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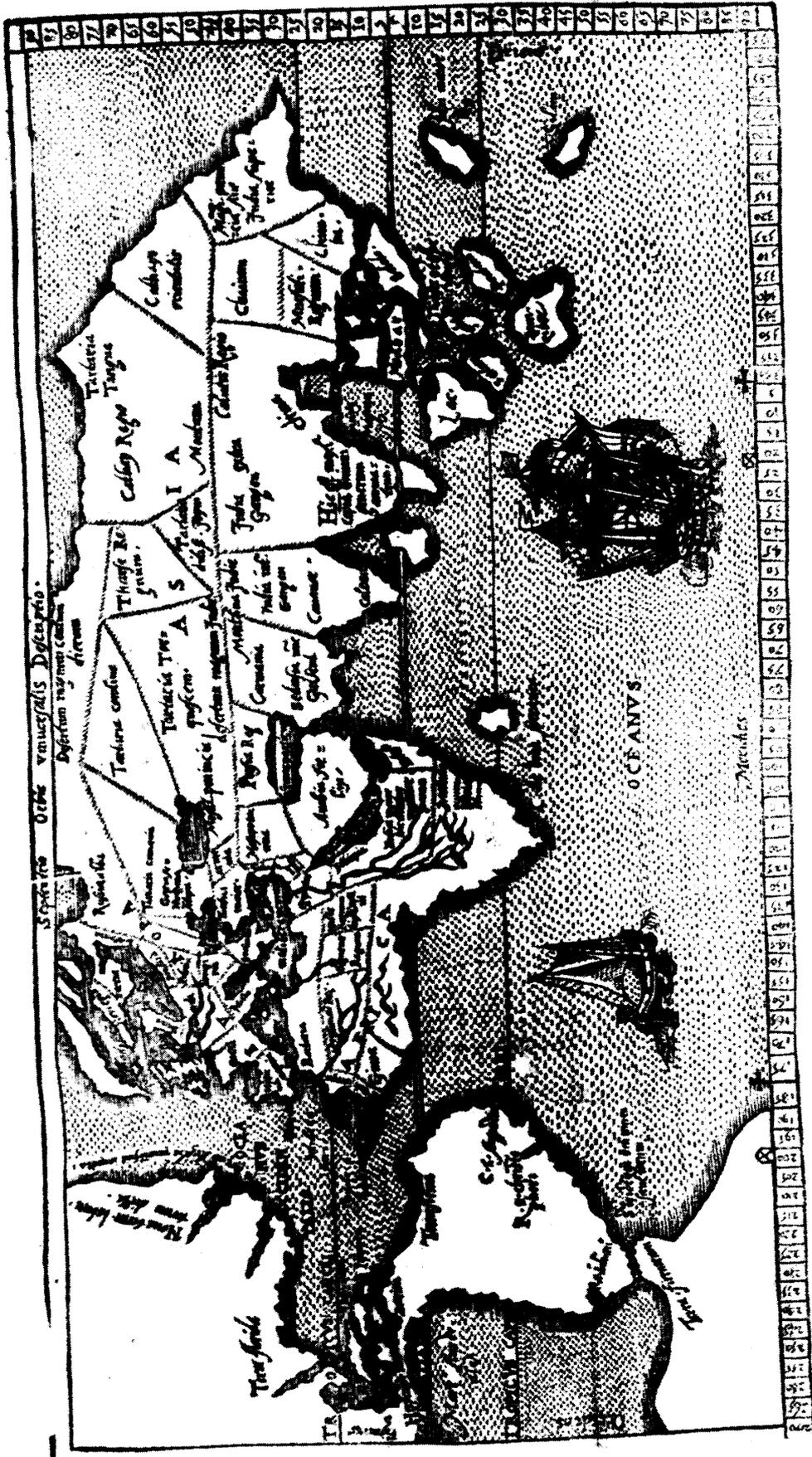
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Muscovy and the English Quest for a Northeastern Passage to Cathay (1553–1584)

