

1. KT + Zitat Schedel
2. KT Thorne

**Frank Kämpfer,  
Die Nordmeer-Route nach China.  
Sigismund von Herbersteins Informationen über Nord-Sibirien  
Und die Entdeckung der Nordkap-Route durch Richard Chancellor 1553**

An der Schwelle der Neuzeit wird die grundlegende geographischen Orientierung in Europa geändert. Seit das mittelalterliche Bild der Welt als Scheibe als überholt behandelt wird, haben Cosmographen, Fernfahrer und sogar Herrscher, wie der Infant von Portugal, Heinrich der Seefahrer (+1460) sich zur antiken Geographie zurückgewandt, die in der Lehre von Claudius Ptolemaios (+ um 180 n. Chr.) zusammengefaßt vorlag. Sicher, unter den Fachleuten gab es moderne Auffassungen, doch in allgemeinen Werken, wie in dem **"Buch der Cronicken und geschichten mit figuren und pildnissen von anbeginn der welt bis auf diese unsere zeit"**, erschienen 1493 in Nürnberg auf lateinisch und deutsch, zog der verantwortliche Herausgeber, Hartmann Schedel, vorsichtige Formulierungen vor. Zu seiner Weltkarte heißt es, "Die werlt wirdt darumb ein umbkrais genant daz sie simbel rotund gescheybelt oder kugelt ist." Schon ein Jahr zuvor, also während der abschließenden Arbeiten am **"Buch der Cronicken"**, hatte der Nürnberger Michel Behaim, der seit 1485 in Portugal gelebt hatte, seinen "Erdapfel", also den ersten Globus der Welt, fertigstellen lassen. Ebenfalls 1492 hat Cristobal Colon seine Reise zur Entdeckung (West-) Indiens angetreten.

In **1498** the portuguese admiral **Vasco da Gama** discovered India (Calicut) and **1513** Portuguese ships anchored in Macao and **Kanton**. In these years it was **PORTUGAL**, where the most precise informations were available about the world beyond the normal euro-centric world-view.

Here every new information was collected and recorded in books and maps. Under the authority and the arbitration of the Roman Pope Spain und Portugal divided the oceans of the Southern hemisphere:

in 1493/94 The **Treaty of Tordesillas** divides the Atlantic

in 1529 The **Treaty of Saragossa** divides the Pazifik ocean.

Monopolies of this kind disturbed the other sea-faring nations, not only the English. In a book 1525 published in Rome, we read about the anger caused by the aggressive occupation of the southern world.

The author refers to the opinion of a **Russian diplomat**

<i>Vehementer enim &amp; supra equum, Lusitanorum iniuriis erat accensus,</i>	[The Russian <b>Dmitrij Gerasimov</b> was very irritated about the injustice of the Portugalian
<i>qui India magna ex parte armis domita, occupatisque omnibus emporiis, cuncta aromata coemerent, &amp; in Hispaniam averterent,</i>	who conquered the most of India , occupied all trading ports, now confiscate all spices, and sent it away to Spain
<i>atque ea graviore quam antea precio ac impotenti quaestu omnibus Europae populis venditare consuevissent:</i>	(then they sell the spices for a price much more expensive than before)
<i>quin &amp; diligenti adeo cura Indici maris littora perpetuis classibus custodirent ...</i>	Besides that they guard the coast of India by uninterruptedly patrolling fleets

While Spain and Portugal concentrated their efforts on the southern part of the globe, the English began to explore the northern hemisphere; **their** Columbus was **Giovanni Caboto** of Genua, better known as John Cabot. Furnished with a Privilege of King Henry VII, Cabot set about in 1496 to search for the north-**western** passage to the Pacific.

In 1498 he reached Labrador, but then died on the voyage.

It seems very strange, that we have no information about attempts to explore the north-**eastern** part of the Atlantic, because the Viking Ottar had already chosen this way in the ninth century.

