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# The Toscanelli Letters: A Dubious Influence on Columbus<sup>1</sup>

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MILES H. DAVIDSON

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and Hernando Colón, authors of the two best-known early works that dealt with Columbus and his discovery of the Americas, each provided copies of two letters which they claimed were written to Columbus by Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli. Las Casas stated that these were Spanish copies of Latin letters but gave no indication whether they were made from originals or copies. It was not until the nineteenth century that the only extant Latin copy of any of these was found. It is a Columbus holograph. It differs textually from the Spanish translation of the same letter. Columbus made this copy before his death in 1506, while Las Casas finished his manuscript in mid-century and Hernando's version was first published in Italian in 1571.

The Columbus holograph is historiographically the closest to a primary text, albeit a problematic one. Before this Latin copy was found, historians and biographers necessarily relied on the Lascasian and Hernandine versions which gave them general acceptance as authentic copies of an otherwise unknown original. Assuming for the moment that the Spanish letters are genuine, they are still at best secondary sources. Unfortunately, most late twentieth-century American authors accept Samuel Eliot Morison's firmly held belief that both of the Spanish letters were authentic and that they influenced Columbus in his decision to seek the Indies by sailing due west from Europe. Recently, John Noble Wilford subscribed to this theory, for that is what it is—only a theory. Both of these authors worked from the Spanish text of the letter without offering any explanation for giving preference to a secondary over a primary text.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from Miles H. Davidson, *Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, forthcoming in 1996).

Any individual selection and interpretation of these letters by historians and biographers is acceptable as long as the questionable nature of the letters themselves is made known to the reader. Over the years, doubts have been expressed as to their authenticity. It is not the intent here to attempt a determination on this debatable subject but instead to demonstrate through textual analysis that the integrity of the copies simply cannot be proven conclusively.

The information given in the letter said to have been written by Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli to Fernan Martins is often believed to have provided Columbus with the incentive to cross the Atlantic. Toscanelli was an eminent Florentin physician, cartographer, and mathematician. It has not often been commented upon that Toscanelli, besides his intellectual accomplishments, had commercial interests as head of his family's business trading in spices and hides, trade that would inevitably have brought him into contact with Portugal. He died in 1482 at the age of eighty-five. One significant point is that at no time did Columbus ever mention Toscanelli in any of his known correspondence.

Fernan Martins may have been a canon of the cathedral in Lisbon. There is no record today of this person, possibly due to the loss of records in the earthquake which was followed by a devastating fire that destroyed much of Lisbon in 1775. Las Casas gave his name as Hernán Martínez, although there is a theory that he was "Fernando de Roriz, canonicus Ulixbonensis," a canon of Lisbon.<sup>2</sup>

There are conflicting theories connected with these three letters, the first, in Latin, written to Martins, the other two, in Spanish, of which one is a copy of the Martins letter supposedly sent by Toscanelli in response to queries made by Columbus, while the other is a follow-up letter encouraging Columbus to seek Cathay by traveling to the West. The latter two are known only in these Spanish versions. There are substantive differences in content between the Latin letter and its Spanish version. Both are dated 25 June 1474. Modern scholars lean toward acceptance of the Latin letter while considering the other two apocryphal. This is not to say that there are not respectable scholars who reject all three, just as others accept all of them as authentic.

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<sup>2</sup> Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela, eds., *Cartas de particulares a Colón y relaciones coetáneas* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984), 129.

The only known Latin copy of the letter to Martins attributed to Toscanelli was located in 1860 by José María Fernández de Velasco bound-in with the Columbine Library copy of Æneas Silvius Piccolomini's *Description of Asia*, the first part of his *Historia rerum ubique gestarum*.<sup>3</sup> This is a Venice edition published in 1477.<sup>4</sup> Most modern American Columbists accept the opinion that this copy belonged to Columbus. This belief is based primarily on analyses of the handwriting in the many postille in this book.

The fact is generally overlooked that the only version known until 1860 of this famous first letter was in a Spanish translation of an unknown original supposedly written to Columbus by Toscanelli. Las Casas wrote: "The said master Paulo, answered him [Columbus] in a letter in Latin, incorporating in it what he had written to Hernán Martínez [sic], canon, which I saw and had in my hand, translated from Latin to [the] Romance [language]."<sup>5</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that being a perhaps indifferent Latinist, although Fernández de Oviedo did say that he spoke a "genteel Latin," Columbus had translated the letter back into Latin from a Spanish copy, rather than copying from a Latin original. Obviously, someone had to have made the Spanish translation first in order for it to have been available for translation back into Latin. This raises the possibility that the Columbus holograph is an emended translation of the text of the Toscanelli letter as found in the Spanish letter. Conceivably, this could have been an effort on the part of the writer to provide evidence for the authenticity of the Spanish version by providing a Latin original for his translations.

<sup>3</sup> José María Asensio y Toledo, *Cristóbal Colón: su vida, sus viajes, sus descubrimientos* (Barcelona: Espasas y Compañía, 1891), 2:60.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Pius II (1405-64), *Descripción de Asia*, ed. Francisco Socas (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992), xxi. 1477 was the year of publication in Venice of the Columbine Library's copy of the *Historia rerum ubique gestarum* by Æneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) in the back of which the copy of the famous Toscanelli letter was found.

<sup>5</sup> The original wording is: "Rescibida la carta de Cristóbal Colón, el dicho maestro paulo respondióle una carta en latín, encorporando la que había scripto al Hernán Martínez, canónigo, la cual yo vide y tuve en mi mano, vuelta de latín en romance." Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, ed. Manuel José Quintana (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Continente, 1985), 63. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are by the author.