Samuel H. Baron

The many accounts we have of early Anglo-Russian relations invariably begin with the Willoughby-Chancellor expedition of 1553 that opened a route to the White Sea and brought in its wake the establishment of the Muscovy Company. Thereafter, attention generally focuses on the vicissitudes of the company, the course of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the intimate connections between the foregoing.¹ I propose to examine another dimension of the story that has received less scrutiny than it deserves. This paper is the first installment of a two-part study of English efforts from the mid-sixteenth century to 1615 to explore the seas and coasts of northern Russia east of the White Sea, with a view to the discovery of a passage to the orient and, secondarily, the development of trade relations with northeastern Russia.²

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- 1 The two most important works are I. Liubimenco, *Les relations commerciales et politiques de l'Angleterre avec la Russie avant Pierre le Grand* (Paris, 1933); T. S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company 1553–1603* (Manchester, 1956). Other studies and the main sources on which they are based are listed in "Ivan the Terrible, Giles Fletcher and the Muscovite Merchantry: A Reconsideration," Chapter IV of my *Muscovite Russia: Collected Essays* (London, 1980), notes 5 and 6. An interesting recent paper germane to the present inquiry is Terence Armstrong, "In Search of a Sea-Route to Siberia, 1553–1619," in *Unveiling the Arctic*, ed., Luis Rey (Fairbanks, Alaska, 1984).
- 2 It should be noted that Cathay, the name widely used to designate the orient in the last half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, did not have a very precise referent. If it most often envisaged China, this was not always the case, as is apparent from a travel account of 1596 entitled "The Third Voyage Northward to the Kingdoms of Cathaia and China." Marco Polo, the most important source on the orient then available to Europeans, never visited Cipangu (Japan): but he had heard of it, and described it as a rich and powerful island kingdom in the ocean east of Cathay. It is safe to say that Europeans who engaged in the search for a northeastern passage to the orient hoped to reach Japan as well as China. I have found no earlier references, but in 1593 a Dutch merchant named Balthazar de Moucheron, who participated in the planning and financing of voyages of discovery, spoke of a northeastern passage to China and Japan. The expedition of 1607 led by Henry Hudson was "to discover a passage by the North Pole to Japan and China." And it was in the course of a similar attempt to reach China and Japan that Jooris Carolus discovered one of the islands of the Spitsbergen archipelago. Gerrit de Veer, *The Three Voyages of William Barents to the Arctic Region*, 2nd ed. (London, 1876); J. H. Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 51; V. A. Kordt, "Ocherk snoshenii Moskovskago gosudarstva s Respublikoiu Soedinennykh Niderlandov do 1631 g.," *Sbornik Imperatorskago Russkago Istoricheskago Obshchestva* (hereafter *SIRIO*), 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1867–1916), CXVI, xcv; Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 24 vols. (Glasgow, 1905–7; reprint ed., New York, 1965), XIII, 299; William Martin Conway, *No Man's Land* (Cambridge, 1906), p. 77.