His report on the voyage to the White Sea and the plundering of Biarmia - Eastern Karelia - was fixed under King Alfred the Great.

Six hundred years later we get the next information on the eastern part of the Arctic Ocean: In the scripts of the Italian **Mauro Urbino**, written down in 1494, we read about a large island in the northern ocean, ten times greater than Crete, with Slavic inhabitants. Two years later there is a letter of a German scientist,

**Doctor Hieronymus Münzer**, to the King of Portugal, where he mentions the possibility to reach China via the north-eastern passage.

He had new information on the far north of the continent.

There the Russians, "only a few years since, found [under the star of the Arctic pole]

the great island of [Grulanda] three hundred leagues long, which - with a numerous population - is under the sway of the said Duke [of Russia]".

The name "**Grulanda**" designates - as our American colleague **Samuel Baron** has found out - the island of **Novaja zemlja**.

The huge island Novaja zemlja, which really is ten times larger than Crete, is the prolongation of the Ural mountains and so divides Europe and Asia.

As can be seen, scientists in Europe collected every piece of information

about the scarcely known northern world. They were excited about the new horizons opened by the new conviction that the earth really is a globe - and not a disc.

When John Cabot - in search for the American passage in 1497-98 reached Labrador, the hope to also discover a north-eastern-passage to the pacific, grew.

The precious goods of **China** seemed to be at hand.

The marvels of China were known in Europe since **Marco Polo** and the foundation of a christian Episcopy in Peking in **1308**.

But the only two ways to China were the transcontinental silk road through the asiatic deserts and the sea-route through the southern oceans.

For Marco Polo - looking from south China - the far north is the **land of darkness** -

nothing he says about a northern ocean, as it is mentioned by the cosmographs of antique times.

The new informations of Mauro Urbino and Hieronymus Münzer about the island **Novaja zemlja** told the geographs:

in the far north there is a great and inhabited **island** - not a **desert** - ergo: there **must** be **open water**, the northern ocean, therefore a possibility to sail to China, too.

Besides, we learn from two independent sources, that at this time, not later than the second half of the 15th century, the Russians had discovered Novaja zemlja and started settlements there - an interesting fact.

Later texts show, that - from about 1496 on - Russian ambassadors used the sea-route **starting** from the mouth of the river Dvina **crossing** the White sea, the Barents-Sea and **sailing** around Scandinavia to come to western Europe.

In 1525 one of them, the mentioned Dmitri Gerasimov, was interviewed in Rome by Paulus Jovius and he described this voyage.

Bishop Paulus Jovius, a learned author, published all this in his book,

**De legatione Basilii Magni principis Moscoviae ad Clementem**

**VII. Pontificem Maximum Liber.**

printed in Rome **1525, 1545 and 1551**.

Not only in Rome - **everywhere** in Europe cosmographs became interested in the new possibilities after the great success of Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

The first European attempt after the wiking-age to sail around Scandinavia is connected with an english merchant, **Mr. Robert Thorne**, who had lived in Portugalia for some years.

In 1527 Thorne sent a portuguese map to king Henry VIII. and suggested to look in the north-east for a way to China - in that time called **CATHAY**.

In fact, King Henry sent two ships "**for the discovery of the north parts**" -

but we do not know anything about the outcome of this adventure.

The Portuguese map of Robert Thorne shows once more, that north Eurasia was much less known than the southern oceans.

The first printed books on Russia do not provide better information than the maps either.

They show us that the north-east of Europe was a "*terra incognita*" - there was even no traditional **name** for the vast countries lying there.

The **first book** on Eastern Europe was printed in Poland, called TRACTATUS `Treatise on both Sarmatias, the Asiatic and the European, as well as on the inhabitants etc"<sup>1</sup>,

first published in 1517 by the Polish professor Mathias Mechovita in Krakow. The author writes about "**Regions of the Russians or Ruthenians, of the Lithuanians, of the Moskovians and their neighbours**", but Mechovita doesn't know MUCH about the **northern area**.