This copy is in a very poor Latin, inconceivable for a celebrated humanist such as Toscanelli. The letter contains abbreviations for words (a practice frequently used by Columbus), phrases that can only be surmised, and has readily apparent conceptual errors. Comparative translations have been made but all of them are necessarily reconstructions based on the use of a combination of paleography, linguistics, and cosmography. Asensio y Toledo provided copies of the Latin and Spanish letters "so that those who are curious can easily compare the variations that are to be seen between them."<sup>6</sup> A facsimile of the Latin letter was provided by Henry HARRISSE in 1872 and again by Carlos Sanz in 1958.<sup>7</sup>

HARRISSE called the Italian text of the first letter "very inexact and interpolated." The Latin version, for example, provides ten proper names whereas the Spanish version provides fourteen. Another example is that the West (*Poniente*) is mentioned seven times in the Spanish version but only once in the Latin; the East (*Levante*) four times in the Spanish version but only twice in the Latin. It is not the purpose of this study to show the many differences between the two versions of the first Toscanelli letter. A Columbus holograph must take precedence over a translation composed over fifty years after the death of Columbus from an unknown copy of the same letter. Suffice it to say that those who base their argument solely on the Spanish version of the first letter place themselves in a historiographically unsupportable position.

Another point to consider is that of the manner by which Columbus supposedly came by a copy of this possibly apocryphal Latin letter. Hernando Colón offered the explanation that it was through Lorenzo Giraldo, while Las Casas opined that it was through Birardo,

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<sup>6</sup> Asensio y Toledo, *Cristóbal Colón*, 2:250-51.

<sup>7</sup> Henry HARRISSE, *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima, a Description of the works relating to America published between the years 1492 and 1551. Additions*. (Paris: Librairie Tross, 1872), xvi. Over the years 1958-60 Carlos Sanz reproduced, updated, and added five new volumes, including an index, to his reproductions of the HARRISSE originals. See Carlos Sanz, *Índice general: Henry HARRISSE (1829-1910) "Príncipe de los Americanistas:" su vida. Su obra con nuevas adiciones a la Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima*. Facsimile. (Madrid: Librería General Victoriano Suárez, 1958).

better known as Lorenzo Berardi, a Florentin living in Lisbon.<sup>8</sup> The Berardis and Bardis had mutual business interests in Portugal and Spain. Columbus' future agent Juanoto Berardi has been identified in Portugal in 1473, and in later years Columbus was close to the Berardi family in Spain.<sup>9</sup>

There is a curious linkage between Berardi, Bardi, Vespucci, Columbus, and Toscanelli. Amerigo Vespucci's uncle, Giorgio Antonio, was a disciple and friend of Toscanelli's.<sup>10</sup> Documentary evidence suggests that in 1479-80 Vespucci, the explorer who gave his name to America and who was to become Columbus' friend, and Francisco dei Bardi, Columbus' future brother-in-law, were both in Paris and presumably met at that time. Francisco's brother Bernardo definitely did meet with Vespucci. Consuelo Varela suggests that Bartolomé Colón was also in Paris at that time and met with these fellow Italians.<sup>11</sup> Surely, if from no other source, Columbus would have known of Toscanelli through these close associates who shared his interest in exploration and trade with the Indies.

The first intensive study of these letters was made by Henry Vignaud in 1902.<sup>12</sup> His opinion was in part based on his interpretation of translations of the Latin letter made for him by N. Sumien, a court interpreter and well-known scholar in Paris. He concluded that all three

<sup>8</sup> "...llego esto a noticia del Almirante, que era curiosísimo de estas cosas, y al instante por medio de Lorenzo Giraldo, Florentin, que se hallaba en Lisboa." Hernando Colón, *Historia del Almirante Don Cristóbal Colón por su hijo Don Hernando*, traducido nuevamente del italiano, ed. Manuel Serrano y Sanz (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1932), 8:55. See also Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 12:62.

<sup>9</sup> "Nacido en 1457 hubo Giannetto [Columbus's agent Berardi known later in Spain as Juanoto] de emigrar muy joven a la Península Ibérica, quizá llamado por su padre Lorenzo quien en Lisboa, muy vinculado a la pesquería de coral y al comercio africano en general, ocupaba una posición de cierta relevancia." Consuelo Varela, *Colón y los florentinos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Emilio Taviani, *I viaggi di Colombo* (Novara: Istituto Geografico de Agostini, 1986), 383.

<sup>11</sup> Varela, *Colón y los florentinos*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Vignaud, *Toscanelli and Columbus. The letter and chart of Toscanelli on the route to the Indies by way of the West.... A critical study of the authenticity and value of these documents and the sources of the cosmographical ideas of Columbus, followed by the various texts of the letter, with translations, annotations, several facsimiles and also a map* (London: Sands & Co., 1902).

of the letters were apocryphal, a finding that is still disputed. This presupposed that the Latin letter was the first from which the Spanish was copied.

Based on his study of Toscanelli's known cosmographic concepts, Sumien disagreed with Vignaud. In 1927, he published his own opinion that the Latin letter was indeed authentic while dismissing the others as false. Sumien explained that he had expressed his doubts to Vignaud about the latter's rejection of the Latin letter and that Vignaud had urged him to publish his opposing opinion but that, out of delicacy, he had preferred to wait until after Vignaud's death.<sup>13</sup> This gives a good indication as to the differences that can be aroused, even between close friends and collaborators, when dealing with this difficult subject.

The great importance ascribed to these letters lies in the fact that, if authentic, a clear indication is provided for Columbus' objective in sailing to the West, what he sought to find, and where he expected it to be. If, however, one accepts them as apocryphal one must seek the reason behind them. In the latter case, someone would have been playing games with history. Of course the matter is made even more complicated by accepting one letter and rejecting the others.

If the letters are the product of a hoax, three possible rationales come to mind. First, there had been an effort from the start by Columbus and his first biographers to explain his "Great Enterprise" as a result of his study of the ancient cosmographers, to which in this case would be added confirmation by the renowned Toscanelli.

Second, during Columbus's lifetime there were those who claimed that he had only followed the route that an earlier pilot had revealed to him. In 1514, Friar Antonio de Aspa, in a manuscript that is found today in the archives of Madrid's Academia Nacional de la Historia, told the tale of a pilot who had accidentally discovered the islands of the Indies and who, upon his return, died in Columbus' house after revealing the route to him.<sup>14</sup> Fernández de Oviedo was the

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<sup>13</sup> N. Sumien, *La correspondance du savant florentin Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli avec Christophe Colombe* (Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1927).

