either history or fiction: like many other early modern travel accounts, it was always a combination of both. Truth and fiction can almost never be separated in early modern travelogues, since it was verisimilitude, not truthfulness, that counted for early modern audiences. Shifting the focus about what is significant from the text's truthfulness to its tactics — from the historicity of the voyage to the mechanics of the composition — reveals a series of fascinating textual strategies surrounding the European production of knowledge about the New World. Specifically, Zen followed well-established patterns for European travel writing, playing with quotation, pastiche, and temporality, to manipulate the relationship among travel, fiction, and authority and depict his fellow Venetians as virtual but viable contestants in the race to New World empire. Zen's collage is a fable about the Venetians as experts on the Americas. It suggested that for Venetians, conquesting knowledge was more important than acquiring land or building colonies, and that expertise on the New World ultimately trumped experience in it.

2. Venice, Print, and the New World

In the first decades of the sixteenth century, most Venetians displayed little interest in the Columbian discoveries. Indeed, as scholars such as Anthony Grafton and John Elliot have shown, most Europeans in general did not personally experience dramatic cultural or political ruptures as a result of the

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discovery of the New World.[8] To be sure, some were made uncomfortable by the growth of Habsburg power, but few in the halls of Venetian government seemed genuinely anxious. In his 1501 *Historia veneta* (*History of the Venetian Republic*), for instance, Daniele Barbaro (1514–70), a well-known humanist and diplomat, suggested that the Columbian discoveries were surprising and unfortunate for the Venetians, but ultimately of little concern: "The senators believed that it was bound to happen; the Spaniards have the means and the capability that once belonged to the Venetians. . . . Nevertheless, the senators consoled themselves about the earnings and profits that [Venetians] were making other ways, and judged that it was a very unusual thing to have discovered in our time new regions and peoples — almost another world — which had been hidden to us."[9] Venetian diplomats received up-to-the-minute political news from around Europe and the Mediterranean, yet even in attentive reports, ambassadors mentioned surprisingly little about the New World, and dispatches tended to report on the Americas as a mere passing curiosity.[10] Even the lengthiest of surviving Venetian *relazioni* from Spain in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, those of Giovanni Badoer (1515) and Francesco Corner (1521), dedicated just single lines to estimates of Habsburg income from the New World.[11] Later ambassadorial reports, such as those of Gasparo Contarini (1522–25) and Andrea Navagero (1527), began to show more interest, especially in the conquests of Hernán Cortés (1485–1587) and the city of Tenochtitlán, whose watery topography was much like that of Venice.[12] In general, however, the Venetian state in the early sixteenth century expressed much greater concern about the Portuguese discoveries in the East, and followed more closely the voyages of Vasco da Gama (1460–1524) and Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467–1520) that represented a much larger threat to the Venetian economy.[13] At the time when Columbus returned from his fourth voyage in 1504, the Venetians were focused on the possibility of digging an earlier version of the Suez Canal to

[8]Grafton, 1992; Elliott, 1970; see also Kupperman. On Italy and the New World, see Penrose; Romeo; Zorzi. On Venice and the New World, see See Ambrosini; Aricò; Dursteler; Horodowich.

[9]Barbaro.

[10]Francesco Cappello's *relazione* to the Venetian senate on 20 May 1497, for instance, only briefly mentions the Americas. See Sanudo, 1:628–29.

[11]Ibid., 19:373–74 and 30:321–41 (esp. 327).

[12]See Berchet, 1:102–35.

[13]See Dursteler; Stiffone.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

connect the Mediterranean to the Red Sea: a canal that would potentially enable them to continue to compete with Portuguese merchants.[14]

While Venetian traders and politicians continued to think only of Habsburg revenues or the quickest way of reaching the spice emporium of India and the riches of Asia to the east, the Venetian editorial world by contrast paid rapt attention to the cultural significance of the discovery of the New World. Venice developed a unique position with respect to the discoveries as the print capital of early modern Europe. The Venetian press published between 15,000 and 17,500 editions in the sixteenth century alone. This represented half or more of all the books printed in Cinquecento Italy, and the expansion of the Venetian press neatly coincided with the accelerated pace of exploration and discovery.[15] Italy was "one of the greatest centers for the spread of information about the discoveries," and within Italy, Venice and the Veneto produced both some of the earliest and most significant treatments of Columbus's voyages, including the *Paesi novamente retrovati* (*The Newly Discovered Lands*, 1507), which went through fifteen editions in four languages and was "more instrumental than any other work in disseminating knowledge of America, Africa, and the Far East."[16] News of the discovery of America reached Rome, Paris, and Florence before Venice, but Venice overall was second only to Paris in producing texts about America in the sixteenth century.[17] Venice was, after all, "the leading center of information and communication in Europe," rivaled only by the cities of Genoa, Antwerp, and Rome.[18] Furthermore, the city was one of the greatest centers of European cartographic production in the early modern period, especially for maps of the New World.[19] In a truly striking divorce between experience and the production of knowledge, Venice represented a clearinghouse for information about the Americas. It was the place from which news of global travel and discovery became known and as such

[14]Archivio di Stato, Venice, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti Miste, Filza 16, 1504: "Si potria far una cava dal mar Rosso, che mettesse a drectura in questo mare de qua, come alter volte etiam si è rasonato de far, la qual cava se potria assecurare a l'una e l'altra ocha cum do forteze, per modo che altri non potriano nè entrar nè ussir, salvo queli interessano al signor Soldan" ("One could make a canal from the Red Sea that would lead directly from that sea to here, as it has also been discussed at other times; the canal could be secured at both ends with two forts in such a way that others could not enter it or use it, except for those who share the interests of the Sultan [of Egypt]").

[15]Elliott, 1970, 12–14; Grendler, xvii, 6; Migliorini, 295.

[16]Romeo, 15. See also Elliott, 1976, 1:14; Harisse, 270.

[17]Donattini, 1980, 69–72; Hirsch.

[18]Burke, 390. See also Infelise.

[19]Cosgrove.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

occupied a singular position in the transmission of information about the discoveries.[20]

It was not uncommon for those only obliquely involved in the discovery of the Americas to stake a claim for their place in the New World.[21] The Venetians never figured prominently among the great discoverers of America, but they were among its most significant textual and virtual explorers. Against this background, amidst this staggering production of texts on the New World in the presses of these Venetian armchair travelers, Nicolò Zen the writer published his narrative, dropping his slim account into this flood of sixteenth-century Venetian texts about the New World.

3. Nicolò Zen and the Tradition of Travel Writing

The Zen family was among the oldest and most prominent patrician families in Venice. One of the Zens participated in the election of the first doge in 703, and following the Fourth Crusade, Marino Zen (d. 1215?), the Vice Doge of Constantinople, had the bronze horses taken from the Hippodrome sent back to adorn the Basilica of San Marco.[22] Both Vivaro Capellari and Marco Barbaro — two of the most significant genealogical sources for the city — list the Zen family, including Antonio and (most probably) both the elder and younger Nicolò Zen, in their pages. Following the medieval and early modern practice of reconstructing fantastical genealogies, Giacomo Zabarella (1533–89) claimed that the Zens had descended from Noah.[23]

Both Antonio and Nicolò Zen the traveler had had maritime careers, and Nicolò had commanded a galley in the Battle of Chioggia (1380). Like his ancestors, Nicolò Zen the writer worked throughout his entire life in service to the Venetian maritime state. Already known at age twenty-two for his expertise in maritime engineering, he became *Savio agli Ordini dell'Arsenale*, or special commissioner for the Arsenal, in 1538, and came to hold a great variety of offices in the Venetian state during his

[20]See Dionisotti, 170–71; Rubies, 1996, 153.

[21]See, for instance, Gentile; Johnson, 2008; Markey; Prosperi and Reinhard; Schmidt.

[22]Musatti, 2:365.

[23]Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (hereafter BNM), MS Italy, Class VII, 18 (8307), 4:fols. 215^{v}–227^{v}, esp. 217^{r}–218^{v}; BNM MS Italy, Class VII, 928 (8597), fol. 222; Zabarella, 22. The eighteenth-century genealogist Capellari lists various Nicolò Zens alive at the end of the fourteenth century, making it unclear which one could have potentially undertaken this voyage. Nicolò Zen the traveler is typically identified as Nicolò Draconis, or "son of the Dragon," because his father Pietro, an admiral, had a dragon on his shield that he supposedly wrested from a Genoese captain in hand-to-hand combat. On the Zen family history and genealogy, see Bolognesi, 200–03; Padoan, 31–44; Pinessi, 7–23.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lifetime.[24] Nicolò was one of the most eminent statesmen of his time. Public esteem for his dedication to civic life was so great that Paolo Veronese (1528–88) included him in his depiction of the 1160 Convocation at Pavia with the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1122–90), a painting that hung in the Hall of the Great Council.[25]

Nicolò Zen the writer was also at the center of Venetian intellectual and cultural life. Knowledgeable in the fields of mathematics, engineering, and architecture, he was a sponsor of Sebastiano Serlio's (1475–1554) books on architecture, a patron of Andrea Palladio (1508–80), and an editor of Vitruvius's (ca. 80–ca. 15 BCE) *Ten Books on Architecture*. His works on Venetian history include his unpublished *Storia della guerra veneto turca del 1537*,[26] and *Dell'origine de' barbari che distrusser per tutto'l mondo l'Imperio di Roma, onde hebbe principio la città di Venetia* (Plinio Pietrasanta, 1557).[27] Pietro Aretino (1492–1556) praised him as a poet, Giuseppe Moleto (1531–88) lauded his abilities in geometry, and perhaps most importantly here, the Venetian *poligrafo* Girolamo Ruscelli (1500–66) referred to Zen in the introduction to his 1561 edition of Ptolemy as "universally held to have, to this day, few equals in history and geography in the whole of Europe."[28] A portrait of him by Titian (1475–1576) hangs in the Kingston Lacy Estate Collection in Dorset. In Titian's portrayal, Nicolò Zen turns with the seriousness of a statesman to gaze out of the frame, wearing wide, fur-lined sleeves and fingering his stole: the unmistakable attributes of nobility and high political office in Venice.[29]

Nicolò Zen the writer lived at the Crosechieri, in what is now a solemn if not severe looking palazzo that overlooks the *campo* (square) of the Gesuiti

[24]Zen was *Savio di Terraferma* in 1548, or legal advisor for the mainland territories, where he worked to reclaim vast tracts of marsh and to manage the hydraulic equilibrium of the lagoon and the Grand Canal; *Savio sopra le Acque*, or water commissioner, in 1554; *Provveditore sopra I Beni Inculti* in 1558, where he directed mainland agrarian reform; a member of the Council of Ten — Venice's most important security council — in 1563; and the *Provveditore all'Arsenale* in 1565, at which time oversaw the structural reorganization of the Venetian shipyards. He was a member of Venice's delegation to Emperor Charles V in 1545, and was one of the forty-one electors of Doge Girolamo Priuli in 1559. For a complete list of his offices held and political accomplishments, see Pinessi, 25–48; Padoan, 18–20.