The humanist author speaks of the very vague antique name **SARMATIA** and doesn't know a **modern** name for his subject, although he lives in direct neighbourhood.

The first **west** European books on Muscovy were published in Rome and in Tuebingen, in 1525 and 1526 respectively;

they were actually interviews with Russian diplomats.

The Westerners even had to ask for the political names of the unknown people in the north-east:

Paulus Jovius explains:

**"The name of the Muscovites is an recent one"** (recens est).

The German author, Dr. Johann Fabri, rejects the antique names like

"Roxolanes" or "Hamaxobitae", and gives a new definition:

**"Muscovites we call them today"** (Moscovitas appellamus hodie).

Both authors are attesting the fact that Europe has recognised around the year 1525 that Moscovia, the empire in the north-east of the continent was a kingdom of a unique nature.

Especially the interview at Tuebingen, conducted by Doctor Fabri emphasised the particularly endangered

geopolitical position of Muscovy:

**`the position of Muscovites is surrounded by their enemies, by Turks, Tatars and - the Arctic sea - mare glaciale,."**

We learn from the interviews, that the Russians did on the one hand stress the military strength of their country, speaking of hundreds of thousands of armed Russian horsemen, on the other hand they emphasised its endangered position

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<sup>1</sup>Tractatus de duabus Sarmatijs, Asiana & Europiana & de continentis in eisA; S.A. Anninskij: Matvej Mechovskij, Traktat o dvuch Sarmatijach. Moskva 1936.

by the inhospitality of the climate and by the foes of Christianity.  
Both Russian diplomats, at Rome and at Tuebingen, spoke of the wild and barbarous tribes in the north-eastern icy shores of Russia,  
**"ad litus maris glacialis in sylvis habitans"**.

In 1525 for the first time speculations about the north-eastern sea-route around the eurasian continent to China were published.  
We find it in the interview with **Dmitrij Gerasimov**:

<p>"Satis tamen constat, <b>Dividnam</b> innumerabiles trahentes amnes, ingenti cursu ad Aquilonem deferri, <b>mareque ibi esse longe vastissimum,</b></p>	<p>It is quite sure: the <b>Dvina</b> brings her mighty water to the north, and the sea is very broad and wide</p>
<p><b>ita ut illinc ad Cathayum</b> legendo oram dextri littoris, <b>nisi terra intersit,</b> navibus perveniri posse, certissima coniectura <b>credendum sit.</b></p>	<p>so that <b>from here to China</b> - holding the shore on starbord - <b>if there is no land between</b> - it is possible to sail with ships -this is a very sure supposition to believe.</p>
<p>Pertinent enim Cathayni ad extremam Orientis plagam, ad Thraciae ferme parallelum, (...)  quo vel uno argumento, non longe ab Scythicis littoribus Cathayum urbem abesse putamus.</p>	<p>The China's extend until the shore of extreme Orient nearly parallel to Thracia ... - we think the <b>city of Cathay</b> will not be far away of the <b>shores of Scythia.</b></p>

Here we recognize a strange idea about the form and the extension of Eurasia  
a mistake going back to Ptolemäus.

Not before the middle of the 16th century the west Europeans could find  
more detailed and better information: There is **Sigismund von Herberstein's**  
famous book **Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii (Viennae 1549)**.  
Herberstein's diplomatic voyages to Russia had been in 1516 and in 1526 but on  
his book he has worked for more than 20 years, examining everywhere he had a  
chance to find new facts.  
Besides that he consulted specialists from Russia and Poland.  
Finally his "**Moscovia**" had developed into an all-round Manual on Russia and  
Eastern Europe.  
In Addition we can say that it was one of the first and maybe the best of all  
Chorographies of the 16th century.  
**Herb** even provides facts on the Russian conquest of the north-western part of  
Siberia, too.