<sup>14</sup> Cesareo Fernández Duro, *Nebulosa de Colón según observaciones hechas en ambos mundos. Indicación de algunos errores que se comprueban con documentos inéditos* (Madrid: Est. Tipográfico "Sucesores de Rivadeneyra," 1890), 74-75.

first to propagate in print what has become known as the tale of the unknown pilot. In the first chapters of his work published in 1539, he reported that

some wish to say that a caravel en route to England from Portugal with a load of wine and general cargo was blown off-course, and finally reached some islands where naked natives were found. The ship took on water and wood for cooking fuel and set sail for home. The whole voyage took some four or five months, and on the return trip most of the crew died. The pilot, with four or five crew members, reached Portugal, shortly after which the remaining crewmen died. The pilot, a good friend of Columbus, asked him to draw up a map showing where he had been. Columbus took him into his home where the pilot soon died.<sup>15</sup>

The story next appeared in López de Gómara's *Historia General de las Indias* in 1553. It also appeared in Las Casas' *Historia* and in Hernando's *Historie*. It was not a story that would go away by itself.

A third possibility is that Columbus sought the word of an "expert," i.e., Toscanelli, to refute those at court such as Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, who wrote on October 1:

A certain Colón navigated towards the West until reaching the coasts of the Indies—as he believes—, in the antipodes. He found many islands and it is believed that they are the ones mentioned farther away from the Eastern Ocean by the cosmographers, and adjacent to India. I do not deny it completely, although the magnitude of the world seems to indicate the opposite; anyhow those are not lacking who believe that the

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<sup>15</sup> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias y tierra firme del mar oceano* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de Historia, 1851), 2:13 and 3:14.

Indian coast (if the supposition is admitted) is very little distant from the Spanish shores.<sup>16</sup>

Later, in his *First Decade*, D'Anghiera expressed early skepticism of Columbus' claims: "Placing, thus, prow to the West he says that he discovered the island of Ofir [sic]; but taking into account with care the longitude of the cosmographers, those and the other neighboring (islands) are the Antilia islands. This one he called Española."<sup>17</sup>

While some were questioning Columbus' belief that he had reached the islands off India, the information in the so-called Toscanelli letters served to confirm it.

The Spanish letters were first brought to the attention of the public in Hernando's *Historie* published in 1571 in Italian.<sup>18</sup> Las Casas included Spanish copies in his *Historia*, which was written mid-sixteenth century but not published until 1875-76. These are not diplomatic copies of the Latin version but do contain much of the same information. The following is my literal rather than literary translation of Francisco Socas' recent Spanish translation of the Latin version, identified as postil #854 in the Columbine Library copy of Piccolomini's *Historia rerum*:

To Fernando Martins, canon of Lisbon, the cosmographer Pablo sends you greetings. It pleased me to know of your health, your favor and treatment with your most noble (and) generous king. As on another occasion I spoke with you about a route by means of

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<sup>16</sup> The original wording is: (1 Oct., Martire to Braga) "Cierta Colón navegó hacia Occidente hasta llegar a las costas de las Indias—según él cree—, en los antipodas. Encontró muchas islas, y piensan que son las mencionadas por los cosmógrafos más allá del Oceano Oriental, y adyacentes a la India. Yo no lo niego por completo, aunque la magnitud de la esfera parece indicar lo contrario; pues no faltan quienes opinan que el litoral índico dist (de ser admitido lo supuesto) muy poca de las playas españolas." Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *Opus Epistolarum* (Madrid: Imprenta Góngora, 1955), 10:245.

<sup>17</sup> Pedro Martire de Angleria, "Primera década oceánica de Pedro Martire de Angleria, Milanes, consejero real, protonotario apostólico, dirigida a Ascanio Sforza Visconti, Cardenal Vicecanciller," in Gil and Varela, *Cartas de particulares a Colón y Relaciones coetáneas*, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Hernando Colón, *Historia del Almirante*, 8:57-65.

maritime navigation to the lands of the spices, more short than the one that you take by Guinea, the most serene king asks me now yet more, a visible demonstration, in order that including [even] those moderately instructed comprehend and understand that route. I for my part, although I know that it can be shown by means of a spherical figure, as the world is, nevertheless I have decided, for a more easy understanding and also for a more easy task, to show that route \*\*\* [sic] by the navigational charts that \*\*\* [sic] manifest it.

I send then to His Majesty a map made by my hands in which your coasts and islands are drawn, from those that start the voyage always to the West, and the places to which they should arrive and how much they should distance from the pole or the equatorial line and by how much space, that is, by how many miles, one should arrive at places very rich in all classes of spices and gems. And you should not be surprised if I call "occidentals" the parts where the spices are, despite the fact that generally they are called "orientals," since when one navigates always towards the west those parts are reached by means of a navigation that is made under the Earth, on the other hand, if the voyage is made by land and by the roads above, the East would always be found. Next the straight lines, shown on the length of the map, show the distance from east to west; on the other hand the transverse ones show the spaces from the midday [equator] up to the north. But I mark on the map the diverse places to which you can put into harbor, for the major information of the navigators, in order that if due to the winds or due to any other chance they reach another place than they thought; but in part so that they can show the indigenous people that they too have some information about their nation, which should be quite pleasing. But in order that they not establish themselves in the islands except the merchants. Then be assured: there is such abundance of navigators with merchandise, that in the rest of the whole world there are not as many as in one

famous port called "Zaiton." For they assure that one hundred large ships of pepper reach this port every year, without counting the other ships that transport other spices. That nation is very populous, very rich due to the multitude of its provinces and kingdoms and cities without number at the orders of a single prince who is called "Gran Kan" a name which in our language means "king of kings," whose seat and residence is, at most of the times, in the province of Katay [sic]. His ancestors wanted [an] alliance with the Christians; 200 years ago they sent an embassy to the Pope and asked him for many wise men in order to receive instruction in the faith. But those that were sent to him, blocked in their voyage, returned. Besides in the times of (Pope) Eugene [1431-47] one came to Eugene who spoke of the great sympathies towards the Christians. I also had with him a long talk about many things, about the size of its palaces, the size of its rivers of a width and startling length, and about the great number of its cities on the banks of the rivers, in such a way that on one single river there are 200 cities and bridges of marble of great width and length, adorned on all sides by columns. This nation deserves that the Latins go to search for it, not only because they can obtain from it great profits in gold, silver, gems of all kinds and spices that have never reached us, but because of the learned men, philosophers, and expert astronomers and those who with talent and art should govern so powerful and extraordinary a province and who conclude the wars. I put these things here in satisfaction of your request, to the extent that the shortage of time permitted and my occupations allowed, disposed in the future to satisfy farther, as much as wanted, to your Majesty the King. Dated in Florence. 25 June. 1474.