[25]This painting was lost in a fire in 1577. Sansovino, fol. 132^{v}.

[26]BNM, MS Italy, Class VII, 2053 (7920).

[27]Translated into English as *History of the Venetian-Turkish War of 1537* and *On the Origin of the Barbarians Who Destroyed Rome's Empire Around the World, From Which Had its Origins the City of Venice*.

[28]Aretino, 3:249; Moleto, 92; Ruscelli, dedication.

[29]See Hope, Fletcher, Dunkerton, et. al., 33, 170–71; Sponza. Tintoretto also perhaps painted him: see Pinessi, 51–103. I thank Allison Sherman for these citations.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(then called the church of the Crociferi or Crosechieri), of which the family were patrons. Some of the most significant Italian intellectuals of the day lived in the same area, including the architect Sebastiano Serlio, Zen's publisher Francesco Marcolini (d. 1559) (best known for publishing the works of Pietro Aretino), the humanist Daniele Barbaro, Titian, Paolo Veronese, and Zen's friend Pietro Aretino himself.[30] By now the Zen palazzo is faded and worn: weeds push out from the cracks in its walls, and exposed electrical wires dangle from its eaves. Nevertheless, the façade that faces the Fondamenta Santa Caterina still clearly bears a soot-covered, nineteenth-century plaque recording the Zen journey to the North Atlantic, memorializing what has perhaps become Nicolò Zen's most significant legacy.[31]

Joan-Pau Rubiés has pointed out that even for European powers with infrastructures and economies solidly rooted in the New World, tangible gains often fell short of what Europeans had hoped and expected to find in the Americas. In Zen's account, therefore, as in other European travel accounts that mixed the plausible and the implausible, "myths grew out of . . . historical frustration."[32] As a variation on this idea, Stephen Greenblatt has posited that "we can be certain only that European representations of the New World tell us something about the European practice of representation," and Stuart Schwartz has similarly argued that "portrayals of another culture are important for what they tell us about the observer rather than the observed."[33] At least in part, Zen's *Dello scoprimento* represented insecurity about Venetians' lack of participation in the discovery of the New World, and patriotically asserted that indeed Venice had played a role in these events. Any sense of the mythical, imaginary, invented, or implausible, as Rubies suggests, reflected Zen's Venetian identity. Accepting Zen's patriotism and potential insecurity in turn suggests the importance of considering the virtual or textual strategies he employed in order to assert

[30]Pinessi, 27–28.

[31]The plaque reads, "A / NICOLO E ANTONIO ZENO / NEL SECOLO DECIMUOQUARTO NAVIGATORI SAPIENTEMENTE ARDITI / NEI MARI NORDICI/PER DECRETO DEL COMUNE / 1881" ("To Nicolò and Antonio Zen, wise and courageous navigators to the northern seas in the fourteenth century. By decree of the commune, 1881").

[32]Rubiés, 1999, 75.

[33]Greenblatt, 7; Schwartz's introduction in *Implicit Understandings*, 1–2. This is true for European and non-European observers, both of whom developed ethnographies of the Other derived from self-conception. See the essays by Macgaffey; Reid; de Silva; and Toby in Schwartz.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a sense of Venetian power and authority in the increasingly important Atlantic world.

Before exploring these specific textual tactics, however, it is important to note that while generations of scholars have expressed a sense of disappointment with the fraudulent nature of the Zen narrative, *Dello scoprimento* was part of a well-established and long-standing European tradition of travel literature that regularly mixed the believable and the implausible as a means of expressing what Europeans feared about and desired from foreign, unknown lands and their populations. For instance, Prester John's 1161 letter to the Byzantine emperor Manuel I offered a glittering account of the lands that had come under Prester John's sway somewhere in Africa or Asia. Mixing the credible and the fantastical, his letter became one of the most popular reads of its time and clearly captured the medieval imagination.[34] Perhaps most famously, *The Book of John Mandeville* (ca. 1360) neatly illustrates the relationship between the believable and the unbelievable in travel literature. It describes the passage of a partially fictional and imaginary traveler, an English knight from St. Albans, to the Holy Land, written by someone who probably never visited any of these places. *The Book of John Mandeville* was a pious text devised to entertain, instruct, and imaginatively re-create the mythology of the Holy Land, but like the Zen narrative, it also contained remarkably accurate descriptions of the geography, lands, and peoples encompassing much of the known world.[35]

Most early modern travel accounts from the Americas blended the plausible and the fantastical. Columbus did so famously in his first journal of discovery that described real Caribbean islands and mythical Cipangus, real gold and native empires together with fabled Amazons and men with tails. The lesser-known story of Madock represented a similar mixing of the credible and the less credible in a legend of the pre-Columbian discovery of America. First appearing in print in 1583 in an English pamphlet published to promote the British colonization of America, the story claimed that a Welshman named Madock had traveled to America in 1170, established a colony there, and returned to England. While the colony could never be located with any precision, proof of its existence lay in some of the Welsh-seeming linguistic practices of Montezuma, suggesting the Welsh origins of or influences on Mexican

[34]Today nearly one hundred different Latin versions of his account still survive, and countless medieval and early modern maps represent his empire. See Berthon and Robinson, 64; Wilford, 48–49; Skelton, 47.

[35]See Higgins; Rubiés, 2000.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

peoples. As with the Zen tale, "scholars believe . . . that the story is based on some core of truth."[36] The German Hans Staden (1525–76) likewise composed a travelogue, notably entitled the *Warhaftige Historia* (*True History*, 1557), which became a sensationalist bestseller in the sixteenth century. Staden recounted his voyages to Brazil, including the dubious tale that he had witnessed a French crew give a Portuguese sailor to the Tupinambá Indians to be eaten.[37] In this tradition, a veritable chorus of travelogues — innumerable examples — went on to blend the believable and the marvelous from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.[38] At no point did readers question the veracity of these accounts or complain about authorial license, textual embellishment, or exaggeration.

In this context, the events that befell the Zen brothers at the end of the fourteenth century should not seem so impossible, especially to early modern readers who knew their Venetian history. Marco Polo (1254–1324) had entered into the service of a foreign ruler. Pietro Querini's (ca. 1396–1448) fifteenth-century account of shipwreck and survival in Scandinavia also made ample mention of a certain hitherto unidentified Zuan Franco who remained in Sweden as a retainer of the Swedish king.[39] Surely another Venetian traveler could have similarly settled into the service of a foreigner. In fact, Nicolò Zen's historical text *Dell'origine de' barbari* (*On the Origins of the Barbarians*, 1557) specifically addressed the issue of credibility. After discussing the Amazons, Zen commented: "Today we find a lot of things in the world that when others tell us about them, be it for their distance or where they happen, we do not believe them. It is not at all surprising that if something is remote from us by centuries, it is rarely believed, and little accepted by common people, who do not believe what they cannot see. But intelligent men, having a knowledge of the writers listed above [Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch] . . . will believe what I have written about the Amazons."[40] Zen asked his learned readers to draw on their knowledge of classical history and, armed with that erudition, not to

[36]Williams, 43.

[37]See Duffy and Metcalf. I thank John Gagné for this citation.

[38]See Fausett, 79–97; Lucas, 146–48.

[39]Pietro Querini, *Viaggio e naufragio di Piero Quirino, gentiluomo viniziano*, in Ramusio, 4:72.

[40]Zen, 1558a, fol. 42^{v}: "Molte cose hoggidì si trovano al mondo, che, quando altri le dice, per la lontananza del luogo dove ò sono ò si fanno, non si presta lor fede; non si deve maravigliar alcuno, se cosa per tanti secoli rimota da noi, poco è creduta, et men accettata dal vulgo, che non crede, se non tanto quanto vede; ma gli huomini d'intelletto, havendo riguardo à gli scrittori di sopra allegati . . . crederà quanto delle Amazzoni ho scritto."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

condemn the Amazons as false even though they might seem incredible. These words describing the ability to believe that which you could not see could easily refer to *Dello scoprimento*, published one year later. As early modern readers were open to the mixture of the plausible and the less plausible in ancient accounts, distant in time, Zen encouraged them to accept this coexistence in accounts of travel to distant lands.

Seen in this light, Zen was not a liar but a compiler of visions, credible and incredible, as many medieval and early modern travelers and travel writers were. By modern standards, John Mandeville (1300–71) appears to have invented quite a bit, Columbus some, and editors of travel literature such as Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485–1557) less, but all of these writers and their accounts mixed the truthful with the imaginative. Zen was in no way unique. That is to say, in terms of the early modern study of geography, both fiction and real travel played a role in geographical perception. Travel writing clearly worked within a host of related genres, including chronicles, cosmographical treatises, political reports, histories, and fiction, including chivalric romances and utopian literature. Rubies has noted "the existence of fictional elements within a substantial proportion of early modern travel accounts," in ways that defy their simple classification as "travel literature."[41] In other words, a mixture of desire, imagination, and experience pervaded most accounts of travel and discovery; to conceive of travel literature otherwise would be to misunderstand entirely its intent. Travel literature ranged from the matter-of-fact to the fanciful and the dramatic, and all early modern travelogues existed somewhere on a continuum between the two.[42] This said, it is important to note here that the inventiveness of Zen's text differed from the inventiveness of other travelogues. Zen's account did not contain examples of the monstrous or the fantastical: it invented documentation more than fantastical experiences. Despite this difference, *Dello scoprimento* was nevertheless situated among this body of texts that considered credibility differently from the modern world. If recognized and popular European travelogues looked like this, Nicolò Zen invested his travel account with authority by embracing and imitating their approaches.