In 1499 a Russian army had reached Siberia and subjugated the ural-altaic tribes living there.

During his voyage to Russia, HERB had had the chance to interview one of the commanders of this expedition.

On his map of Russia the inscription **"IVHRA inde vngarorum origo"** (**Jugra where the origin of the Hungarians is**) shows the far-reaching Russian interests in that region and even some political implications. In the text of his **book** this is explained in more detail: **"This is Jugaria, where the Hungarians came from to occupy Pannonia. Under prince ATTILA they devastated many provinces of Europe". "The Muscovites glorify themselves with this name, because their subjugates did in old times depopulate a good part of Europe"**

Was the Russian intention to justify territorial claims not only in Siberia but in Europe, also?

Twenty years before that, in **1491**, the Italian architect **Pietro Solari from Milano**

fastened a Latin inscription on the Spasskii Tower of the Moscow Kremlin. As one of the many components of the **geographical titulatura of the Russian monarch** had to be: **"...ONGARIAE ... DOMINUS"**.

This means that the Moscovite Gosudar had incorporated in his real or virtual sovereignty the north-western part of Siberia.

For the Latin Version of the Name **Jugaria** he chose the political term **`Ongaria`**.

It was very interesting for the British cosmographs to examine the new evidence about the land Siberia.

**Before** Herberstein, it seemed, there was no continental way through Eurasia. The land route through the Ural mountains seems to have been impermeable.

We don't know whether the information provided by **Francesco da Collo** spread in Europe or not:

When in 1518 this diplomat tried to find out whether there were high mountains in Muscovy or not, Grand Prince Vasiliij III gave him the opportunity to ask a man named Ugrino Bezarovich whose brother had climbed to the heights of **"le monte Iugorische"**. Obviously there were only very few people in Moscovia who had travelled to the summits of the Ural.

**Francesco da Collo** was searching for the mythical "Rhiplean mountains" in the centre of the Russian lands, but Russian told him about the **`zemnoj pojas`** or **`Montes dicti cingulus terrae`** the Ural mountains, very high and not passable **"the belt of the earth"**.

Herberstein was able to report on the Russian military expedition through the Ural mountains and to northern Siberia in 1499. And he brought some important news on the Trans-Uralian world to western Europe, even on the never heard northern route to China, combining the sailing over sea beyond of **NOVAJA ZEMLJA** and then upstream the river **Ob**.

The map of Russia, or rather Eurasia, included the most astonishing pictorial informations on Siberia, the map reaching even further to "*Cumbalick regia in Kytay*" and the "*Kitay lacus*".

(*Cumbalik* is the medieval name of Peking, in Europe first reported by Marco Polo.)

On the map, it can be seen that there is supposed to be a way up the river **Ob** (*Oby fluvius*) to Peking.

Looking at a modern map of Eurasia one would not suppose that there could be a travel route like the silk-road in the south. But Russians told the Austrian diplomat about **black people**, coming from China to the river **Ob**.

Ab hoc lacu [ <i>kitai</i> ] plurimi homines nigri, communis sermonis expertes, veniunt:	Von dem See [ <i>Khithay</i> ] khomen <b>Schwartzte leüt</b> / die der gemainn red mangln
merces varias, in primis autem uniones, lapides preciosos, secum adferentes,	verkhauffen manigerlay waarn / sonderlichen Perln und Edlgestain

Sy sagen auch das die **Juchri** noch auf heut wie die Hungern / die sprach haben / ich möchte aber khainn zu wegen bringen / damit mein Diener nuer etliche wort mit jme geredt / oder von jme verstanden hette / die sollen auch nuer gefüll zu Tribut geben / wiewol sy **auch Perl und Edlgestain in die Mosqua zuverkhauffen bringen / aber sy habens im Land nit / sonder uberkhumens von dem gestat des Moers / nit verr von dan da Dwina einfelt.**

That means, somebody in Russia must have stated that this route really worked. A confirmation of this remark we find in a letter to the cosmograph **Gerhard Mercator** from 1581:

the anonymous informer reported about a **seamen from Flandria** who had sailed on the White sea and further eastwards to Siberia.