From the city of Lisbon by the west in direct line there are 26 spaces shown on the map, each one of which has 250 miles until the very notable and big city of Quinsay; inasmuch as it has a perimeter of one hun-

dred miles and has ten bridges and its name means "Cità del cielo," City of the Sky; and many marvels are told about her, about the multitude of artisans and moneys. This space is almost the third part of all of the sphere. This city is in the province of Mango, this is in the vicinity of Katay, seat of the royal palace of the territory. But from the Island of Antilla, that you know of, to the most famous island of Çipango there are ten spaces; then that island is very rich in gold, pearls and gems, and they cover their temples and palaces with solid gold, in such a manner that by unknown roads not very large sea distances must be crossed. Maybe many things should be explained with more clarity, but an interested and thoughtful man, based on these, could on his own understand the rest. Good-by, most affectionately.<sup>19</sup>

The letter is dated 25 June 1474 in all three of the known copies—those of Columbus, Hernando, and Las Casas. It should be noted that the final paragraph which follows the date in the Latin letter appears instead before the date in the Hernandine and Lascasian versions. It is in this paragraph that the only specific geographic information is given, information that would have been commonplace for a man of Toscanelli's prestige. There is no way of determining the significance of the fact that the first two paragraphs are not separated by a space whereas the final paragraph in the Latin version is separated from the preceding one by what appear to be the equivalent of four or five spaces. This placement of the date provides an excellent clue for determining the source used for their transcripts of the letter by most modern authors—invariably they use the letter supplied by Las Casas rather than the copy made by Columbus. By inference this means that those who do accept the Spanish version as a true copy must accept the Columbus holograph as an inexact copy. It may be that those authors do so not by reason of contemplated selection but rather due to careless disregard for the primary source.

The Latin text states that the purpose for the letter is to show a way "to the land of the aromatics, more short than the one that you

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Pius II, *Descripción de Asia*, postil #854, p. 261.

take by Guinea."<sup>20</sup> At that time the word Guinea represented the West African coast. The first crossing of the equator by the Portuguese was in 1473, but this was still a long way from the Cape of Good Hope—the way to the land of the spices—which was only finally rounded by Bartholomeu Dias in 1488. By the time that Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) died, Portuguese explorers had sailed down the west coast of Africa as far as the Cape Verde islands. As John Noble Wilford states, "It is still not certain whether Prince Henry consciously sought to reach India and Cathay by circumnavigating Africa."<sup>21</sup> In the absence of evidence to the contrary it is to be assumed that Prince Henry did not.

King Alfonso V (1432-81) made a purely commercial arrangement with Fernão Gomes for the latter to discover one hundred miles a year for five years down the African coast; his compensation was to be a monopoly on the Guinea trade. According to Jerry H. Bentley, "The slave trade developed with amazing rapidity: according to the Venetian mariner Cadamosto, by the mid-fifteenth century the Portuguese shipped one thousand slaves per year from their fort at Arguim in Guinea."<sup>22</sup> When Gomes' contract expired, he had discovered as far down as the equator, and by 1481 the trading rights had reverted to the new king, João II (1455-95).

Based on the record of Portugal's explorations, a highly secretive one at the time, the only conclusions that can be drawn about the crown's motivations for sailing down the African Coast were exploration and profit from trade in gold and slaves. There is no evidence in the historical record that what they were actually seeking was a way to the "land of the spices." In 1487 João II did send Dias to see if the African continent could be rounded at its southernmost end. If this could be done, it would logically follow that a sea route to the Far East would be possible. Yet that route was not opened until 1498 by Vasco da Gama.

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<sup>20</sup> The original wording is: "...ad loca aromatum per maritimam nauigationea quam sit ea quam facitis per guineam." Asensio y Toledo, *Cristóbal Colón*, 2:252.

<sup>21</sup> John Noble Wilford, *The Mapmakers: The Story of the Great Pioneers in Cartography from Antiquity to the Space Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 178.

The interest in finding a new route to "the land of the aromatics" would have been appropriate any time after 1453 when the Turks captured Constantinople, thereby partially interdicting the time-honored trade route from the Mediterranean to the East. But at that time it would not have involved the yet-to-be-discovered Guinea. It is incorrect to state that trade with the East ceased at this time. Instead the Venetian and Genoese trade with these areas was taken over by the Turks. As head of a Florentine firm dealing in spices, Toscanelli would have been particularly interested in any route to the so-called Spice Islands.

If the phrase "the route...that you take by Guinea" refers indeed to the route to the Far East, then this part of the letter could not have been written by Toscanelli unless he was aware of secret Portuguese intentions which are unknown even today. If they were indeed seeking the way in 1474, then why did they wait until 1487 to send Dias? Once Dias had rounded the Cape why did they wait eleven more years to send Da Gama? Obviously there was no urgency in finding the West African route to the Far East until 1498, twenty-four years after the Toscanelli letter. By that time it was generally accepted that Columbus, six years earlier, had already reached the fabled Indies by the transatlantic route. Even those who questioned whether he really had reached India agreed that he had shown a way there by sailing westwards.

The references to the letters from the Mongols' embassy to Rome requesting "instruction" in the faith clearly relate to the time of Kublai Khan (1215?-1294). They report that the friars sent in response to the Khan's request "blocked in their voyage, returned." Niccolò Polo, Marco's father, did say that on his return trip to Cathay he was accompanied by two preaching friars who, fearful of the hazards of the projected journey, deserted his party in Armenia.<sup>23</sup>

Toscanelli, a humanist of repute in his own day, would certainly have been familiar with the Polo work and presumably would have known that a Franciscan friar, John of Plano Carpino, did reach the khan's capital, Karakorum, in July 1246. This fact was recognized by the writer of the second Spanish letter when he wrote that he had information from "Magnificent men of great knowledge who have returned from those parts to this court in Rome, and from other

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<sup>23</sup> Marco Polo, *El Libro de Marco Polo*, ed. Juan Gil (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992), 13-14.

merchants who have dealt for much time in those parts, men of much authority."<sup>24</sup> This passage does not appear in the Latin Columbus holograph.