Within this tradition of travel writing, the first significant textual strategy that Zen used to insert Venice into the history of the age of discovery was pastiche. Pastiche denotes a mixture of borrowed forms and texts from a variety of sources, and the use of pastiche enabled Zen to express his sense of patriotism by inserting Venice into his own personal collage of canonical

[41]Rubiés, 2000, 10. See also Salwa.

[42]See Davies; Johnson, 2007; Von Martels.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

texts on the New World. Zen's account functioned as a pastiche first and foremost on the level of its framing. Zen the writer claimed that he had constructed his text from the fragments of five different letters from Nicolò Zen the traveler to his brother Antonio and from Antonio to his brother Carlo Zen (1334–1418): as he described the letters, scraps of paper that he rhetorically knitted together with connecting passages in his own voice. That is to say, Zen the writer presented his account as a collage of three different voices: Antonio and Nicolò Zen the travelers, and Nicolò Zen the writer.

Furthermore, the language that Nicolò Zen the writer employed to describe the creation of his text merits scrutiny: "[I] grieve that the book and many other writings on this same subject have come, I know not how, unhappily to harm, because, being still a boy when they came into my hands, and not knowing what they were, I tore them to pieces and destroyed them, as boys will do, which I cannot remember now without the deepest of regret. Nevertheless, in order that so fair a memory of such things may not be lost, I have placed in order in the above narrative what I have been able to recover of the aforesaid materials."[43] At once Zen confusingly states that he both did and did not know how the original texts and letters regarding these voyages had been damaged, and then goes on to describe the physical construction of his collage: the tearing or shredding of the paper, the destruction of the texts, and their reorganization to form his revised narrative. Here Zen neatly describes the production of a pastiche. Whether this destruction and re-creation actually happened or not will never be known; what is clear is that Zen used this rhetorical strategy to give his text a fable of creation: the creation, specifically, of a collage about his Venetian ancestors and their relationship to the New World.[44]

A closer look at the sources that Zen drew upon for the story of the Frisland fishermen, the same section of the text that claims a Venetian, pre-Columbian discovery of America, presents an opportunity to examine the specific textual components of Zen's pastiche.[45] In this fourth letter that Nicolò the writer collaged into his text, Antonio Zen describes how an anonymous fisherman had returned to Frisland after spending twenty-six

[43]Zen, 1558b, fols. 57v–58r: "Mi dolgo, che il libro, e molte altre scritture pur in questo medesimo propsito siano andati non sò come miseramente di male; perche, sendo io ancor fanciullo, e pervenutomi alle mani, ne sapendo ciò che fossero, come fanno i fanciulli le squarciai, e mandai tutte à male, ilche non posso se non con grandissimo dolore ricordarmi hora. Pur, perche non si perda una sì bella memoria di cose quel, che ho pututo havere in detta materia, ho posto per ordine nella narration di sopra."

[44]I thank Alessandra Russo for her insights into this passage.

[45]Zen, 1558b, fols. 51v-53v.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

years on hitherto unknown islands to the west, including the islands of Estotiland and Drogeo. The fisherman's description of these islands — again, islands purported to be somewhere in the Americas — represented an elaborate pastiche of other early modern travelogues about the New World, including the letters of Columbus and Vespucci, Francisco López de Gómara's (ca. 1511–ca. 1566) *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*, and most significantly the *isolario* (book of islands) of Benedetto Bordone (1460–1531). (López de Gómara and Bordone, notably, were also both armchair travelers themselves.[46]) For instance, after wrecking on Estotiland and living there for some time, the fisherman later shipwrecked a second time on the island of Drogeo, and the story of his shipwrecks and subsequent knowledge of cannibalism on these islands corresponds neatly with the story of Gerónimo de Aguilar (1489–1531). Aguilar was a Franciscan who had come to work in the Spanish colonial town of Santa María la Antigua del Darién that had been founded by Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1475–1519) in 1510. Aguilar left Panama in 1511 for Santo Domingo, accompanying the sixteenth-century procurator Juan de Valdivia. Their ship ran aground near Jamaica and it is from this point in Aguilar's story that Zen drew for his text, as recounted in book twelve of López de Gómara's *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*.

Zen's account of the fisherman's shipwreck on Estotiland repeats the language of López de Gómara's description of Aguilar's wreck. Zen notes "this Estotiland . . . on which one of the boats wrecked. The six men who were in it were seized by the islanders," compared to López de Gómara's "we got as far as Jamaica when the caravel struck on the shoals . . . I and six others."[47] Both Zen's fisherman and López de Gómara's Aguilar come into the service of two successive native chiefs. Following Zen's narrative, when the fisherman hears that some ships have arrived on Drogeo, he goes to the coast and with great happiness discovers that they are from Estotiland. The sailors on these ships take the fisherman with them since he understands their language and can function as their interpreter on Drogeo. Similarly, Aguilar also hears of the arrival of foreigners on his island in the Caribbean and goes to the coast to look for them; when Aguilar realizes they are Spaniards, he weeps for joy, and the sailors in turn are content to have him among them as an interpreter. Zen recounts, "By good fortune, he learned

[46]It was not uncommon for armchair travelers, or those who had never been to the New World, to publish copious amounts of information about the Americas. See Horodowich.

[47]Zen, 1558b, fol. 52r: "Detta Estotilanda . . . nella quali si ruppe un de' navigli, e sei huomini, che v'erano su furono presi da gli isolani"; Gómara, 26: "Llegamos a Jamaica se perdio la caravella en los baxos . . . Yo, y otros seys."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from the countrymen that some ships had arrived at the coast, and he hoped to accomplish his desires. He went to the coast and, enquiring from what country the ships came, learned to his great pleasure that they were from Estotiland. Then, having begged to be taken away, he was willingly received, because he knew the language of the country, and there being no one among the sailors who understood it, they used him as their interpreter." López de Gómara similarly states, "And then he said in Spanish 'Gentlemen, are you Christians?' They replied that they were Spaniards, and he was so overcome at their words that he burst into tears. . . . Jerónimo de Aguilar's story caused the greatest astonishment among his listeners, and also fear, because of his account of the sacrificing and eating of men, and the hardships that he and his companions had endured. But they thanked God to see him out of the hands of these barbarous and cruel people: also, because they saw in him a true and trustworthy interpreter."[48]

Zen derived much of his description of Estotiland from Benedetto Bordone's account of Mexico. For instance, Zen claims that Estotiland "had a tall mountain in the middle, from which four rivers rise that irrigate the island." Bordone describes an identical mountain in Hispaniola, "and from this mountain, four rivers flow down into the plain."[49] Both Zen and Bordone describe the locals' literacy; according to Zen, the natives on Estotiland "have a language, and separate letters," while for Bordone, the Mexicans similarly "have distinct characters in their writing."[50] Zen relates that to the south of Estotiland, there was a country "very rich in gold"

[48]Zen, 1558b, fol. 53v: "Per sua buona ventura intese dà paesani, che erano giunti alla marina alcuni navigli. Ond'egli entrato in buona speranza di far bene i fatti suoi, venne al mare, e dimandato, di che paese erano, intese con suo gran piacere, che erano di Estotilanda: perche, havendo egli pregato di essere levato, fu volentieri ricevuto per aver la lingua del paese, né essendo altri, che la sapesse, lo usarono per lor interprete"; Gómara, 25–26: "Y dijo luego en castellano, 'Señores, sois cristianos?' Respondieron que sí y que eran españoles. Alegróse tanto con tal respuesta que lloró de placer. . . . Gran temor y admiración puso en los oyentes este cuento de Jerónimo de Aguilar, con decire que allí en aquella tierra comían y sacrificaban hombres, y por la desventura quell él y sus compañeros habían pasado; pero daban gracias a Dios por verle libre de gente tan inhumana y bábara, y por tenerle por faraute cierto y verdadero."

[49]Zen, 1558b, fol. 52r: "havendo nel mezzo un monte altissimo, dal quale nascono quattro fiumi, che la irrigano"; Bordone, xiir: "et da ditto monte, quattro fiumi scendono giuso nel piano."

[50]Zen, 1558b, fol. 52v: "hanno lingua, e lettere separate"; Bordone, ixr: "hanno certe charratere nel loro scrivere."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

where "they sow corn and make beer, which is a kind of drink that northern people drink as we [the Venetians] do wine." Bordone claims that the inhabitants of Paria, "are very rich, and their wealth is pearls and gold . . . they have wine, red and white, of a delicate taste, but not made of grapes (for they do not have vineyards), but of fruits completely unknown to us."[51] Bordone, in turn, derived this passage from Columbus's account of his third voyage, when Columbus stated that "for making the white and red wine they use maize, which is a plant that bears an ear like that of wheat."[52] Both describe the inhabitants of Drogeo and of Hispaniola, respectively, as rough, destitute, naked, and cold from lack of clothing.[53] Both Zen and Bordone discuss temples, idols, and human sacrifice.[54] Perhaps most significantly, Zen describes Drogeo by saying "The country is very big, and almost [like] a new world," compared to Bordone's "Land of the Holy Cross, or New World . . . a very great island."[55]

As a final series of examples, Zen also drew heavily on the letters of Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512). For instance, Zen describes the inhabitants of Drogeo: "They do not have metal of any kind. They live by hunting, and carry lances of wood sharpened at the tip, and bows whose strings are made from animal skins. They are a very ferocious people; they fight to the death and eat one another."[56] Similarly Vespucci notes: "Their arms are very well-made bows and arrows, except that the do not have any iron or any other kind of hard metal. In place of iron, they put the teeth of animals, or of fishes, or a spike of good wood, and harden the point by fire. . . . They have other arms, such as fire-hardened spears. . . . Warfare is carried out among them, very cruelly, against people who don't speak their language, without granting life to anyone except to reserve him for greater pain. . . . They eat little flesh except human flesh. . . . They eat all their enemies whom they kill

[51]Zen, 1558b, fol. 52^{v}: "molto ricco d'oro," "seminano grano, e fanno la cervosa, che è una sorte di bevanda, che usano I popoli Settentrionali, come noi il vino"; Bordone, fol. xi^{r}: "sono molto richi, e la loro richezza è perle e oro . . . hanno vino bianco e vermiglio, al gusto suavissimo, ma non di uvo (perche questo luogo vite non produce), ma fatto di alcuni frutti da noi del tutto sconosciuti."

