

IUXTA MARE GLACIALE -
the northeastern
border of Russia in the XVIth century.

As it seems, it was the Polish propaganda in the first quarter of the 16th century which has put a new borderline between the Eastern Slavs, who politically belonged to the Rzecz-pospolita, and the Eastern Slavs of the Muscovite Grand Prince. The interests of the Habsburg dynasty to find an ally beyond the lands of the Jagiellon dynasty confused the Poles – in their opinion the trench between the west and the east should be widened. The creation and propagation of a new, politically distinguishing name for this schismatic people, namely "moschi, moschoviti", was one of the political means for this purpose. The Polish victory over the Russians at Orsha 1514, for instance, was propagandistically presented as defence "contra haereticos et schismaticos Moscovienses"¹

The first book on Eastern Europe was the "Treatise on both Sarmatias, the Asiatic and the European, as well as on the inhabitants etc"², first published in 1517 by the Polish scholar Mathias Mechovita in Krakow. The author writes about "Regions of the Russians or Ruthenians, of the Lithuanians, of the Moskovians and their neighbours"³.

The first west European books on Muscovy were published 1525 and 1526; they were actually interviews with Russian diplomats in Rome respectively in Tuebingen.⁴ The German author, Dr. Johann Fabri, rejects the old names "Roxolanes" and "Rutheni", and gives a new definition: "Moscovites we call them today" (Moscovitas appellamus hodie). The Italian Bishop Paulus Jovius explains: "The name of the Muscovites is an recent one" (recens est). Both authors attest the fact that Europe has recognised the empire in the far east of the continent as a kingdom of a unique nature

In the time before these publications of Mechovita, Jovius and Fabri, that is, at the end of the 15th century, rumours circulated in Europe about the Eurasian north - for example the remark of the Italian Fra Mauro, written down in 1459, about a large island in the northern ocean, ten times greater than Crete, with Slavic inhabitants. Especially interesting is a letter from 1493 of a German scientist, Doctor Hieronymus Münzer, to the king of Portugal on the possibility to reach China over the north-eastern passage: "the Duke of Muscovia, who, only a few years since, has 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". The name "Grulanda" designates - as Samuel Baron found out and explained - the island of Novaja zemlja.⁵

As we can see, in the 1490s the information on the north-east of Europe had spread from Nuremberg, a centre of knowledge and communication, to Portugal. At this time, no later than the second half of the 15th century, the Russians had discovered Novaja zemlja and started settlements there.

Bishop Paulus Jovius and the theologian Doctor Johannes Fabri tried to describe the new vast kingdom. Interviewing the Russian diplomats they wished to detect the boundaries of Muscovy, especially in the unknown regions in the north and the east. They enquired about the geographical borders and the neighbouring peoples or tribes. When questioned about the borderline between Europe and Asia, the Russians spoke of endless and vast territories in the east. The westerners understood that "the empire of the duke of Muscovy extends in that kind of length and wide lands, that it covers some parts of Asia and some of Europe as well."⁶

We hear, maybe for the very first time, the definition of Russia as - in our modern terminology - a Eurasian kingdom.

Especially the interview at Tuebingen made by Doctor Fabri emphasised on a particularly endangered geopolitical position of Muscovy: "the position of Muscovites is surrounded by their enemies, by Turks, Tatars and - mare glaciale, the Arctic sea."⁷.

This means that in the interview the Russians did on one hand stress the military strength of their country,

1 Frank Kämpfer: Herbersteins nicht eingestandene Abhängigkeit von Johann Fabri aus Leutkirch, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44 (1996) pp. 1-27, here p. 12.

2 "Tractatus de duabus Sarmatijs, Asiana & Europiana & de continentis in eis"; S.A. Anninskij: Matvej Mechovskij, *Traktat o dvuch Sarmatijach*. Moskva 1936.

3 *regiones Russorum seu Rutenorum, Lithuanorum, Moskorum et eis adiacentes*.

4 Cf. Kämpfer, Herbersteins ... Abhängigkeit, passim.

5 S. H. Baron: Did the Russians Discover Spitzbergen? in: S. H. Baron: *Explorations in Muscovite History, Variorum Reprints* 1991, VI/pp. 42-64, here p. 55.

6 *Moscovitarum certe ducis imperium adeo latius protenditur, longisque agris, ut aliquot spatia Asiae complectatur, aliquot etiam Europae*, see Kämpfer, Herbersteins ... Abhängigkeit, p. 15.

speaking of hundreds of thousands of armed Russian horsemen, on the other hand they emphasised its endangered position by the inhospitality of the nature – and by the foes of Christianity, the Tatars and Turks. Both Russian diplomats, at Rome and at Tuebingen, spoke of the wild and barbarous tribes in the north-eastern shores of Russia, "ad litus maris glacialis in sylvis habitans".