Plano de Carpino returned to Italy in 1247 with a letter from Kublai Khan threatening the Christians: "In our presence, they chose Cuyuc [sic] as Emperor, or Chan [sic].... The said Cuyuc Chan, together with all the princes, raised the standard to proceed against the Church of God and the Roman Empire, and against all Christian kingdoms."<sup>25</sup> This hardly suggests the wish expressed in the letter "to receive instruction in the [Catholic] faith." Toscanelli would presumably also have known of the well-publicized voyage of Franciscan friar William of Rubruck (Guillaume de Ruysbroek) to Karakorum over the years 1253-55.<sup>26</sup>

A Franciscan, John of Montecorvino, was sent to China in 1290 to serve as bishop of Khanbaliq (present-day Beijing), staying there until his death in 1328. He was followed in 1342 by another Franciscan, John of Marignolli. These Franciscans, together with Dominican friars (there were four similar Dominican missions between 1245-51), served Catholic communities in various cities including Khanbaliq and Quanzou (Marco Polo's and Toscanelli's Zaiton).<sup>27</sup> Friar Odoric of Pordenone left detailed descriptions of his travels from Constantinople to Khanbaliq "where he remained [from 1328] for three years, attached, it may be presumed, to one of the churches founded by Archbishop John of Montecorvino."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hernando Colón, *Historia del Almirante*, 8:64.

<sup>25</sup> Gérard Chaliand, ed., *The Art of War in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 470. For the full report see Willem Van Ruysbroeck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55, as Narrated by Himself with Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John Pian de Carpino*, ed. William Woodville Rockhill (1900; reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1967), 1-39.

<sup>26</sup> For further information consult *The Journey of William of Rubruck* (see note 25). See also Clements Markham, ed., *Book of Knowledge of all the Kingdoms, Lands and Lordships that are in the World, and the Arms and Devices of each Land and Lordship, or of the Kings and Lords who Possess Them* (London: Hakluyt Press, 1912); and Sir Henry Yule, ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, 4 vols. (1915; reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1967.)

<sup>27</sup> Bentley, *Old World Encounters*, 156. For Montecorvino's manuscript see Yule, *Cathay*, 3:45-59. For Marignolli's report see Yule, *Cathay*, 3:177-269.

<sup>28</sup> Yule, *Cathay*, 2:9-10.

Rabban Sauma, a Turkish Nestorian Christian, was sent to Rome in 1287 to seek an alliance reported by Bentley as "an alliance with the Christians that would help him [the Persian ilkhan] to conquer Jerusalem and crush Islam as a political force in the Middle East."<sup>29</sup> This is a far cry from the alliance claimed in the letter to have been requested by the Tartars of China. He left Europe in 1298. News of Rabban Sauma's mission was well known in Europe.

One must keep in mind that all of these early travelers left extensive reports of their journeys and their manuscripts were copied and widely distributed throughout Europe before the days of printing. It must be noted that most of these friars mentioned encountering traders from Genoa and Venice throughout India and China.

Toscanelli wrote in the above-cited letter: "Besides in the times of (Pope) Eugene [1431-47] one came to Eugene who spoke of the great sympathies towards the Christians. I also had with him a long talk about many things." This is a reference to a voyage made by Niccolò de' Conti, who on his return from the Far East in 1444 did seek absolution for apostasy from Pope Eugene IV. The Pope's secretary, Poggio Bracciolini, wrote down Conti's account of his twenty-five year sojourn in the Far East.<sup>30</sup> That Toscanelli could have met with Conti is not unlikely.

Toscanelli must certainly have known from the reports of those travelers and missionaries who left China in mid-fourteenth century that the Mongols and their khan had by his time been driven out of that part of Asia.<sup>31</sup> It is simply not credible that Toscanelli would have been unaware of all of this information relating to conditions in China together with the poor evangelization and commercial prospects for Europeans in those former lands of the "Gran Can."

Another anomalous matter concerns a letter reported by John Boyd Thacher. Inasmuch as this letter is not referred to in modern works dealing with this matter, it is perhaps worthwhile reproducing the gist of it here:

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<sup>29</sup> Bentley, *Old World Encounters*, 157.

<sup>30</sup> John Frampton, *The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo together with the Travels of Niccolò de' Conti* (London: The Argonaut Press, 1929), 126-36.

<sup>31</sup> Bentley, *Old World Encounters*, 155-58.

Not only à propos of Toscanelli's study of geography, but as completely disposing of the charges made by Mr. Vignaud to the effect that Toscanelli was unknown to the Portuguese, the following note or postilla [sic], published by Signor Uzielli in 1898, is here given. It was among the manuscript papers of Francesco Castellani, a contemporary of Toscanelli.

In 1459 I record that on...July I loaned to Andrea Bochacino, for Master Paolo of the family of Domenico da Pozo Toscanelli, my great historical mappemonde complete in every way.... And he was to restore it to me, except it was agreed that he should have it for several days and show it to certain ambassadors of the King of Portugal: and so the said Andrea and the said Paolo promised to restore it to me.

Received from Master Ludovico, nephew of the said Master Paolo, February 2, 1484, the said mappemonde, somewhat damaged and worn by handling.<sup>32</sup>

If the map referred to in this extract is related to the one mentioned in the famous letter, there is a wide discrepancy in years; the Castellani memorandum is dated 1459, the map's return, two years after the death of Master Paolo in 1482. The first Toscanelli letter is dated 1474. No map accompanies any of its three known copies, although one is referred to as enclosed with the letters. João II did not become king until 1481 and therefore it is conceivable that he could have been unaware of both the letter and map(s) that were supposedly sent to his predecessor. It seems somewhat strange that Castellani reported the loan of a map in 1459 "for several days" while receipt for its return was acknowledged twenty-five years later. It does seem an interesting coincidence at least that this particular map was returned in 1484, the same year that Dulmo was first authorized by João II to attempt an

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<sup>32</sup> John Boyd Thacher, *Christopher Columbus: His Life, His Works, His Remains as Revealed by Original Printed and Manuscript Records, Together with an Essay on Peter Martyr of Anghera and Bartolomé de las Casas, the First Historians of America* (New York: G.P. Putnam's and Sons, 1903), 1:354.