[52]See Major, 1870, 126.

[53]Zen, 1558b, fol. 53^{r}; Bordone, fol. xii^{r}.

[54]Zen, 1558b, fol. 53^{r}; Bordone, fol. viii^{v}.

[55]Zen, 1558b, fol. 53^{r}: "il paese essere grandissimo, e quasi un nuovo mondo"; Bordone, fol. x^{r}: "Terra di Sancta Cruce over mondo novo . . . grandissima isola." Or, from [Montalboddo?], 133, "Il quale novo mondo chiamare ne stato licitio" ("Which was right to call a New World").

[56]Zen, 1558b, fol. 53^{r}: "Non hanno metallo di sorte alcuna, viveno di cacciaggioni, e portano lancie di legno nella punta aguzze, e archi, le corde de i quali sono di pelle di animali. Sono popoli di grán ferocità, combatteno insieme mortalmente, e si mangiano l'un l'altro."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or capture, women as well as men."[57] Without considering the complete list of Zen's sources and comparisons to other texts, it is enough to note that every component of this so-called letter, that is to say, the vast majority of the fisherman's story, except for the fisherman's observation that there existed Latin texts in Estotiland, was borrowed from other sources.

Nineteenth-century scholars long ago noted many of these textual similarities and made lengthy lists of the sources that Nicolò Zen "plagiarized," indicating the inherently deceitful nature of his text.[58] While space does not permit an extensive analysis of Zen's map here, his *carta da navegar* also represented a pastiche of other maps that Zen borrowed from a wide variety of cartographic sources. To name just a few, a manuscript map of the North Atlantic by the Danish geographer Claudius Clavus (b. 1388), as well as three Florentine manuscripts of Ptolemy, served as models for both the outlines and place-names of Zen's Greenland and Iceland. The Swedish mapmaker Olaus Magnus (1490–1557), who visited Venice in 1535 and perhaps met both Giovanni Battista Ramusio — the Venetian editor and author of the first collected history of the New World — and the Venetian mapmaker Giacomo Gastaldi (1500–66), published a map in Venice in 1539 that directly influenced Zen's depiction of Scandinavia, and Norway in particular. Zen also drew on the maps of Gerardus Mercator (1512–94), Michele Tramezini (b. 1546), Fra Mauro (d. 1460), the map of Alberto Cantino (1502), and many others.[59]

Reconsidering Zen's rhetorical tactics in a more analytical and historicized and less positivist way illuminates how Zen used textual and visual pastiche not to lie, but as a means of framing his Venetian vision of fiction, travel, and authority. He collaged together a series of quotations from a group of recognized authorities on travel to the New World to form both a style and content that would be plausible to an early modern audience. He then grafted his ancestors into his pastiche, thereby likening them to heroic explorers, such as Columbus and Vespucci, while at the same

[57]Vespucci, iii, v, "Le loro armi sono archi e saette molto ben fabricate, salvo che non tengon ferro, ne altro genere di metallo forte; et in luogo del ferro pongono denti di animali, o di pesci, o un fuscello di legno forte arsicciato nella puncta. . . . Altre arme tenghono, come lance tostati. . . . Usono di guerra infra loro con gente che non sono di lor lingua molto crudelmente, senza perdonare la vita a nessuno, se non per maggior pena. . . . Mangion pocha carne salvo che carne del huomo. . . . si mangiono tutti eloro nimici che amazzano, o pigliano, si femine come maschi." These passages are also similar to [Montalboddo?], 137; and to Bordone, xi^{r}.

[58]See Lucas, 78–84, 209–11.

[59]See ibid., 98–124, 195–200.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

time imbuing them with the authority of recognized historians of the New World, such as Peter Martyr, López de Gómara, and Bordone. *The Book of John Mandeville* had also employed historical collage and pastiche, using the most up-to-date European accounts of travel and pilgrimage as its sources — especially accounts from China and India — to form a unified, new narrative.[60] As Iain Macleod Higgins points out, recomposing old books into new ones was a common medieval practice and "a basic medieval mode of original research and 'creation.'"[61]

The creation of a pastiche is very much a process of redefining and confirming who established authorities were and what authority meant. Pastiche represented a method of quotation, or the search to find accepted authorities that could be used or exploited to create a new text. Regarding pastiche, collection, and compilation, especially where the New World discoveries were concerned, the Venetians were experts, since Venice was the site from which the most important sixteenth-century compilations and collected histories of the New World emanated. These texts include, for instance, Angelo Trevisan's *Libretto de tutta la navigatione de re de Spagna de le isole et terreni novamente trovati* (*Handbook of All the Navigation of the King of Spain and the Islands and Lands Newly Discovered*, 1504); the *Paesi novamente retrovati*, attributed to both Fracanzio Montalboddo and Alessandro Zorzi (1507); the unpublished manuscript compilations of Alessandro Zorzi (b. 1470);[62] and most significantly, Giovanni Battista Ramusio's *Navigazioni e viaggi* (*On Journeys and Navigations*, 1550–59), published during Nicolò Zen's lifetime. These compilers are traditionally categorized as authors of history as opposed to Zen's fiction, and yet they too collaged together travelogues that were themselves based on a mixture of the plausible and the imaginative, as the genres of early modern history and biography regularly combined such elements. Giorgio Vasari's (1511–74) biographies, for instance, were compounds of fact and fiction, and his *Lives of the Artists* represented a collaborative pastiche involving a variety of both authors and genres.[63] Scholars would hesitate to label Ramusio or Vasari

[60]The author integrated up to three dozen texts about travel into a comprehensive narrative cosmography including, most significantly, the *Itinerarius* of the German William of Boldensele, Prince Hayton's *Fleurs des Histoires d'Orient*, William of Tripoli's *De satu Saracenorum*, Friar Odoric of Pordenone's account of his visit to China, Brunetto Latini's *Livre dou trésor*, and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* and *Speculum natural*. See Higgins, 9; Rubies, 2000, 14.

[61]Higgins, vii, 12.

[62]See Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, Ferrara (hereafter BCA), MS Class II, 10; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Banco Rari 234 (Magliabechiana.XIII.81).

[63]See Barolsky; Rubin, 4–5.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

liars, as they have regularly labeled Zen, when in fact all these editors undertook the similar tasks of compiling, editing, arranging, and blending texts together. Ramusio and Zorzi distinguished between various voyages and attributed narratives to existing sources and known authors, but the process was comparable. Assuming that Zen's textual mixing was willful and not the result of a complete lack of awareness of the provenance of his texts, this narrative technique rather than the more traditionally encyclopedic style allowed Zen to insert a Venetian presence into this history and construct Venetians in turn — as both travelers (his Venetian ancestors) and editors (himself) — as experts on the Americas.

To put it another way, Zen created an ideologically welcome, creative hybrid of a range of accepted and plausible texts about the Americas — much like Ramusio and Zorzi — and then collaged Venetian voices into it to elevate the Venetians to the level of other recognized authorities on the New World.[64] The format of collage created a space for Venetian authority and fundamentally asserted that it was not so important that Venetians colonize the New World as it was that they lay claim to knowledge of it. The text's existence alone makes this point in its proclamation that the Venetians were the first Europeans to know of the New World through the story of the Frisland fisherman as well as Antonio Zen's initial sighting of it. Furthermore, Zen asserted the importance of knowledge by cannibalizing and colonizing texts to form his narrative, pointing to the idea that the possession of texts and knowledge, and one's ability to organize and manipulate them, trumped experience or the possession of land. Through his pastiche, Zen asserted that Venetians did not necessarily have to go to the Americas; it was enough that they produced texts about it and in turn controlled and directed Europeans' understanding of it. Above all, Zen's collage proclaimed Venetian expertise on the subject of the New World.

Pastiche represents not only a creative mixture or synthesis of texts, but additionally can result in the creation of a new work in a plausible past style. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have labeled this process "anachronic substitution," or the legitimate reproduction of documents that had accidentally gone missing over time.[65] Nicolò Zen aimed to do just this, and his second significant textual strategy was the use of pastiche in order to manipulate his readers' sense of temporality and in effect fold time backwards with his text. *Dello scoprimento* represented precisely this type of retroactive substitution, since Nicolò Zen claimed to be replacing his ancestors' lost or damaged papers with his own effectively substitutional

[64]I thank Ann Rosalind Jones for contributing to these ideas.
[65]Nagel and Wood, 31, 289.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ones. Attempts to substitute documents and objects were in fact very common in early modern culture, as a multitude of artists and writers created paintings, sculpture, architecture, and texts that aimed to appear older than they were. Ancient coins, for instance, were often produced or copied without originals, and early modern audiences accepted their antiquity unproblematically. Michelangelo (1475–1564) famously copied the work of Giotto (1267–1337) and Masaccio (1401–28) so well that according to Vasari and others, no one could tell the difference between the original and his copy, or seemed to care.[66] Medieval and early modern scholars regularly created and planted documents in archives — there exist hundreds of known cases — to attest to the origins of or shore up claims for the antiquity or legitimacy of a monastery, bishopric, town, or duchy.[67] Few questioned the authenticity of these texts and objects, in part because "forgery and counterfeit are both words that started out with positive connotations and over time acquired bad connotations."[68] That is to say, early modern audiences were happy to accept copies and substitutions, and, in fact, such copies were antiquities in their minds, as long as they effectively appeared to be. It was achieving verisimilitude or a likeness to the truth that counted, not our modern sense of authenticity.[69]

While there exist scores of examples of early modern substitution similar to Zen's, perhaps the most illuminating comparison is the case of Annius of Vitterbo (ca. 1432–1502), a Dominican historian whose 1498 treatise *Antiquitatum Variarum* (*The Antiquities of Annius*) stated that he had discovered a group of antique vases, bronzes, and inscriptions near Vitterbo. In short, Annius faked a series of Etruscan antiquities and then published a thesis about them. Annius's eloquent volume mixed original sources by real Babylonian and Egyptian authors such as Archilochus (680–645 BCE), Berosus (ca. 350–280 BCE), and Manetho (d. ca. 220 BCE), with imaginary Greek authors like Metasthenes, as well as imaginary texts by real people such as the Roman Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE), the Roman historian Quintus Fabius Pictor (b. 254 BCE), and the Egyptian historian Manetho, some of which he claimed to have found in Mantua and Armenia. Like Zen with his text and map,

[66]See Goffen, 74.

