

GIOVANNA GUADAGNI AND THE DISCOVERY OF NORTH AMERICA

Christopher Columbus discovered the “New World” in 1492. Amerigo Vespucci, Florentine, wrote extensively about the “New World” so they called it the “land of Amerigo”, which eventually became “Ameriga” and then “America”. Giovanna Guadagni, daughter of Simone, and granddaughter of the Vieri Guadagni who dealt with the three popes, married Alessandro da Verrazzano in 1480 and gave birth to a son, named Giovanni after her, in 1485. Giovanni da Verrazzano (1485-1528), the Guadagni offshoot, was the first European, since the Viking expeditions to North America in the year 1000, to explore the Atlantic coast of North America between the Carolinas and Newfoundland, including New York Harbor and Narragansett Bay in 1524, a century before the Pilgrims arrived with the Mayflower.

The bridge over the opening of New York harbor, a naval vessel of the Italian navy, and a destroyer of the Navigatori class, are among the numerous things named after him.

In 1523, after the Spanish and the Portuguese had occupied most of South and Central America, King Francis I of France asked Giovanni da Verrazzano to explore the area between Florida and Terranova for France and try and find a sea route to the Pacific Ocean. However the King did not have enough money to finance the expedition, so the Guadagni financed it.

Within months, four ships, under Giovanni’s command, set sail for the Great Banks region, but a violent storm and rough seas caused the loss of two of them. The remaining two damaged ships, La Dauphine and La Normande, were forced to return to Brittany.

Repairs were completed in the final weeks of 1523, and they set sail again. This time the ships headed south toward calmer waters although they were under dangerous Spanish and Portuguese control. Complications forced La Normande back to home port, but Verrazzano’s ship, La Dauphine, on January 17, 1524, headed once more for the North American continent. It neared the area of Cape Fear on about March 1. After a short stay, they reached modern North Carolina and the Pamlico Sound lagoon.

Continuing to explore the coast further northwards, Giovanni and his crew came into contact with Native Americans living on the coast. Giovanni wrote interesting reports on them and on his land discoveries to the King of France. They are the first reports ever written by a European or anybody on the United States and Canadian Atlantic Coast. They are in ancient Italian, I will translate them and put them in the Guadagni website in the near future.

Eventually, Giovanni discovered New York Bay, sailed along Long Island and entered Narragansett Bay, where he received a delegation of Wampanoag Indians. He stayed there two weeks, and then moved northwards. He gave Italian or French names to the new sites he discovered. He named the coast near New York “Norman Villa”, New York was “Angouleme” and Newport “Refugio”. The New Jersey Coast he named “Longa Villa”. These were the first European Names ever given to North American sites.

He followed the coast up to northern Maine, southeastern Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Then he returned to France on July 8, 1524. He called the whole North Atlantic Region he explored "Francesca" in honor of Francis I King of France (in Italian "Francesco").

Verrazzano arranged a second voyage in spring 1527 and reached the coast of Brazil, where he harvested a cargo of brazilwood before returning to Dieppe, France in September. This partial success, although it did not find the desired passage to the Pacific Ocean, inspired Giovanni's final voyage which departed Dieppe in the spring of 1528.

In 1528, while exploring Florida, the Bahamas, and the Lesser Antilles, Giovanni anchored away from shore. He rowed ashore in a little boat to greet the natives. He soon found out that they were not pleasant natives that wanted to trade. They were cannibals. They killed Giovanni da Verrazzano and ate him immediately. His brother was in the main boat that was anchored away from shore. He witnessed this, but could not do anything about it, for he was too far out for gunshots, and could not make it to shore on time. Giovanni da Verrazzano died at the age of 43.

It is interesting to know that North America was originally called "Francesca" and that it was first discovered by Giovanni da Verrazzano's son, Giovanni da Verrazzano, whose expedition was financed by the Guadagni Family. Giovanni's brother, Tommaso Guadagni, was at the time the richest banker in Europe.

Notes

A few of the many authors that wrote about it:

1. Morison, Samuel Eliot (1971) *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages* (New York: Oxford University Press.) Chapter IX: "The voyages of Verrazzano, 1524-1528".
2. Shaw, Edward Richard (1900). *Discoverers and Explorers*. American Book Company.
3. Giovanni da Verrazzano. *Embassy of France in Washington, D.C.*
4. Habert, Jacques (1964) *La vie et les voyages de Jean de Verrazane* (The life and the voyages of Giovanni da Verrazano) Montreal and Ottawa: Cercle du livre de France.
5. Boucher, Alain (2006) *Jean de Verrazane: un Lyonnais decouvre le site de New York* (Giovanni da Verrazzano, an explorer from Lyon discovers the site of New York) Lyon: University Claude Bernard Lyon.
6. Thrower, Norman (2003) "Verrazzano, Giovanni Da", in Speake, Jennifer *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, New York, London: Fitzroy, Dearborn.