He reported the opinion of this eyewitness, that the continental way to China via the river **Ob** could not be very difficult.

<p>"Denn die Landeseinwohner sagen, daß man, wenn man drey Tagereisen schiffet(...) längst auf diesem großen Fluß Oby</p>	<p>Because the inhabitants say, that you if you follow the river for three days upstream -</p>
<p>sehr viele mit kostbaren Waaren beladene Schiffe fände, die durch schwarze Menschen geführt würden..." (Adelung)</p>	<p>you shall find many ships loaded with precious goods, <i>led by black people</i></p>

No any doubt, Herbersteins "*plurimi homines nigri*" were northern Chinamen, **Manchu** or maybe **Burjats** from the area of lake Bajkal.

We have no reason to think, that a pale-skinned, fair-haired Russian would have described these people with black hair and dark skin as "**yellow**".

There is no doubt that only Chinese could have pearls and precious stones at their disposal to sell or to trade for siberian sables.

We have to learn that the Russians knew a kind of "northern silk-road" to China, long before the muscovite conquest of Siberia in the 17th century, which opened the road to China without the arduous detour via the Arctic sea and the river Ob'.

As I mentioned before, **Dmitri Gerasimov** had given a very vague answer to the question of Paulus Jovius, whether it is possible to sail to China on following the northern shore of Eurasia or not:

**"nisi terra intersit"**

At that time nobody knew the extension of land and ocean in the north - the same situation as we see it on the **Thorne** map.

The rapport of **Francesco Da Collo** to the Emperor was published only a century later, but the book of Sigismund von **Herberstein**, his **Commentarii**, was printed in **1549**.

His manual came exactly in time to help the english cosmographs to decide, if it would make sense to invest a lot of money in the quest for a northern route to China.

Now it looked rather good to reach to Cathay, whether via the ocean or the river Ob.

About the question - **did the english cosmographs know the book of HERBERSTEIN** or not a scientific discussion went on nearly to the present day.

**Professor Samuel Baron** has written a whole series of articles about the english-russian relations in the 16th century.

This question is connected to the **problem**, why Herberstein's european bestseller

has not been translated completely into english.



There are only fragments in a book of 1555 and then 1577 another selection in the second volume of Hakluyt's collection.

We could extend this question to other books of this genre, too: The **Tractatus of Mathias Mechovita**, a book causing a scientific revolution, was not translated into English, but had - only in the 16th century - 10 Latin editions, 3 German, 3 Polish, 8 Italian and one Dutch translations (>POE).

The same we find with the **COSMOGRAPHIA of Sebastian Münster**: there were 21 German editions, 5 Latin, 6 French and 5 Italian translations.

On the topic "**Hakluyt and the Reception of Herberstein in Great Britain**" **Professor Paul Dukes** from Aberdeen held a lecture at the Herberstein-Conference 1999 in Münster.

At the same conference **Professor Walter Leitsch** from Vienna gave a philological and historical analysis about the early English translation.

**Samuel Baron** quotes the Russian scholar **Hamel**, who wrote in 1847: *"Is it not worth considering whether Willoughby and Chancellor might not, prior to their expedition, have had some information or other about the White Sea, the Dvina, and generally the northeastern regions of Russia?"*

Hamel notes that **Sebastian Cabot** (1474–1557), the prominent navigator and explorer who is generally regarded as the guiding man of the expedition, had spent his youth in Venice, and that an Italian edition of Herberstein had appeared there in 1550. He implies that Herberstein's opus suggested the idea of a northeastern expedition, explaining: *"It is difficult to believe that Cabot did not order the book... from Venice."*

In 1952 the German **Professor Karl Heinz Ruffmann** stressed the importance of **John Dee (1527-1608)**, a brilliant student at Cambridge, who went to Louvain and Paris in 1547 to 1551 and, back in England, was engaged as the *"technical adviser to the Cathay voyages"*.