[67]See Rowland. On cartographic forgery, see Hiatt.

[68]Nagel and Wood, 283. See also Wood.

[69]In both portraits and urban imagery, the goal of artists was similarly not to achieve a mimetic representation or appearance in exacting detail, but rather to make images that emphasized verisimilitude and represented a reasonable semblance to the original. See Maier, 747: "True likeness was a rich and flexible concept, as was accuracy, in the early modern period."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Annius produced both artifacts and a text (a text that was also a pastiche) that corroborated one another; he established, in effect, a self-proving circuit of information from antiquity. This comparison demonstrates that for Zen, the relationship between the transmission of information about the discovery of new lands and the creation of information about them was incredibly subtle, and for his early modern audience, of less import than for modern audiences. Annius's artifacts and text appeared to have been intentionally falsified, which one cannot claim with certainty for Zen. It is enough to note the similarity that, as for Zen, Annius's text (though rejected as a forgery by some) exerted an impact for generations.[70] Again, early modern audiences tended to accept Annius's substitution, and in fact, "it would be difficult to overstate the pervasiveness of Annian historians in the sixteenth century."[71]

Whereas Annius of Vitterbo wanted to date his objects retroactively to derive from the world of antiquity, Nicolò Zen by contrast dated his ancestors' voyage and map to 1380, to the moment when Venice had just defeated the Genoese in the Battle of Chioggia, one of the most significant and decisive battles in the history of the city. Carlo Zen, Nicolò Zen the writer's ancestor, was instrumental in defeating the Genoese in this battle, and afterward went on to be elected Captain General of the sea, the highest position in the Venetian fleet.[72] It was not, therefore, incidental in Nicolò Zen the writer's folding of time that his ancestors wrote of unexplored islands in or near America in 1380. At the end of the fourteenth century, both the lagoon city and the Zen family were, in many ways, at the height of their powers in the Mediterranean. It made sense for Nicolò Zen the writer to use this historical moment as the temporal foundation on which he situated his narrative of Venetian prestige and authority.

Annius's was one case among many; medieval substitutions (or what moderns might label forgeries) of documents were common, and in this way, Zen once again merely followed a well-established tradition. It was as if Zen, like Annius, had conceived of a gap in the historical record and arranged to fill it, substituting his sixteenth-century document representing his ancestors' letters for absent or damaged letters and documents that once existed. Annius, on the one hand, wanted his artifacts and texts to be perfect substitutions that worked as indisputable evidence from the ancient world; Zen, on the other hand, did not make such claims and openly pointed out that his substitution was imperfect. For Zen, the rhetoric of his authority or antiquity revolved more simply around the damaged condition of his

[70]Grafton, 1991, 76–103, esp. 80, 101.
[71]Popper, 380.
[72]Lane, 194–95.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

materials. Where his map was concerned, Zen stated, "It occurred to me to draw out a copy of a navigating chart that I once found that I possessed among the ancient things in our house. Although it is all rotten and many years old, I have succeeded tolerably well and which, placed before the eyes of those who enjoy such things, will serve almost like a light to make intelligible that which, without it, they would not be so well able to understand."[73] Regarding the text, and specifically of the letter containing the story of the anonymous fisherman, Zen claimed that the narration had "so much detail that, except that we have changed the old language and style, we have let the matter stand as it was."[74] Somewhat unusually, Zen actually described here the process of his substitution: how he updated the old to make it more legible and readable for a modern audience. Here, the drawing out of the map (*trarre*) is clearly intended as both sketching and a pulling forward out of the past. With the text, Zen expressed that his substitution was both the same (in content) and altered (in style), thereby allowing the document to comfortably coexist simultaneously, so to speak, in two different historical moments: in both the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

It is possible to hypothesize that Zen was moved to produce *Dello scoprimento* specifically by a knowledge of the contents of the second volume of Ramusio's *Navigazioni e viaggi* (1559), which included the Persian *relazioni* of Giosafat Barbaro (1413–94) and Ambrogio Contarini (1429–99), but not the account of his father Caterino Zen's (1483–1556) travels to Persia.[75] It may have tugged on Zen's sense of family pride that Ramusio had also included the *Viaggio e naufragio di Pietro Quirino* (*The Voyage and Shipwreck of Pietro Querini*) in his compilation, a travelogue that narrated the merchant's travels to Scandinavia in 1432, and not Zen's account of travel to the North Atlantic. Evidence suggests that Ramusio knew of the story of the Zen voyages to the North Atlantic but chose not to pursue them for inclusion in the first edition of his text. In a letter dated 16

[73]Zen, 1558b, fols. 46^{v}–47^{r}: "M'è paruto di trarne una copia dalla carta da navigare, che ancora mi trovo, havere tra le antiche nostre cose di casa; laquale, con tutto che sia marcia, e vecchia di molti anni, m'è riuscita assai bene; e posta davanti gli occhi di che si diletta di queste cose servirà quasi per un lume à dargli intelligentia di quell, che senz'essa non si potrebbe cosi bene sapere."

[74]Ibid., fol. 51^{v}: "così puntalmente, mutate però alcune voci antiche, e lo stile, e lasciata star nel suo essere la materia."

[75]The publication of the second volume of Ramusio's *Navigatione* was supposed to occur earlier but was delayed because its original manuscript was destroyed in a fire. Zen's *Dello scoprimento* was therefore published before Ramusio's collection but potentially with a knowledge that it would not be included in it. *Dello scoprimento* was eventually included in the 1574 edition of *Navigatione e viaggi*, reedited by Giovanni Batista Ramusio's son Paolo Ramusio, who possibly paid more attention to Zen's text after Mercator published Zen's map in his 1569 world map.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

February 1539, Girolamo Fracastoro (1478–1553) told Ramusio about Zen's story, writing that he had learned of a voyage to the New World, as well as "to Greenland and under the North Pole."[76] As Giorgio Padoan has pointed out, Nicolò Zen was in frequent contact with Ramusio and the omission of both the Zen family travel accounts from Ramusio's text — and the inclusion of Quirini's — may have vexed Zen.[77] Zen, however, had no text for Ramusio to publish, which could feasibly have incited Zen to produce one: again, to substitute a text that Zen may have believed once existed. Early modern writers would not have understood this textual production or substitution as fakery, but as unproblematically producing anew a text — or a coin, inscription, or drawing — that had gone missing over time.

All this is not to say that early modern historians and writers possessed a shoddy sense of what constituted reliable evidence from the past. Renaissance readers were sharp detectors of linguistic, material, geographical, and other errors in historical and antiquarian scholarship. Indeed, as any familiarity with the work of Lorenzo Valla suggests, Renaissance historians and literary scholars had precise mechanisms for evaluating the reliability of their sources; they were prudent and careful thinkers who paid particular attention to historical method.[78] This method was simply not the same as that of modern scholars. As Nicholas Popper puts it, early modern methods of reconstructing historical events "prioritized conviction over textual remains" and "promoted a principle of empiricism that encouraged credulity, or the willingness to give credence to some elements of prima facie improbable texts and assertions."[79] That is to say, according to early modern historians even suspect texts merited consideration and publication in the process of building accurate histories, since even dubious accounts might ultimately supply good evidence. Each source or publication represented a collection of usable evidence that could be employed to gain insight into other sources. Rather than definitively accept or deny a given text, early modern scholars recognized that elements of texts of uncertain origins could still be used in the process of synthesis, to contrast with other materials and corroborate or deny the validity of other sources. To put it another way, the categories of

[76]*Lettere di XIII huomini illustri*, 717: "d'Engrovelanta, et di sotto il Polo Artico." The language used by Fracastoro, "under the North Pole," directly repeated the title of *Dello scoprimento . . . fatto sotto il Polo Artico*, suggesting that Zen told Fracastoro, who told Ramusio.

[77]Padoan, 24–25.

[78]Grafton, 2007.

[79]Popper, 379, 376.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

true and false simply were not "appropriate terms for judging . . . premodern historiography."[80] Rather, it was plausibility that counted. As Christine Johnson asserts, "standards of credulity were crucially dependent on, but not defined by, categories of potential or plausible truth, because many lies were just as plausible as accepted truths." Renaissance historians "were far more committed to expanding readers' sense of the plausible than to emphasizing the need for skepticism," and suspicious accounts often served the purpose of allowing writers to posit themselves as arbiters, judges, and experts in evaluating evidence.[81] Surekha Davies has similarly argued that where dubious texts were concerned, Renaissance geographers and cartographers employed the strategy of providing all the information, from the credible to the incredible, and ultimately allowed readers to make up their own minds.[82] Renaissance thinkers were not uncritical consumers of ideas and information: rather, the early modern historical mind was both skeptical and credulous and embraced uncertainty rather than reject it, all of which helps to contextualize both the content and publication of Zen's narrative about the New World.

In compiling and substituting, Zen had to imagine the genre of the travelogue as it was composed, as well as how it would have sounded in both the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The creation of a new work in an old and believable style is a sophisticated undertaking, one that Zen could only have accomplished with a refined historical consciousness. That is to say, his techniques and procedures made him a historicist in the truest sense of the word, and his echoing the tactics of other texts such as those of Mandeville or Annius effectively built Zen's credibility and produced his text's verisimilitude. It is important to remember again that, at the time, no one seems to have questioned the veracity of his account. It was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that readers began to doubt his story in print, which points to Zen's masterful understanding of the genre of historical travel literature, as well as his audience's inherent acceptance of it. In sum, Zen employed the textual strategies of pastiche, collage, temporal juggling, retroactivity, and substitution — as scores of early modern scholars had previously done, and as early modern audiences were accustomed to — as tools with which to insert the Venetians into an established canon of otherwise acknowledged authorities on travel to the New World.