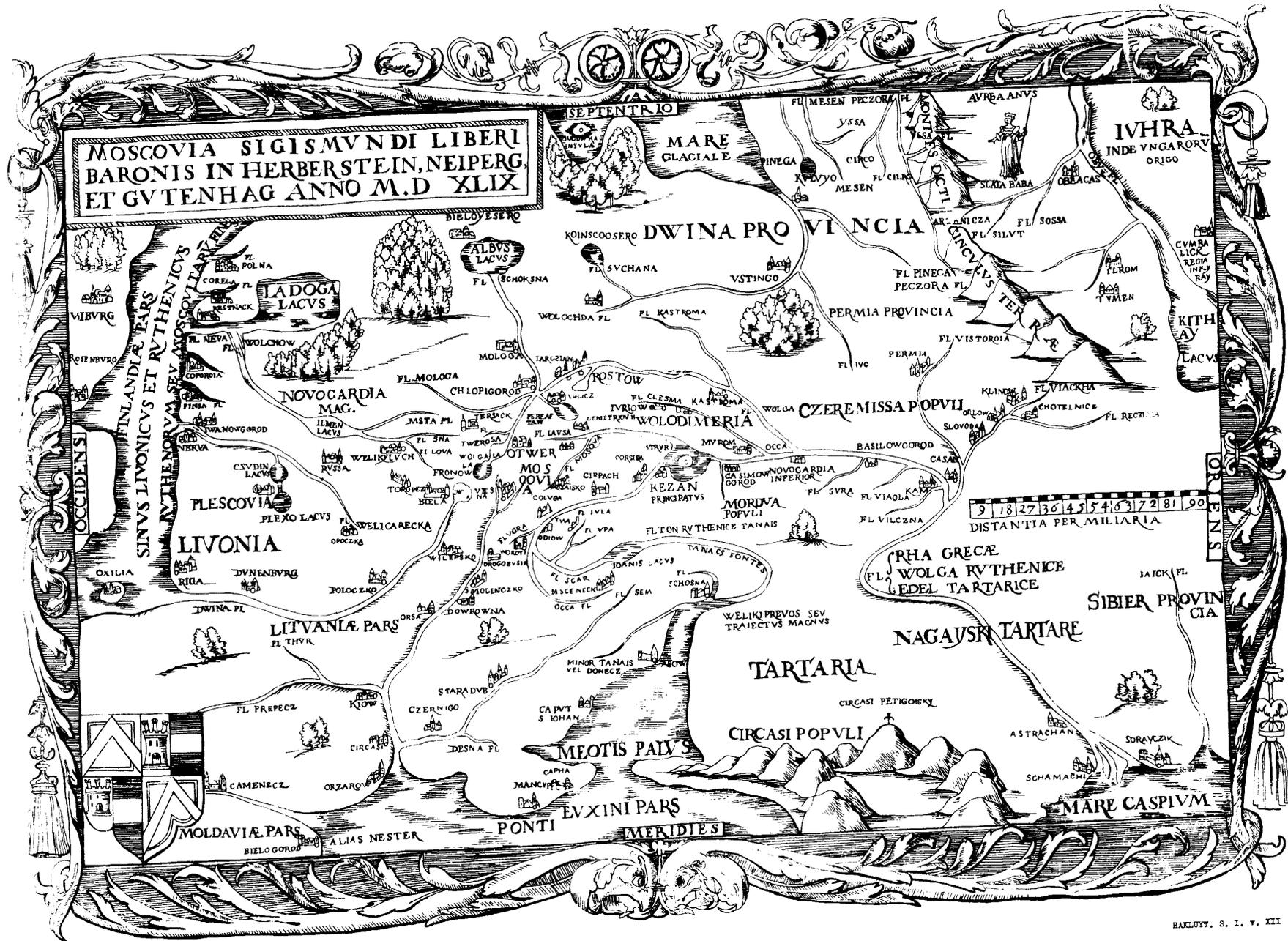
ROBERT THORNE'S MAP

It is sometimes forgotten that the 1553 expedition was seeking a route to the fabled Cathay when one of the vessels found its way to the mouth of the Northern Dvina. Such English enterprises, E. G. R. Taylor stresses, "were undertaken only after a full consideration and review of all the expert knowledge available."³ Indeed, as she demonstrates, Sebastian Cabot, Richard Hakluyt the Elder, Richard Eden, and John Dee — the best-informed cosmographers England boasted — were all involved in some measure in the planning of the 1553 endeavor. According to Taylor and others, they were especially influenced by the proposal of a merchant named Robert Thorne to King Henry VIII in 1527 that a search be made for a northeastern passage to the orient. Thorne, who was familiar with Portuguese and Spanish explorations and the great commercial benefits they had conferred, betrayed no doubt as to the existence of such a navigable route, and produced a map suggesting how Cathay could be reached by sailing eastward from northeastern Russia.⁴

Taylor does not treat other likely contributions to English thought on the matter which might have been considered more authoritative because they were derived from *Russian* sources. The Italian writer Paulus Jovius (Paolo Giovio) had published in 1525 a description of Muscovy, based on information provided him by Dmitri Gerasimov, a well-traveled Russian diplomat. In this work, Jovius wrote of the large body of water into which the Dvina and other rivers drain (the White Sea) and, from which, "sailing by the coast of the right hand, ships may have passage to Cathay as it is thought by most likely conjecture, except there lie some land in the way."⁵ His tract was first published in English only in 1555, but English cosmographers were almost certain to have known it from one of the earlier Latin editions of 1525, 1545, and 1551. One Russian writer has even speculated that Thorne advanced his proposal as a result of having become familiar with Jovius.⁶