Atlantic crossing, and that Columbus is claimed by some to have left Portugal to seek support for his venture in Spain.

The cosmographic concepts expounded in the Toscanelli letter are closely related to the size of the earth. It was believed that if one knew the extent of the Euro-Asian land mass, one could accordingly deduce that of the then-known ocean. The estimated size of what was known at the time as the Ocean Sea was basic to Columbus' plan—the shorter the distance the more feasible his Great Enterprise.

The matter of the size of the circumference of the earth has preoccupied mankind from almost the beginning of recorded history. There was a great unknown, first outside the Mediterranean and later beyond Europe. From an early date it was determined that the space between Western Europe and the Orient was approximately equal to one-third of the globe. Knowing this size made it possible to estimate the miles separating the two, thereby determining for Columbus' time the feasibility of crossing the intervening ocean.

Eratosthenes (c.276-196 B.C.) provided the first scientifically demonstrated measurement of the earth's surface.<sup>33</sup> He knew that at the time of the summer solstice the sun is directly overhead at noon in the Egyptian town of Seyne. This was based on the knowledge that there was a well in the town, in which every year at the time of the solstice the sun shone perpendicularly down to the bottom of the well. He believed that Seyne, being due south of Alexandria, was on the same meridian (this involved a slight error) and that furthermore, it was distant by a fifty-day camel journey from Alexandria. As camels were estimated to travel one hundred stadia per day, the two cities were presumably five thousand stadia apart; he now knew the length of the arc of the meridian between these two points. At the summer solstice, when the sun would be at its maximum height over Alexandria, he measured the shadow that a perpendicular shaft of known height cast on the line of the meridian. This gave him the two sides of a triangle. With this knowledge he could measure the angle of the third side in relation to the sun. It measured about seven degrees, twelve minutes, or about one-fiftieth of a 360 degree circle. To his mind, this figure placed the distance between Seyne and Alexandria at one-fiftieth of the

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<sup>33</sup> Cleomedes, a second-century Greek astronomer first published in printed form in Paris in 1539, preserved Eratosthenes' method for measuring the circumference of the earth.

earth's surface, from which figure he calculated the circumference of the earth as 250,000 stadia.

The commonly used rate of eight stadia to a mile gave him a figure of 22,500 miles for the earth's circumference. The actual distance is approximately 24,000 miles. Alfragan, a highly-regarded medieval Arabian geographer often quoted by Columbus, reached the conclusion that the true figure was closer to 20,400. Thus a figure of roughly one-third of 22,500 would mean that the Orient was distant from Portugal by about 7,500 miles according to Eratosthenes' estimate, 6,800 miles by Alfragan's calculation, and 6,500 according to Toscanelli.

The Toscanelli letter states that the width of the ocean "is almost the third part of all of the sphere," i.e., around 120 degrees. Based on the distance of 6,500 miles between Lisbon and the Orient given in the letter, the writer estimated the circumference of the globe as 19,500 miles, a distance shorter than the estimates of the authorities consulted by Columbus. This has raised a certain amount of controversy because it is believed that Toscanelli was too well informed to have used this measurement based in part on Marinus of Tyre's extension of Asia to the meridian of 225 degrees (i.e., 135 degrees for the width of the ocean),<sup>34</sup> an exaggeration first copied and later corrected by Ptolemy, who adjusted the figure to 180 degrees.<sup>35</sup> In his *Ymago mundi* Pierre d'Ailly first repeated Ptolemy's original acceptance of the

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<sup>34</sup> "Toscanelli se résume dans l'idée erronée d'une réduction à 130 degrés de l'espace s'entendant à l'ouest du vieux monde, avec une extension corrélative de l'Asie vers l'est, et que cette idée venait des auteurs grecs anciens, notamment Marin de Tyr, qui lui donna une forme systématique en avançant les limites orientales de l'Asie jusqu'au 225 degrés méridien...cette vieille erreur n'avait jamais obtenu créance au moyen âge; qu'elle ne fut connue qu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle par la publication de la géographie de Ptolémée, qu'il avait rectifiée, en partie, en ramenant la mesure du monde à 180 degrés." Henri Vignaud, *Histoire critique de la Grande Entreprise de Christophe Colomb comment il aurait conçu et formé son projet sa présentation a différentes cours son acceptation finale sa mise a exécution—son véritable caractère* (Paris: H. Welter, 1911), 1:280.

<sup>35</sup> "Ptolomeo, quien en el capítulo duodécimo de su primer libro sobre *Cosmografía* enmendó lo dicho por Marino sobre la longitud de nuestra tierra habitable y mostró que la longitud de la misma no se extiende más allá de 180 grados." Pierre d'Ailly, *Ymago mundi y otros opúsculos*, ed. Antonio Ramírez de Verger (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992), 161.

Marinus estimate, but one of Ptolemy's later tracts, published by D'Ailly over the years 1410-14, included his correction.<sup>36</sup>

The copy of the so-called *Ymago mundi* used by the Columbus brothers was published sometime between 1480 and 1487 and included all of the tracts together with one by Jean Gerson. Columbus selected from D'Ailly the figures that indicated the shortest passage to India, those provided by Marinus of Tyre, who was supported by Seneca, rather than Ptolemy's larger estimate. As Columbus noted, "the cardinal [D'Ailly] gives to these great authority, more than to Ptolemy and other Greeks and Arabs."<sup>37</sup> Thus, at some point Columbus purposefully gave preference to Marinus over Ptolemy as his authority on this all-important point. It fitted better with his claim that the distance was not too great for his plan to succeed. At no point did he ever acknowledge the Latin version's even shorter projection. It was of equal importance to Columbus to know what land he would find by sailing to the west.