[80]Wolf, 10–11, 21.
[81]Johnson, 2007, 415, 432–34.
[82]Davies, 228.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

4. Zen's Civic Patriotism

As suggested above, Nicolò Zen the writer's *Dello scoprimento* was a patriotic text, and a patriotic vision surely served as the impetus behind its writing and publication. This concept has received surprisingly little attention, perhaps because it has not been able to compete with the dazzling array of debates about the truth behind the voyage itself.[83] Zen's patriotism and assertion of Venetian accomplishment at first might not appear obvious: his text was short (a mere thirteen folio pages); Antonio Zen, hardly an intrepid explorer, sighted America by coasting its shores but did not make landfall on it; Zen's *carta da navegar* placed Estotiland, Icaria, and Drogeo — the New World — quietly and unobtrusively in the bottom left corner, devoid of any artistic description, and instead visually centered Frisland and Greenland.

Yet Zen's sense of civic pride forms one of the crucial building blocks underlying his text's meaning and purpose. As the motivating force behind his work of pastiche, compilation, and substitution, his patriotism merits further scrutiny. On the most basic of levels, Zen's account expressed a sense of family pride by focusing the reader on the admirable feats of exploration by his ancestors: a concept that needs little explanation. In addition, Zen's sense of family pride was neatly linked to a sense of civic patriotism that emerges in the text of *Dello scoprimento*. Zen's sense of Venetian patriotism was subtle rather than propagandistic, but nevertheless quietly wove its way through the narrative. For instance, after Nicolò Zen the traveler had settled into life on Frisland, Zichmni requested that Zen lead Zichmni's fleet in a battle against the King of Norway: "The sea in which they were sailing was, so to speak, full of shoals and rocks, so that if Sir Nicolò had not been their pilot, with his Venetian mariners, all that fleet, in the judgment of all that were in it, would have been lost because of the little experience that Zichmni's men had compared to ours, who were, so to say, born, bred and grown old in the art [of navigation]."[84] Clearly, Zen the writer expressed here a sense of Venetian honor and dignity. Not only did the Venetians know more about the sea than this other island population, but Venetian maritime skills were so great as to trump the locals' knowledge of their own seas as the deciding factor in Zichmni's victory.

[83]For instance, Padoan, 23, stated that patriotism was not a motivating factor for Zen: "motivations from nationalism are not invocable either."

[84]Zen, 1558b, fol. 47^{v}: "Questo mare da lor navigato era in maniera pieno di seccagne et di scogli, che se non fosse stato M. Nicolò il suo piloto, e i marinai venetiani, tutta quell'armata, per giudicio di quanti v'erano sù, si sarebbe perduta, per la poca pratica, che havevano quelli di Zichmni à comparatione de I nostri, che nell'arte erano si può dir nati, cresciuti, e invecchiati."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In addition, Zen the writer several times points to distant historical connections between the Atlantic World, the New World, and Venice. Recounting the initial shipwreck of Nicolò Zen the traveler on Frisland: "A prince [Zichmni] with an armed following happened to be there. . . . He spoke in Latin, and demanded of what nation they were, and where they came from, and when he discovered that they came from Italy and were men of the same country, he was filled with the greatest joy."[85] It was not so far-fetched that Latin speakers could exist on the islands of the North Atlantic since there had been a great Icelandic production of Latin literature in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.[86] However, by having the Latin-speaking Zichmni be so happy to see men from his homeland, Zen implied that in some way, Zichmni had come from Italy, and since the word *paese* is ambiguous, meaning either *country* or *town*, even possibly from Venice. While this passage has been explained as a blunder of Nicolò Zen the writer's editorial skills,[87] a closer consideration of additional passages suggests its intentionality. Describing the inhabitants of Estotiland — again, purportedly in the Americas — the fisherman who first brought news of these western lands to Antonio Zen claimed that "those who live there are intelligent and possess all of the skills that we have. It is believed that in earlier times, they had commerce with us."[88] While this passage is similarly vague, if Estotiland had once traded with Frisland, it had, in turn, once traded with men of Italian or perhaps even Venetian descent. The fisherman then went on to describe Estotiland as a very large country that seemed "almost a new world" — a turn of phrase historically used only to indicate lands associated with the Columbian discoveries and not with medieval travel, suggesting that the Venetian Antonio Zen had been the first European to learn of the Americas.

By suggesting that these Atlantic people could have historic connections to Venice, Nicolò Zen the writer participated in a larger tradition of asserting links between Venice and the New World. For instance, upon seeing a group of Native Americans brought to Lisbon in 1501, the Venetian ambassador Pietro Pasqualigo (1472–1515) reported that while Native Americans traditionally did not have iron and instead made knives from

[85]Zen, 1558b, fol. 46^{v}: "Fosse trovato ivi vicino un prencipe con gente armata. . . . Parlò in Latino, e dimandò, che genti erano, e di dove venivano, e saputo che venivano d'Italia, e che erano huomini del medesimo paese fu preso di grandissima allegrezza."

[86]See Ross. The author thanks Allen Grieco for pointing this out.

[87]See Major, 1873, 5.

[88]Zen, 1558b, fol. 51^{r}: "quelli, che l'habitano sono ingeniosi, et hanno tutte le arti, come noi; et credesi, che in altri tempi, havessero commercio con i nostri."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stone, the natives he saw in Lisbon had brought with them "a piece of a broken, golden sword, which was certainly made in Italy, [and] a child of theirs was wearing two silver earrings, that without a doubt seem to have been made in Venice."[89] In his state of fascination upon witnessing the presentation of these Native Americans at the Portuguese court, Pasqualigo saw Venice in the New World. A more speculative reading might even suggest that like Zen, Pasqualigo implied that the Portuguese explorer Gaspar Corte-Real (ca. 1450–1501) could only have hit upon land (once again, in North America) that had been previously visited by the Venetians. The Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo (1466–1536) also noted in his diary that on his first voyage to North America, John Cabot (1450–98) marked the New World with both English and Venetian flags; the 1508 *Terra Nova* map of Johannes Ruysch (1460–1533) similarly indicates a "Cape of St. Mark," perhaps because of Cabot's presence there.[90] Venetian writers naturally connected the Columbian discoveries to their own tradition of travel and exploration: Francesco Sansovino (1521–1586), for instance, asserted that it was the example of Alvise Ca' da Mosto (1432–88) and his explorations along the African coast that compelled Columbus to discover the New World.[91]

Zen's text was also in dialogue with other significant Venetian texts about exploration. For instance, *Dello scoprimento* participates in the Venetian tradition of the *isolario*, of seeing the world in terms of islands, including islands to be conquested. *Isolarii* were texts that depicted world geography as a series of islands. They were both chorographic and geographic, emphasizing history, topographical description, and culture rather than nautical or maritime knowledge. They became popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at exactly the same time that Europeans' global geographic knowledge expanded. Text such as Bartolomeo da li Sonetti's *Isolario* (1485), Benedetto Bordone's *Libro di Benedetto Bordone* (1528), and Tommaso Porcacchi's *L'isole piu famose del mondo* (1572), among many others, allowed readers to comprehend the expansion of global frontiers through the specific medium of islands.[92] Writers of *isolarii*, and Nicolò Zen in this tradition, chose islands as the measure by which to

[89][Montalboddo?], 146: "uno pezo de spada rotta dorata: la qual certa par facta in Italia: uno putto de questi haveva ale orechie dui tondini de arzento: che senza dubio pareno sta facti a Venetia."

[90]Sanudo, 1:806–07; Harisse, 317.

[91]Sansovino, fol. 249^{v}: "D'età 22 anni passò fino al porto della scussa nella Ethiopia inferior, al cui essempio mosso il Colombo, ritrovò il mondo nuovo" ("At the age of 22 he passed the port of Scussa in lower Ethiopia [and] his example moved Columbus to find the New World").

[92]See Lestringant; Tolias.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

understand the geography of the expanding world. Islands were a means of connecting the New World seamlessly to the Old and the world of antiquity to the world of modernity, since through them, geographers could describe the Americas like places or islands that they already knew. In the sixteenth century Mexico City became, for instance, a new Venice.[93]

Scholars have long acknowledged that *isolarii* were predominantly Venetian: they were very much a product of the cultural industry of the *Serenissima*.[94] As late as 1696, the Venetian cartographer Vincenzo Coronelli (1650–1718) went so far as to say in his *isolario* that "all the world is divided up into islands," attesting to this long-standing Venetian vision that emphasized islands as the fundamental rubric of geographical knowledge.[95] Nicolò Zen the writer drew heavily on the *isolario* of Benedetto Bordone for the content of his text. But beyond these particulars, Zen's narrative — written in an island city that produced an abundance of texts about islands during his lifetime — focused on the wealth of islands in the Atlantic and in doing so, represented a particularly Venetian way of seeing the world.[96] Venetians had historically fought for islands in the Mediterranean, islands that became their long-standing colonies, and Zen's text depicted Venetian mariners fighting for islands in the North Atlantic, or embarking to discover new islands to the west. In this way, his account echoed and replicated this Venetian vision of an insular, colonial world, and, more speculatively, had potentially prescriptive or didactic aims. While in general Zen's text seemed to posit that the acquisition of knowledge was more important than the development of colonies, this aspect of his text suggested that the Venetians, like the Spanish, could still be on the lookout for more islands to conquest.

Dello scoprimento also subtlely echoed Marco Polo's *Travels*, additionally reflecting Zen's sense of Venetian patriotism. Just as Marco Polo had lived and worked at the court of the Great Khan in China, Antonio and Nicolò Zen served as the retainers of Zichmni in the North Sea. Polo's text represented a fundamental reference point for Venetians, affirming for the ages Venetian superiority in travel and discovery. Ramusio clearly expressed how Polo framed Venetians' understanding of global exploration when he stated in the second volume of his *Navigazioni e viaggi* (1559) that

[93]See Ballino, "Timistitano," n.p.; Bordone, fols. 7^{v}, 10^{r}, 29^{v}–30^{r}.

[94]Donattini, 2000, 183. See also Guglielminetti; Lucchi and Tonini.

[95]Coronelli, 4.