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- 3 E. G. R. Taylor, *Tudor Geography 1485–1583* (London, 1930), p. 1. More generally, with respect to the Age of Exploration, an eminent expert has written: "Responsible rulers and skeptical investors would not send ships out deliberately on long and possibly dangerous voyages away from the known routes of commerce merely in the hope of making chance discoveries." Instead, experts were consulted, and "proposals were discussed and tested with reference to an accepted body of geographical information and informed conjecture." Parry, p. 42.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 46–7, 92. Thorne's letter is printed in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow, 1903–5), II, 159–63. See especially pp. 161–3. Pursuant to Thorne's letter, King Henry in 1527 sent two ships "for the discovery of the north parts." Little is known of this expedition, but it clearly did not succeed in its quest. See Hakluyt, III, 1–2.
- 5 *The First Three English Books on America*. Translations and compilations by Richard Eden. ed. Edward Arber (Birmingham, 1885), p. 313.
- 6 M. P. Alekseev, *Sibir' v izvestiiakh inostrannykh puteshestvennikov i pisatelei* (Irkutsk, 1941), p. 98. There is a map connected with the name of Gerasimov, though it is not known whether he drew it himself, or if Jovius drew it on the basis of the information Gerasimov gave him, or if a third party produced it from information in the Jovius tract. For a discussion of the map and its provenance, see Leo Bagrov, *A History of Russian Cartography up to 1600*, ed. Henry Castner (Wolfe Island, Ontario, 1975), pp. 61–4.

MOSCOWIA SIGISMVNDI LIBERI
 BARONIS IN HERBERSTEIN, NEIPERG,
 ET GV TENHAG ANNO M. D. XLIX



Possibly more important was the work of Baron Sigismund von Herberstein, who clearly knew and valued Jovius's tract, and may be said to have pressed farther the case the Italian had made. First published in 1549, Herberstein's book provided a detailed description of the river network of northern Russia that he had obtained from Russian informants. Crucial for our purposes is his claim, and it too was supported by a map, that a river called the Oby (Ob) which flows into the northern sea has its origin in Lake Kithai, that "gives its name to the great Khan of Cathay."⁷ The implication was that Cathay could be reached by sailing the northern seas eastward to the mouth of the Ob — then Muscovy's northeastern border — and then down the river. As if to reinforce such reflections, Herberstein included the Jovius account in the second Latin edition of his work (1551).

It seems probable, although impossible to say with certainty, that Herberstein's work was known to the English planners of the 1553 expedition. If none had encountered the 1549 (or the 1551) edition then, so at least two writers have asserted, Cabot would surely have known the second edition published in Italian in 1550.⁸ This edition came out in Venice, the city where Cabot had spent his youth. Given his interest in explorations, he was apt to have kept in touch with the place, because in the mid-sixteenth century, together with Rome, it was one of the two principal cartographic centers of Italy, the country that then led Europe in the production of maps.⁹ It is also worth noting that Richard Eden published an English translation of relevant parts of Herberstein, along with Jovius and other authors, in *The Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555).¹⁰ Considering the amount of time it then required to