Another problem is to be found in the sentence in the Toscanelli letter that reads "But from the Island of Antilla, that you know of, to the most famous island of Çipango there are ten spaces" (i.e., 2,500 miles). To begin with, the Island of Antilla appears first in Greek mythology. Thus any mariner would be expected to have known of it but not its location. Antilla, which means "island opposite" Portugal, appears on all early maps, both pre- and post-Discovery.<sup>38</sup> It was shown as southwest of the Azores and northeast of Çipango (Japan),

<sup>36</sup> D'Ailly, *Ymago mundi*, postil #23b, p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> The original wording is: "Plinio escribe...El Maestro [Peter Comestor]...dize que las aguas son muy pocas... El Aristotel dize que este mundo es pequeño y es el agua muy poca y que fácilmente se puede pasar de España a las Indias, y esto confirma el Avenrouz [Averröes] y le alega el Cardenal Pedro de Aliaco [d'Ailly] autorizando este decir y aquel de Séneca, el cual conforma con éstos diciendo que Aristóteles pudo saber muchos secretos del mundo a causa de Alexandre Magno, y Séneca a causa de Cesar Nero y Plinio por respecto de los romanos. El cual Cardenal da a éstos autoridad más que a Ptolomeo ni a otros griegos ni árabes, y a confirmación de decir que el agua sea poca, al respecto de lo que se decía por autoridad de Ptolomeo y de sus secuaces; a este trae una autoridad de Esdras...adonde dice que de siete partes del mundo las seis son descubiertas y la una cubierta de agua. La cual autoridad es aprobada por santos...así como es San Agustín e San Ambrosio." Cristóbal Colón, *Descubrimiento del Continente Americano: relación del tercer viaje por Don Cristóbal Colón*, facsimile edition, ed. Carlos Sanz (Madrid: Gráficas Yagüe, 1962), f8, unnumbered p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Wilford, *The Mapmakers*, 61.

and on the Behaim globe as approximately half-way between the Canary Islands and Çipango. It was placed at 28°N whereas Çipango was shown lying across the Tropic of Cancer at 24°N. Columbus equated Hispaniola with Çipango in his *Diario*. The Latin letter states clearly that the distance between Antilla and Çipango is 2,500 miles. The distance between Antilla and the African mainland is approximately the same while the distance between Lisbon and the Canary Islands is half of that, approximately 1,250 miles.<sup>39</sup> These figures are all approximations but correspond to the locations on the early maps. On this basis the transoceanic voyage for Columbus—Canary Islands to Antilla to Çipango—would be 3,700 miles. This is roughly the figure that he provided in his *Diario*.

When Columbus had sailed 1,284 miles, the Las Casas paraphrase of his journal entry for 25 September 1492 reported: "Very soon He will give us land. On that morning he says that he saw a white bird that is called rabo de Junco which is not accustomed to sleep at sea."<sup>40</sup> He and the crews continued to find signs of nearby land. When they had sailed 1,800 miles he and Martin Alonso, based on a chart that the admiral had with him, decided that they were in the vicinity of land, the latter even claiming to have seen it.<sup>41</sup> This shows that Columbus expected to find land before Çipango, presumably Antilla. It will probably remain unknown whether he based this estimate on the chart he had with him, the mapamundi that he says he saw before setting off on his voyage, the Toscanelli letter, or even on Behaim, maker of the famous globe.

Çipango had been generally known of through Marco Polo and mapamundi. In antiquity it was known as Taprobana. It was also believed that Çipango was closer to Europe than Cathay in the Indies. Columbus set off to cross the ocean from the Canary Islands, the Fortunate Islands of antiquity. These were to the south of Lisbon and extended, on the old charts, over a thousand miles to the west of Lisbon, the point from which Toscanelli measured. Surely Toscanelli

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<sup>39</sup> Wilford, *The Mapmakers*, 32-33. See the Ocean Section of Martin Behaim's globe of 1492.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492-1493*, ed. and trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), f4v:3-6, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Columbus, *The Diario*, f5v:19-40, p. 40.

was too well informed to not know that the whereabouts of Antilla—if it ever existed—was a mystery then as it is today, whereas the Canary Islands, the westernmost known land, had already been discovered in 1402 by a Frenchman, Béthancourt. In 1479 they were recognized in the Treaty of Alcácovas as being under the jurisdiction of Spain, although they were not totally conquered until 1496.

Ten days after his first landfall on Guanahaní in the Bahamas, Columbus mentioned "Çipango" twice in the *Diario*, anticipating that Cuba might be it.<sup>42</sup> This makes it evident that his intent was to sail a course to Çipango.

In Columbus' log for his first voyage he counted approximately four thousand miles between his point of departure in the Canaries and his first landfall in the Bahamas. The smaller figure that he supposedly gave to his crew members was 3,400 miles. His son Hernando claimed that the distance that he had expected to have to travel to find land was 2,800 miles.

On his second voyage, Columbus did say that he would find land eight hundred leagues, or 3,200 miles, from the Canary Islands, which is the nearly correct distance to Trinidad, the first land that he encountered on this journey. As he was sailing a completely different course than the one that he had taken on the first voyage, this estimate has indicated to some that he had prior knowledge of the route. He could not have gleaned this information from the Toscanelli letter because these names are not mentioned in it; however, it is not impossible that they were included in the missing map that accompanied the letter.

Whether these letters are apocryphal or not, the fact cannot be ignored that Columbus, his son Hernando, and Las Casas knew of their contents in one form or another. Regardless of whoever made the copy reported by Henry Harrisse in the *Historia rerum*, at least one item found only in this letter was repeated in a letter that has been identified as having been written by Columbus' brother Bartolomé while he was in Rome in 1506. This letter is known through a manuscript appended to a copy of the *Paesi nouamente ritrovati* published in 1507 by its compiler, Fracancio Montalboddo. While not alluding directly to Toscanelli, Bartolomé did trace a map on the back of this letter which identifies Veragua (on the coast of today's Nicaragua) as the Catigara

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<sup>42</sup> Columbus, *The Diario*, ff. 16v9, p. 108 and 17r38, p. 112.

of Ptolemy and Española as Cipangu. Furthermore, the grid on the map is divided into spaces of ten degrees rather than the customary fifteen (representing one hour of latitude), and there are thirteen such spaces shown between Lisbon and Catigara, providing for the approximately 130 degrees used by Marinus of Tyre for the distance to Asia.<sup>43</sup> This unusual form of dividing the degrees is also provided in the Toscanelli letter, a fact which could indicate that Bartolomé Colón was aware of its content. This has offered support for those who believe that it was Bartolomé who wrote the Toscanelli letters. On the second sheet of Bartolomé's letter are shown both the 225 land degrees as given by Marinus of Tyre and the 180 ocean degrees ascribed by Ptolemy. Thus, if this map is correctly attributed to Bartolomé, he was not only aware of these different estimates but even long after the discovery still held to the shorter measurement.