[96]Alessandro Zorzi, a Venetian editor of texts on the Americas, regularly sketched groups of islands in the marginalia of his manuscripts about the New World, and sometimes wrote next to his drawings phrases such as "insule molte" or "insule infinite." See, for example, BCA, MS Class II, 10, fol. 11^{r}.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

when one compared overland to maritime travel — meaning, when one compared the achievements of Polo to Columbus — that "it was much longer, more dangerous, and more difficult to go to Cathay than to the New World."[97] Zen's reverberations of Polo therefore implied the continued primacy of Venetians as explorers.

His loose recasting of Polo's story in the North Atlantic similarly forwarded a Venetian agenda. Classical writers had largely ignored the North Atlantic, describing it as an uninhabitable frozen zone. While knowledge of the inhabitable world grew dramatically in early modern Europe, the North Atlantic continued to exist only on the periphery of geographic knowledge until the end of the sixteenth century.[98] Given Spanish domination in Central and South America, Zen's concentration on the north was not surprising. The north offered a blank canvas onto which Zen could paint a picture of Venetian authority in the Americas, and the relatively unknown geography of the North Atlantic in the middle of the sixteenth century allowed for the plausibility of the Zen text.

Zen more openly revealed his Venetian allegiances and his sense of civic pride in his other writings. For instance, his text *Dell'origine di Venetia* (*On the Origins of Venice*, 1557), clearly represented a tribute to his beloved *patria*. For Zen, Venice was "the most glorious among cities"; its inhabitants were directly descended from Troy — not from Rome — specifically from Antenor, Priam's most important counselor during the Trojan War, and Helenus, Priam's son.[99] When the Goths and Lombards invaded the Italian mainland, "just as God had saved Noah's Ark from the flood, he saved this people of ancient lineage in the lagoon."[100] *Dell'origine di Venetia* included a discussion of Cassiodorus's well-known sixth-century letter in praise of the nobility of the early inhabitants of the city, and extolled the valor of the Venetians in defending their liberty during the Frankish invasion of the lagoon in the ninth century. In his *Storia della guerra veneto-turca* (1535), Zen specifically betrayed his anxieties about Habsburg expansion in the Americas and his mistrust of their assertions: "Starting in the West . . . as they call the New World, the Spanish claim that there are many countries, islands, and provinces, but they are bombastic by nature, and it is certain that they have found much less than what they

[97]Ramusio, 3:23–24.

[98]See Small.

[99]Zen, 1558a, fols. 1r–2v.

[100]Ibid., fols. 7v–8r: "Come Dio salvò dal diluvio nell'arca Noè con i suoi, cosi salvò questo popolo de seme antico in queste lagune."

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

claim."[101] He then immediately went on to note that "in Italy there are a few lords of little importance, the most significant of which are the Duke of Ferrara and the Duke of Mantua. There are a few others, but they are subject to the emperor — indeed slaves, to tell the truth."[102]

While other European states had begun to build great monarchies and empires or had discovered sea routes to take them to the riches of Asia or to New World, Zen doubted the truthfulness and the importance of these accomplishments. Instead, he continued to emphasize the importance of Venetian freedom and liberty rather than scrutinize the city's failure to colonize the New World. Just as the city had remained historically free from both Roman and barbarian rule, it continued to maintain its freedom from Habsburg Spain, to which the rest of the Italian peninsula, as well as the New World, was subject by the mid-sixteenth century. Subjection to Spain was a striking similarity between Native Americans and Italians. While the Venetians may not have established an impressive New World empire, Zen called attention to the lagoon city being among the few that had not been enslaved by the Spanish: yet another reason for him to express his sense of patriotism and civic pride.

5. Conclusion

In a story that is most likely apocryphal, a Venetian senator supposedly came to visit the Venetian mapmaker Fra Mauro (d. 1460) on the island monastery of San Michele in the northern lagoon. Here, Fra Mauro was working on his fifteenth-century map of the known world: a map that, as one of its captions states, Fra Mauro was making "for the contemplation of this most illustrious *signoria* [of Venice]."[103] The senator tried unsuccessfully to find Venice, and asked Fra Mauro where it was; Fra Mauro pointed to a dot on his yet unfinished map, which to the senator appeared tiny compared to the rest of the world. "Why so small?" the senator complained, "Venice should be bigger and the rest of the world smaller!"[104] The senator's disapproval of a seemingly undersized Venice would have been understandable: Venice had loomed large in global history and should

[101]BNM, MS Italy, Class VII, 2053 (7920), fol. 3r: "Principiando da ponente . . . che si chiamano il mondo novo, nel quale si contiene molti paesi, insule, et provincie, come narrano spagnoli, benche per esser la lor natura parabolana è cosa certa ritrovarsi meno assai di quello, che dicono."

[102]Ibid., fol. 5r: "In Italia sono alcuni signori di poca importanza, il maggior il duca di Ferrara, poi il duca di Mantova. Sono poi alcuni altri, ma soggieti all'imperator, anzi schiavi per dir meglio il suo vero epifeto."

[103]See Falchetta, 699: "Questa opera, fata a contemplation de questa illustrissima signoria."

[104]Berthon and Robinson, 73–74.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

continue to do so even as Europeans' knowledge of world geography expanded. Surely it did, which was precisely what Nicolò Zen's *Dello scoprimento* argued. The discovery of the Americas served, for Zen, to tell a local history of the lagoon city and its historical greatness.

It would of course be intriguing to unearth new evidence about the Zen voyages. To date, no one knows for certain if they really happened or not, or if so, where, or how far they went; all that exists, at the end of the day, is Zen's text. That is to say, there is little that is concretely knowable about these travels or whether they were truthfully, by modern standards, undertaken; but it is certain that Zen produced this narrative, a text that merits consideration on its own terms.

As previously noted, early modern audiences accepted Zen's account in the way they had always accepted the plausible and the marvelous blended together in history, biography, and travel narratives. Building on this a bit further, a final Zenian rhetorical strategy that bolstered his text was a certain kind of tentativeness. It was as if Nicolò Zen the writer hoped to push the relationship between the credible and the implausible just as much as he could without going too far. He did not want to make assertions that would too easily be doubted. Compared to modern readers, his early modern audience looked primarily for a believable likeness to the past and was flexible where truth and fiction were concerned, but knowing this, he still did not want to press them beyond their capability for belief. Had Zen, like Columbus, claimed to have converted natives or to have conquered them in a historic battle like Cortés, he might have overstretched their capacities. Zen produced a narrative that was gently, as opposed to aggressively, patriotic, using pastiche and temporal folding to imply that Venetian ambitions in relation to the New World were limited or undefined, but still somehow existed. It is as if *Dello scoprimento* suggested that the Venetians could still build a New World empire if they chose to. They had the historical expertise, had had the opportunity in the past, and thus the door to colonial expansion was still open if they chose to walk through it. In the end, however, the Venetians chose to remain above this fray, since they had other, more important tasks at hand, namely, trade in the Levant and the production of texts about the New World.[105] As a part of a long tradition of travel writers and editors of collections about travel, Nicolò Zen knew that the Venetians were probably better at making books and maps about the New World than making colonies; nevertheless, he fashioned a text whose rhetoric depicted the Venetians as potentially expert in and surely capable of both.

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY

[105]See Horodowich.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Archivio di Stato, Venice, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti Miste, Filza 16, 1504.

Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea (BCA), Ferrara, MS Class II, 10.

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, Banco Rari 234 (Magliabechiana XIII.81).

Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (BNM), MS Italy, Class VII, 18 (8307).

BNM, MS Italy, Class VII, 928 (8597).

BNM, MS Italy, Class VII, 2053 (7920).

Printed Sources

Ambrosini, Federica. *Paesi e mari ignoti: America e colonialismo europeo nella cultura veneziana (secoli XVI–XVII).* Venice, 1982.

Aretino, Pietro. *Libro de le lettere di M. Pietro Aretino al sacratissimo re d'Inghilterra.* 6 vols. Paris, 1609.

Aricò, Angela Caracciolo, ed. *L'impatto della scoperta dell'America nella cultura veneziana*. Rome, 1990.

Babcock, William H. *Legendary Islands of the Atlantic: A Study in Medieval Geography*. 1922. Reprint, Plainview, NY, 1975.

Ballino, Giulio. *De'disegni delle più illustri città et fortezze del mondo*. Venice, 1569.

Barbaro, Daniele. *Historia veneta*. In *Fonti italiane per la storia della scoperta del nuovo mondo*, ed. Guglielmo Berchet, 2:119. Rome, 1892.

Barolsky, Paul. "What Are We Reading When We Read Vasari?" *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 22 (2002): 33–35.

Berchet, Guglielmo, ed. *Fonti italiane per la storia della scoperta del nuovo mondo*. 2 vols. Rome, 1892.

Berthon, Simon, and Andrew Robinson. *The Shape of the World*. Chicago, 1991.

Bolognesi, Emanuele. "Nicolò Zeno (1515–1565): Dalla storiacontemporanea alla storia delle origini." PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Ferrara, 1995.

Bordone, Benedetto. *Libro di Benedetto Bordone*. Venice, 1528.

Burke, Peter. "Early Modern Venice as a Center of Information and Communication." In *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano, 389–419. Baltimore, 2002.

Coronelli, Vincenzo. *Isolario dell'atlante Veneto*. Venice, 1696.

Cosgrove, Denis. "Mapping New Worlds: Culture and Cartography in Sixteenth-Century Venice." *Imago Mundi* 44 (1992): 65–89.

Da Mosto, Alvise. "I navigatori Nicolò e Antonio Zen." In *Ad Alessandro Luzio gli Archivi di Stato Italiano. Miscellanea di studi storici*, 1:293–308. Florence, 1933.

Davies, Surekha. "The Wonderous East in the Renaissance Geographical Imagination: Marco Polo, Fra Mauro and Giovanni Battista Ramusio." *History and Anthropology* 23 (2012): 215–34.

De Silva, Chandra Richard. "Beyond the Cape: The Portuguese Encounter with the Peoples of South Asia." In *Implicit Understandings* (1994), 295–322.

Dionisotti, Carlo. *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*. Turin, 1967.

Di Robilant, Andrea. *Irresistible North: From Venice to Greenland on the Trail of the Zen Brothers*. New York, 2011.

Donattini, Massimo. "Giovanni Battista Ramusio e le sue 'Navigazioni':

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Appunti per una biografia." *Critica Storia* 17 (1980): 55–100.