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- 7 Sigismund von Herberstein, *Notes on Russia*, ed. R. H. Major. 2 vols. (London, 1851–2), I, clx; II, 37–42, 109.
- 8 I. Kh. Gamel', *Anglichane v Rossii v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh*, 2 parts (St. Petersburg, 1865–9), 34; E. Zamyslovskii, *Gerbershtein i ego istoriko-geograficheskiia izvestiia o Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 85. Gamel' (pp. 31–6) brought forth an array of argument in favor of English awareness of then current ideas, derived from Russian sources, on a possible northeastern route prior to the 1553 expedition. T. E. Armstrong, a British specialist, considers the Gamel' claim "a very reasonable possibility." See his article in *The Hakluyt Handbook*, ed. D. B. Quinn, 2 vols. (London, 1974), I, 256. The Swedish explorer Nordenskiöld judged that Herberstein's account "may possibly have had an indirect influence on the sending of Sir Hugh Willoughby's expedition, as the edition of Herberstein's work printed at Venice in 1550 probably soon became known to the Venetian Cabot." A. E. Nordenskiöld, *The Voyage of the Vega Round Asia and Europe* (New York, 1882), p. 56.
- 9 See *The Dictionary of National Biography* on Cabot. On Venice as a map-producing center, Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 260. A third edition of Herberstein appeared in Basel in 1551. It may be further noted that Herberstein's map had been published in Vienna in 1546, three years before the appearance of his book. V. Kordt, *Materialy po istorii russkoi kartografii*, I (Kiev, 1899), p. 67 and map 11. This circumstance increases the chance that Herberstein's ideas were known to the English cosmographers before 1553.
- 10 This fact somehow eluded John Parker, who mistakenly wrote: "One cannot help wondering why an English translation of Herberstein's account of his travels in Russia did not appear about 1555." See his *Books to Build an Empire* (Amsterdam, 1965), p. 41.

print a book, he could well have known Herberstein two or three years earlier. In Eden's *Treatyse on the Newe India*, published in 1553, he had mentioned neither Jovius nor Herberstein, but he confidently postulated in the book's preface the possibility of reaching Cathay by a northeastern passage. It is difficult to escape the impression that Eden's confidence derived from a familiarity with the Jovius and Herberstein materials. Quite conceivably Eden delayed the publication of these materials until 1555 in order to give the impression that the English had not depended upon others in the planning of their quest for a northeastern passage.¹¹

English cosmographers who put their expertise at the disposal of those who planned the 1553 expedition most likely assumed that the way to Cathay ran by or through Russia, making the quest for the one inseparable from the other. Having attained Russia, the Muscovy Company immediately took steps to develop trade, but there is no gainsaying its continuing interest in finding a way to China. Among the desiderata the company hoped to secure from the tsar as soon as it came into existence was the right to "sail, come and enter into all [his] lands, countries, dominions ... by sea, land, or fresh water ... and with the same or other ships ... unto other empires, kingdoms, dukedoms ... at their pleasure."¹² In short, it asked for an open-ended right to venture wheresoever it might wish in the furtherance of its interests. More pointedly, the company instructed its agents sent to Russia in the same year (1555): "It is to be had in mind that you use all ways and means possible to learn how men may pass from Russia either by land or sea to Cathay."¹³

In as much as the first charter of privilege granted the company, in that same year, has not survived, it would appear impossible to say with certainty whether the tsar granted the company's wish. Circumstantial evidence suggests that another objective, its desire to secure free transit across Russia to trade with Persia, was at first denied.¹⁴ However, a case can be made that it did gain permission to explore the northern seas eastward. The earliest surviving charter of privilege, that of 1567, permits the English, and they alone among foreign merchants, to come to trade on the Murmansk Coast (Kola), in the White Sea basin (the mouths of the Dvina, Kholmogory, and Mezen') and to "all our other inheritances in

11 On the other hand, Walter Leitsch asserts unequivocally that Chancellor had not read Herberstein's book. See his article "Herberstein's Impact on the Reports About Muscovy in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Some Observations on the Technique of Borrowing," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 24 (1978), 169. Leitsch explained in a letter to the author (July 28, 1983) that this judgment rests on a comparison of the Chancellor and Herberstein texts, made by one of his students, which shows that Chancellor could not have known the earlier writer. In my opinion, this does not exclude the possibility that one or more of the planners might have known Herberstein's work.