He prepared, for instance, the astronomical calculations and instruments for Captain Richard Chancellor.

During the time, John Dee has spent on the continent, **three editions of HERBERSTEIN had appeared**, 1549 at Vienna, 1551 at Basel and in Italian 1550 in Venice. It seems very likely that he had been acquainted with one of these editions.

**Professor Baron** explains the importance of another student of Cambridge, **Richard Eden**, a cosmographer too, who also was associated with the Cathay-project.

In 1553 he published a partly translation of *Sebastian Münsters "Cosmographia"*, in the dedication of which he refers to the recently launched Cathay expedition:

*"to speak somewhat of this voyage  
which our countrymen have attempted  
to sail into the East parts, by the coasts of Norway,  
Lappia, and Finnmarkia, and so by the narrow tract of the Sea by the coasts  
of Grueland [Novaja zemlja]  
into the frozen sea, called Mare Congelatum,  
and so forth to Cathay  
(if any such passage may be found)  
which only doubt does at this day  
discourage many faint hearted men,  
especially because in the most part  
of the Globes and Maps  
they see the continent or firm land,  
extended even to the North Pole  
without any such passage."(49)*

Two years later **Richard Eden** published a book, containing - beside others - the first fragments of **Jovius**, **Fabri** and **Herberstein** in english.

This book was analysed by **Walter Leitsch** in his Münster lecture of 1999. Leitsch points out, that Eden stresses the informations of Herberstein by highlighting the title of this part, placing a heading "**Moscovia and Cathay**" on every page and stressing the content by printing the name "**Cathay**" in **VERSALIA**:

*"The description of the regions, people, and ryvers,  
lying North and East from Moscovia:  
As the way from Moscovia to the ryver Petzora,  
and the province of Iugaria, or Iuhra:  
And from thense to the ryver Obi.  
Lykewyse the discription of other countreys and regions,  
even unto Th[e] empire of the greate Cham of Cathay."*

To sum up - Herberstein was the first traveller who brought back some important news about the Trans-Uralian world to western Europe, even the news of a northern continental route to China, which had never been heard of before.

The English cosmographs and merchants had collected all informations available and the Herberstein **map** was the most important of all.

In **1551** the English had founded a company of  
"MERCHANTS ADVENTURERS OF **ENGLAND**,  
FOR THE DISCOVERY OF LANDS, TERRITORIES,  
ILES, DOMINIONS, AND SEIGNIORIES UNKNOWN".

This company in **1555** was re-named to "**Muscovy Company**" after the discovery of the north-cap-route to Russia in **1553**.

Nevertheless at the moment, when the ships left London for their journey to the north-east, their destination has not been Moscovia, but China. The best testimony for this is a **remark of Hakluyt** about the epistle,

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which the English king has sent along with Chancellor:

**"The copy of the letters missive,  
which the right noble Prince Edward the Sixt,  
sent to the Kings, Princes, and other Potentates,  
inhabiting the Northeast partes of the world,  
towards the mightie Empire of Cathay,  
at such time as Sir Hugh Willoughby knight,  
and Richard Chancellor, with their company,  
attempted their voyage thither (Dorthin)  
in the yeere of Christ, 1553.  
and the seuenth and last yeere of his raigne."**

The English sailors had **hoped for** the marvels of China,  
but only found the average goods of the European North.  
Nevertheless the way to the orient was not forgotten:

The first map of the Eastern-Europe  
reaching from **Moscow to the Caspian Sea and the lake  
Aral,**

was designed less than ten years later:

The famous **Jenkinson map of 1562,**  
which guided the politics of **Peter the Great**  
to conquer the Caspian area  
to open the way to **the silk and the gold**

of the legendary **Persia, India and China.**