———. *Spazio e modernità: Libri, carte, isolari nell'età delle scoperte*. Bologna, 2000.

Duffy, Eve M., and Alida C. Metcalf. *The Return of Hans Staden: A Go-Between in the Atlantic World*. Baltimore, 2011.

Dursteler, Eric. "Reverberations of the Voyages of Discovery in Venice, ca. 1501: The Trevisan Manuscript in the Library of Congress." *Mediterannean Studies* 9 (2001): 43–64.

Elliott, John H. *The Old World and the New*. Cambridge, 1970.

———. "Renaissance Europe and America: A Blunted Impact." In *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, 1:11–23. Berkeley, 1976.

Elton, Charles. *The Career of Columbus*. London, 1892.

Falchetta, Piero. *Fra Mauro's World Map*. Turnhout, 2006.

Fausett, David. *Writing the New World: Imaginary Voyages and Utopias of the Great Southern Land*. Syracuse, 1994.

Forster, John Reinhold. *History of the Voyages and Discoveries Made in the North*. London, 1786.

Gentile, S. *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America*. Florence, 1992.

Goffen, Rona. *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*. New Haven, 2002.

Gómara, Francisco López de. *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*. Ed. Jorge Guerria Lacroix. Caracas, 1979.

Grafton, Anthony. *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800*. Cambridge, MA, 1991.

———. *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery*. Cambridge, MA, 1992.

———. *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*. Princeton, 2007.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago, 1991.

Grendler, Paul. *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540–1605*. Princeton, 1977.

Guglielminetti, Marziano. "Il 'mondo nuovo' come un'isola: Benedetto Bordon e Tommaso Porcacchi." In *L'epopea delle scoperte*, ed. Renzo Zorzi, 103–20. Venice, 1994.

Harisse, Henry. *The Discovery of North America: A Critical, Documentary, and Historic Investigation*. Amsterdam, 1969.

Hiatt, Alfred. *The Making of Medieval Forgeries: False Documents in Fifteenth-Century England*. Toronto, 2004.

Higgins, Iain Maclod. *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville*. Philadelphia, 1997.

Hirsch, Rudolf. "Printed Reports on the Early Discoveries and Their Reception." In *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiapelli, 2:537–62. Berkeley, 1976.

Hobbs, William Herbert. "The Fourteenth-Century Discovery of America by Antonio Zeno." *Scientific Monthly* 72 (1951): 24–31.

Hope, Charles, Jennifer Fletcher, Jill Dunkerton, et. al., eds. *Titian*. London, 2003.

Horodowich, Elizabeth. "Editors and Armchair Travelers: The Venetian Discovery of the New World." *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 36 (2005): 1039–62.

Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era. Ed. Stuart B. Schwartz. Cambridge, 1994.

Infelise, Mario. *Prima dei giornali*. Rome, 2002.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Johnson, Christine R. "Buying Stories: Ancient Tales, Renaissance Travelers, and the Market for the Marvelous." *Journal of Early Modern History* 11 (2007): 405–46.

———. *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous.* Charlottesville, 2008.

Karrow, Robert W. *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth-Century and Their Maps.* Chicago, 1993.

Kupperman, Karen O., ed. *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750.* Chapel Hill, 1995.

Lane, Frederic C. *Venice: A Maritime Republic*. Baltimore, 1973.

Lestringant, Frank. *Le Livre des îles: Atlas et récits insulaires, de la Genèse à Jules Verne*. Geneva, 2002.

Lettere di XIII huomini illustri. Venice, 1560.

Lucas, Frederick W. *The Annals of the Voyages of the Brothers Nicolò and Antonio Zeno*. London, 1898.

Macgaffey, Wyatt. "Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa." In *Implicit Understandings* (1994), 249–67.

Maier, Jessica. "A 'True Likeness': The Renaissance City Portrait." *Renaissance Quarterly* 65.3 (2012): 711–52.

Major, Richard Henry, ed. *Select Letters of Columbus*. London, 1870.

———. *The Voyages of the Venetian Brothers, Nicolò and Antonio Zeno, To the Northern Seas, In the XIVth Century*. London, 1873.

Markey, Lia. "Stradano's Allegorical Invention of the Americas in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence." *Renaissance Quarterly* 65.2 (2012): 385–442.

Migliorini, Bruno. *Storia della lingua italiana*. Florence, 1961.

Moleto, Giuseppe. *Facil modo di tirar le line parallele alle vedute, di misurar le distanzeet di mettere in disegno*. Padua, 1581.

[Montalboddo, Fracanzio?]. *Paesi novamente retrovati et novo mondo da Alberico Vesputio Florentino intitulato.* Milan, 1508. Facsimile, Princeton, 1916.

Musatti, Eugenio. *Storia di Venezia*. 2 vols. Venice, 1968.

Nagel, Alexander, and Christopher S. Wood. *Anachronic Renaissance*. New York, 2010.

Nanni, Giovanni. *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium.* Rome, 1498.

Padoan, Giorgio. "Sulla relazione cinquecentesca dei viaggi nord-atlantici di Nicolò e Antonio Zen (1383–1403)." *Quaderni Veneti* 9 (1989): 7–104.

Penrose, Boise. *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420–1620*. Cambridge, MA, 1967.

Pinessi, Orietta. *Nicolò Zen tra Tiziano e Tintoretto: Storia di un riconoscimento.* Treviolo, 2011.

Popper, Nicholas. "An Ocean of Lies: The Problem of Historical Evidence in the Sixteenth Century." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74 (2011): 375–400.

Prosperi, Adriano, and Wolfgang Reinhard, eds. *Il Nuovo Mondo nella coscienze italiana e tedesca del Cinquecento.* Bologna, 1992.

Ramusio, Giovanni Batista. *Navigazioni e viaggi.* Ed. Marica Milanesi. 6 vols. Turin, 1980.

Reid, Anthony. "Early Southeast Asian Categorizations of Europeans." In *Implicit Understandings* (1994), 268–94.

Romeo, Rosario. *Le scoperte americane nella coscienza italiana del cinquecento.* Rome, 1989.

Ross, Margaret Clunies, ed. *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge, 2000.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rowland, Ingrid D. *The Scarith of Scornello: A Tale of Renaissance Forgery*. Chicago, 2004.

Rubiés, Joan-Pau. "Instructions for Travellers: Teaching the Eye to See." *History and Anthropology* 9:2–3 (1996): 139–90.

———. "Futility in the New World: Narratives of Travel in Sixteenth-Century America." In *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, ed. Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, 74–100. London, 1999.

———. "Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe." *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing* 1 (2000): 5–35.

Rubin, Patricia Lee. *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*. New Haven, 1995.

Ruscelli, Girolamo. *Geografia di Tolomeo tradotta*. Venice, 1561.

Salwa, Piotr. "L'esperienza del nuovo: La relazione di viaggio come strumento Didascalico." *Annali d'italianistica* 21 (2003): 301–17.

Sansovino, Francesco. *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare descritta in XIIII libri da M.Francesco Sansovino*. Venice, 1581.

Sanudo, Marin. *I diarii di Marino Sanudo*. Ed. Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, et al. 58 vols. Venice, 1897–1903.

Schmidt, Benjamin. *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670*. Cambridge, 2001.

Skelton, R. A. *Explorers' Maps: Chapters in the Cartographic Record of Geographical Discovery*. London, 1958.

Small, Margaret. "From Jellied Seas to Open Waterways: Redefining the Northern Limit of the Knowable World." *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007): 315–39.

Sponza, Sandro. "Un dipinto di Tizian riconsosciuto: Il ritratto di Nicolò a Kingston Lacy." In *Pittura veneziana: Dal Quattrocento al Settecento: Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Egidio Martini*, ed. Egidio Martini, Bernard Aikema, and Giuseppe Maria Pilo, 57–61. Venice, 1999.

Stiffone, Giovanni. "La scoperta e la conquista dell'America nelle prime relazioni degli ambasciatori veneziani (1497–1559)." In *L'impatto della scoperta dell'America nella cultura veneziana*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò, 351–64. Rome, 1990.

Toby, Ronald P. "The 'Indianness' of Iberia and Changing Japanese Iconographies of Other." In *Implicit Understandings* (1994), 323–51.

Tolias, George. "*Isolarii*, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Century." In *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, ed. David Woodward, 263–84. Chicago, 2007.

Tonini, Camillo, and Piero Lucchi, eds. *Navigare e descrivere: Isolari e portolani del Museo Correr di Venezia XV–XVIII secolo*. Venice, 2001.

Vespucci, Amerigo. *The First Four Voyages of Amerigo Vespucci: Reprinted in Facsimile and Translated from the Rare Original Edition (Florence, 1505–6)*. London, 1893.

Von Martels, Zweder, ed. *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing*. Leiden, 1994.

Wilford, John Noble. *The Mapmakers*. New York, 1981.

Williams, Gwyn A. *Madoc: The Making of a Myth*. Oxford, 1987.

Wolf, Gerhard. *Von der Chronik zum Weltbuch: Sinn und Anspruch südwestdeutscher Hauschroniken am Ausgang des Mittelalters*. Berlin, 2002.

Wood, Christopher S. *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*. Chicago, 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Zabarella, Giacomo. *Trasea Peto overo origine della Serenissima famiglia Zeno di Venetia*. Padua, 1646.

Zahrtmann, Christian. "Remarks on the Voyages to the Northern Hemisphere Ascribed to the Zenis of Venice." *The Journal of the Royal Geographcial Society* 5 (1835): 102–28.

Zen, Nicolò. *Dell'origine di Venetia et antiquissime memorie dei barbari, che distrussero Per tutto'l mondo l'imperio di Roma, onde hebbe principio la città di Venetia, Libri undici*. Venice, 1558a.

———. *De I Commentarii del Viaggio in Persia di M(esser) Caterino Zeno il K(avaliere). . . . Con un disegno particolare di tutte le detta parte di Tramontana da lor scoperte*. Venice, 1558b.

Zorzi, Renzo, ed. *L'epopea delle scoperte*. Venice, 1994.

Zurla, Placido. *Dissertazione intorno ai viaggi e scoperte settentrionali di Nicolò ed Antonio fratelli Zeno*. Venice, 1808.

https://doi.org/10.1086/678776 Published online by Cambridge University Press