In the middle of the 16th century the western Europeans could find much more and better information: There is Sigismund von Herberstein's famous book *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii* (Viennae 1549) and the description of Scandinavia by Bishop Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Romae 1555). Herberstein was the first traveller who brought some important news on the Trans-Uralian world to western Europe, especially to the very active British cosmographers. They prepared to realise the old dream of a north-eastern passage around the Eurasian coast to the Pacific and China.⁸

Here I have to rely on the results of our American colleague Samuel H. Baron, who has pointed out in several articles that the information Herberstein had collected were known in England already some years before the first ships sailed north-east to explore a route to China.⁹

The most astonishing pictorial information of Herberstein was a map of Russia, including western Siberia and reaching even further on to "Cumbalick regia in Kytay" and the "Kitay lacus" (which looks rather like Lake Baikal than the Yellow Sea). Cumbalik is the medieval name of Peking, popularised by Marco Polo to the Europeans. On the map, we read that there is supposed to be a way up the river Ob' (Oby fluvius) to Peking.

Looking at a modern map of Eurasia you would not come up with the idea that there could be a travel route like the silk-road in the south. But Russians told the Austrian diplomat about the homines nigri, coming from China to the river Ob. This means somebody must have had the experience that this route really worked. S. H. Baron quotes a remark from the early 17th century that there were Chinese fur-traders coming to the town of Surgut on the middle Ob-river.¹⁰ We have to accept that some Russians knew a kind of "northern silk-road" to Peking. This was long before the conquest of Siberia in the 17th century, which opened this road without the arduous detour via the Arctic sea and the river Ob'.

The eastern route overland through the Ural mountains seems to have been impermeable: When the diplomat Francesco da Collo in 1518 tried to find out whether there were high mountains or not, the Grand Prince Vasilij III gave him the opportunity to interview 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 mountains.¹¹ Francesco da Collo was searching for the Rhiplean mountains in the centre of the Russian lands - but the Russians told him about the "zemnoj pojas" or "Montes dicti cingulus terrae" as marked on the Herberstein map. Another matter is the north-eastern sea-route to China. We find it mentioned in the interview of Paulus Jovius of 1525: Theoretically it should be possible (certissima coniectura credendum sit) sailing along the shore from Russia eastwards, to come "ad Cathayum ... nisi terra intersit".

7Situs Moscovitarum circumque hostibus cinctorum. Turcis ac Tartaris undique circumdati ac mare glaciale, ibidem.

8Cf. Paul Dukes: Russia as Frontier of Europe: Some Early Views From England And Scotland, in: Gyla Szvák (ed.), *The Place of Russia in Europe*. Budapest 1999, pp. 29-35.

9S. H. Baron: The Influence in sixteenth-century England of Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*, in: S. H. Baron, *Explorations in Muscovite History XV/pp. 1-17*. The first attempt to investigate this problem is Johann Christoph Adelung: *Geschichte der Schiffahrten und Versuche, welche zur Entdeckung des nordöstlichen Weges nach Japan und China von verschiedenen Nationen unternommen worden*. Halle 1768.

10S. H. Baron: Thrust and Parry: Anglo-Russian Relations in the Muscovite North, in: S.H. Baron: *Explorations in Muscovite History, VIII/pp.19-40*, here p. 27.

11Ol'ga Simèiè: *Franèesko da Kollo. Donošenie o Moskovii*. Moskva 1996, p. 50f.; cf. O. Simèiè: *Franèesko da Kollo i ego donošenje o Moskovii meždu Mechovskim i Gerberštejnom* (unpublished congress paper of 1999, in print).



North-eastern part of the first Herberstein map of Russia
 (Augustin Hirschvogel, ca. 1546)

Herberstein gives us information on the conquest of the north-western part of Siberia, too. On his famous map the inscription "IVHRA inde vngarorum origo" shows the limits of Russian interests in that region and even some political implications of this topic.