12 Hakluyt, II, 299. (All quotations from the sixteenth century sources are rendered here in modern orthography.) The document in which this occurs is erroneously identified as the first privilege granted the English merchants. It is now generally considered to be only a memorandum stipulating the company's desiderata.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

14 See "The Muscovy Company, the Muscovite Merchants, and the Problem of Reciprocity in Russian Foreign Trade," in my *Muscovite Russia*, chap. V, 136-7.

the north parts," including the eastward-lying Pechora and Ob river basins.¹⁵ It seems probable that the 1567 privilege, rather than offering anything new, merely reiterates a right given in the one of 1555. Any doubts on that score seem unwarranted in the face of the dispatch the very next year (1556) of an expedition under the command of Stephen Borough to find the mouth of the Ob. In this early stage of its relations with the Muscovite court, would the company have dared to undertake such an enterprise without the tsar's agreement?¹⁶

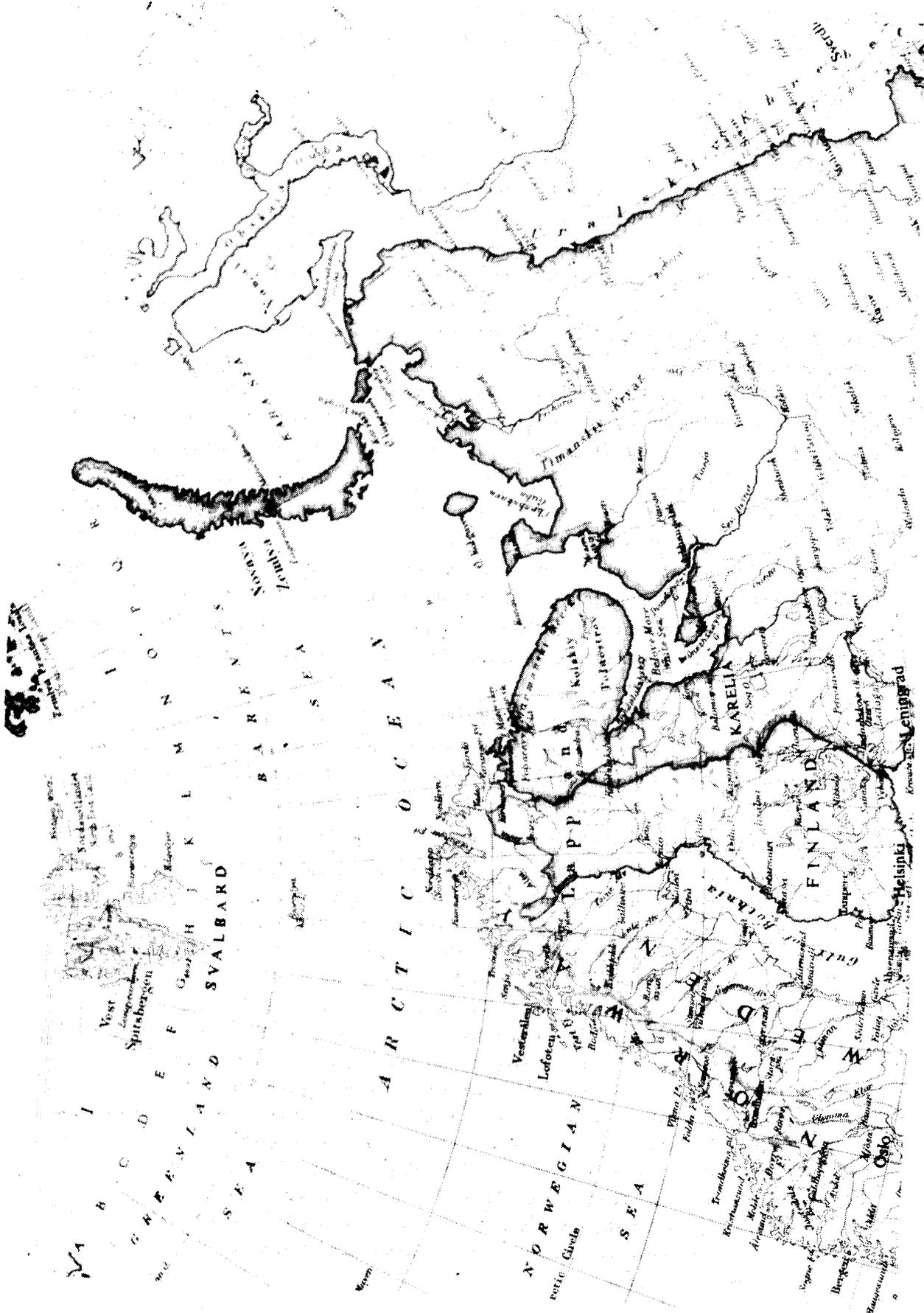
Borough's vessel the *Searchthrift* sailed from England toward the end of April, arriving at the Kola River on the Murmansk coast west of the White Sea on July 9.¹⁷ Evidently intending to bypass that sea and proceed directly eastward, Borough encountered at Kola a fleet of Russian fishing boats which, it turned out, were bound for Pechora. Was this a stroke of luck or the result of Borough's following instructions of the kind given other company agents that we cited above? The latter conjecture seems the more likely. At any rate, the commingling of the English and Russian mariners resulted in Borough being invited to accompany the Russian fleet. Thus it happened that the first Westerners ever to sail the waters of northern Russia east of the White Sea were provided with a Russian escort.¹⁸ In the course of the seven or eight day voyage to Pechora, Borough learned and marked well the location of such key points along the way as the Mezen' River, Caninoz (Kaninnos), Dolgoieve (Kolguev) Island, Swetinoz (Sviaty Nos), and so forth. Upon reaching the Pechora, he tarried but little before proceeding farther to the east, this time unaided by the Russians. The going was rough and slow. More than a month later, near the end of July, a Russian fisherman they chanced upon told Borough that they had reached Nova Zembla (Novaia Zemlia). He pointed the way to the Ob, which required sailing by the immediately adjacent island of Vaigats (Vaigach), and later indicated that "if God send good wind and weather," he