It is curious that many historians, while evaluating the authenticity of the Toscanelli letter, have ignored the obvious fact that it specifically states that it was meant for the personal information of the then-king of Portugal, Alfonso V. It would presumably have been available to his successor, João II, but was never acted on by either of them. The crown and its officers would have been fully aware of Toscanelli's estimate of the width of the Atlantic, as well as of the proximity to the west of the Indies which the Portuguese were supposedly seeking by the southern route. Had João II accepted the Toscanelli premise as a valid one, he could have sent Dulmo on his 1487 expedition (originally scheduled to sail in 1484 and specified to last forty days) based on the Toscanelli letter rather than, as alleged in the *Histoire*, in an attempt to steal Columbus' ideas.

Over the years historians have been interested in the fact that, as revealed in Columbus' log for his first voyage, he was familiar with

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<sup>43</sup> Vignaud, *Histoire*, 1:103-04. In the same text, see also: "Beragua et Puerto de Retrete (Nombre de Dios), dans le voisinage de la Cattigara de Ptolémée. Vers le centre le groupe des Antilles, où Española tient la place de Cipangu. Cette feuille est divisée en espaces de 10 degrés chacun, et il y en a 13 entre le méridien de Lisbonne et celui de Cattigara, soit 130 degrés.... La seconde feuille...D'Après Marin et Colomb il y a du cap Saint-Vincent à Cattigara 225 degrés ou quinze heures. D'après Ptolémée il y a jusqu'à Cattigara 180 degrés ou douze heures. On sait que cette carte est de Barthélemy, parce qu'il alla à Rome en 1506...il y vit un religieux de l'ordre de Saint-Jean de Latran auquel il laissa une description et une carte de Veragua...qui paraît d'ailleurs avoir fait une autre carte de Veragua mentionnée par Oviedo," 2:467.

some of the names used in the literature of his and earlier times for cities and provinces in the lands of Kublai Khan. Attempts have been made to link his use of these names to particular sources. Fernández de Navarrete was the first to point out that the references to Quinsay in the Spanish version of the Latin letter were copied verbatim from chapter 98 of Marco Polo's book. In the Latin version the "magnus kan," "katay," "mangi," "quinsay," "zaiton," "antilia," and "cippangu" are named.<sup>44</sup> However, in the Spanish letter there are three more—Ireland, India, and the Island of Seven Cities. Yet while all of the toponyms for the Far East given by Columbus in his logs do appear in D'Ailly's tracts, not all of them appear in either the Toscanelli letters or the Marco Polo book. Therefore, Columbus' use of these toponyms cannot be offered as proof that he derived them from his reading of either of these claimed primary sources. If his use of these names was single-sourced, that source could only be in the *Ymago mundi*.

If, as the evidence would seem to indicate, at least some parts of the known versions of the letter were written by someone other than Toscanelli, then the question is who? The earliest known version is the one written in the hand of Columbus (although some claim Bartolomé), which presupposes that there was an authentic letter to Martins.<sup>45</sup> Such being the case would mean that either the copy Columbus worked from was already falsified or else the insertions in the Spanish letter were made by him or his brother. This would mean that, for reasons of their own, one of them wanted to have a letter more in accord with Columbus' own concepts than were those in the original letter.

These propositions in turn raise important questions. First of all, what explanation can be given for the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century biographers and historians in the United States appear to be in total ignorance of the existence of a holograph copy made by Columbus of this famous letter? Instead, they inexplicably and

<sup>44</sup> Asensio y Toledo, *Cristóbal Colón*, 2:250-51.

<sup>45</sup> Asensio y Toledo, *Cristóbal Colón*, 1:232. Asensio y Toledo believed that this copy of the letter was made by Bartolomé Colón, although he thought that this copy of the *Historia rerum* belonged to Columbus. It should be noted that Hernando's registry does not show the customary provenance for this work, but the Hernandine library registry number, #3123, does follow entry #3122 for Bartolomé's copy of Pierre d'Ailly's *Ymago mundi*.

unanimously quote only from the Spanish letter, one that scholars who have studied the letter believe to be spurious. Also, why have these modern historians and biographers completely ignored the readily apparent anomalies in the letter? Silent emendation? The problem lies not so much in acceptance of the authenticity of the basic letter as in not justifying that belief in the face of the many contradictory opinions testifying to its falsity.

Columbus' plan of discovery was probably conceived while living in Portugal, but whether these plans were based on a letter and map supplied by Toscanelli is open to debate. There is no confirmation of its existence made by either Columbus, his brother Bartolomé, or any contemporary work. The copies offered by Hernando and Las Casas are of a different letter than the one copied in the hand of Columbus, and became known over half a century after the discovery. The Latin letter did not become known until late in the nineteenth century. The only possible means for determining its authenticity is by textual analysis of the letter itself. As has been demonstrated, the letter contains obvious conceptual errors that seem to be incompatible with any work by this renowned humanist. It contains no cosmographic theory, toponym, or other data that cannot also be found in other sources available to Columbus, sources that, unlike this one, he did repeatedly acknowledge.

In the final analysis, an obscure letter supposedly written by Toscanelli, one of the recognized humanists of his times, in which appear internal contradictions in information readily available to Toscanelli and written in a Latin far below his cultural level cannot, without great difficulty, be accepted as a true copy of one of his letters. The fact that much of the information presented in it conforms with Columbus' known cosmographic concepts and historical beliefs in no way vouches for its authenticity. In short, it is not possible to state conclusively that this letter, even if authentic in whole or in part, influenced Columbus in any way whatsoever.