In the text of his book this connection is explained in more detail: "This is Jugaria, where the Hungarins came from to occupy Pannonia. Under prince Attila they devastated many provinces of Europe.¹² Herberstein refers back to 1516, to his first embassy to Moscovia, when a VIP at the Moscow court, the Greek émigré Georgios Trachaniotes (called Jurij Malyj in Russian texts) tried in diplomatic negotiations to extend "ius principis sui" - i.e. the sovereignty of grand Prince Vasilij III - over Lithuania and Polonia and more. His argument was precisely the sovereignty of the Russian princes over the Jugri / Hunni / Hungri: "The Muscovites glorify themselves with this name, because their subjugates did in old times depopulate a good part of Europe"¹³

In a unpublished congress-paper of 1999 Reinhart Frötschner analyses this opinion and wonders whether such political ambitions really existed at the Moscow court or not.¹⁴ Was there a possibility of ethnic-historical legitimisation for forthcoming territorial claims in the European centre? Maybe Georgios Trachaniotes had made this allusion in a political sense, but Herberstein has read the theory of the ethnic connection between Jugri and Ungri years after his visit to Moscow. Herberstein had found it in the book of Mechovita, who borrowed the story from the "Chronica Hungarorum", by János Thuróczy († 1490), first published in 1488.

We see that the idea of ethnical identity between Hungarians and Jugarians was already reflected in Hungaria for several decades. This theory made its way to the learned Mathias Mechovita in Cracow. He stressed in the résumé of his Tractatus: "Remember what I told before, that Jugra is the region of Scythia, where the Jugri came from, who later on were called Hunni and Hungarians"¹⁵.

More than 20 years before the above-mentioned discussion of Herberstein and Trachaniotes, in 1491, the Italian architect Pietro Solari from Milano had to fix a Latin inscription on the Spasskii Tower of the Moscow Kremlin. As one of the many parts of the geographical titulatura of the Russian title he had to write "...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". In 1488 the name "Jugaria, jugorskij" is mentioned even in the intitulation of a message of Ivan III to the Hungarian king Mathias Corvinus.¹⁶

What about settlements of Russian seafarers, fur-trappers or fishermen? When did the region "iuxta mare glaciale" become Russian in a political sense?

Since the high middle ages the north-east region belonged to the range of Novgorodian fur-traders and we hear of their connections beyond the Ural to acquire the finest furs on earth. We have the first mention in 1096 - in form of a legend. But we know about military actions and massacres in this region, too: In 1193/1194 for instance, a great military expedition against Jugra ended in a catastrophe¹⁷. E. Zamyslovskij quotes a Novgorodian chronicle for the year 1364: "The Novgorodian voevodes Aleksandr Abakunovic and Stepan Lipa went from Jugaria (which is now the starting point) "voevavše po Obe reki do morja, a drugaja polovina rati na verch Obi voevaša"¹⁸ Later still the Russian chronicles inform about expeditions against the northern tribes in 1465 and 1483; in 1499/1500 they report for the first time a large campaign through the mountains of the northern Ural to conquer the land of Jugra. Grand Prince Ivan III had sent two princes in his service - S. F. Kurbskii and P. F. Ushatyi - in a summer-winter campaign with Russian troops from Ust'-Jug, Dvina, Vytshegda and Vjatka to subjugate the princes of the Jugrichi and the Gogulichi. They killed many people and forced the princes to the oath.

12Haec est Iuharia, ex qua olim Hungari progressi Pannoniam occuparunt.

Attilaque duce multas Europae provincias debellarunt.

13Quo nomine Moscovitae multum gloriantur, quod eorum subditi magnam Europae partem olim sunt depopulati.

14Reinhart Frötschner: Ugrier-Ungarn-Hunnen. Herberstein über ein Motiv der Moskauer politischen Mythologie (unpublished congress paper of 1999, in print).

15Et memineris, quod supra dixi, hanc esse illam Iuhram regionem Scythiae, de qua egressi sunt Iuhri, postea Hugni et Hungari dicti. Tractatus, p. 194.

16Frötschner, loc.cit.

17Joachim Dietze (ed. and transl.): The First Novgorod Chronicle in its Oldest Version (Synodal Transcript) 1016-1333/1352. Edition of the Old Russian Text with Facsimile of the Transcript in Reprint. Leipzig, München 1971, p. 40f.

18E. Zamyslovskij: Gerberštejn i ego istoriko-geografičeskija izvestija o Rossii. Spb 1884, p. 88

This seems to be the moment of the political annexation of the Ob-region. I think this is a new attempt (after the old domination of the Novgorodian republic) to incorporate the north-western parts of Siberia into Russia, this time into the Moscow empire. Herberstein writes about the Trans-Uralian lands where “multa passim castra sita sunt, quorum domini omnes principi Moscovviae (ut ferunt) subiiciuntur“.

The 1499/1500 expedition Herberstein refers of marks the moment Russia really became an Eurasian empire.