15 Hakluyt, III, 93, 97. It is essentially repeated in the privilege of 1569. *Ibid.*, 109, 116-7.

16 On the point at issue, my argument contradicts Gamel's summary rendition of what he represents as the essentials of the 1555 privilege in his *Anglichane v Rossii*, pp. 253-4. His presentation includes nothing about a right to explore eastward from the White Sea.

17 A detailed account of Borough's voyage is given in Hakluyt, II, 322-44.

18 Although notable, this type of thing was actually not so unusual. As Parry has pointed out, West European explorers followed well worn paths. They linked up formerly unconnected maritime worlds, with the assistance of denizens of those worlds, who enabled them to extend their range of travel and geographical knowledge. Parry, pp. xii-xv. Russian writers, both pre-revolutionary and Soviet, have bridled at claims that Western explorers discovered the way around the Scandinavian cape to Russia, as well as places like Novaia Zemlia. Their complaint is justified for, as Herberstein had testified, Russians had earlier sailed westward around the Scandinavian cape. (However, they did not exploit the route for purposes of trade.) Moreover, the experience of Borough demonstrated that Russian seamen knew a good deal about the northern seas and coasts, and Western mariners benefited from their knowledge. In addition to Gamel, and the English version of his work — J. Hamel, *England and Russia* (London, 1854; reprint ed. 1968), chap. 2, see I. P. Shaskol'skii, "Ob odnom plavanii drevnerusskikh morekhodov vokrug Skandinavii (Puteshestvie Grigoriia Istoma)," in *Puteshestvie i geograficheskie otkrytiia v XV-XIX vv.* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1965), pp. 7-30; M. I. Belov, *Arkticheskoe moreplavanie s drevneishikh vremen do serediny XIX veka* (Moscow, 1956), chap. 4 and *passim*.



would go there with them. However, two days later he departed without warning, passing over shoals that the English vessel, with its deeper draft, could not negotiate.¹⁹ Having missed out on a tantalizing opportunity, Borough proceeded to the southern side of Vaigach. There, the conjuncture of adverse winds, ice, and the lateness of the season made it prudent to venture no farther, and on August 22 the Searchthrift began the voyage back.

Borough's journey extended English knowledge of the water route to the east some 5–600 miles, no small achievement. This was a far smaller part of the distance to the northeastern tip of Asia than the English supposed, however, for they misconceived the extent of Asia's northern dimension. Instead of piloting his ship back to England, Borough wintered in Kholmogory, purposing "the next summer to proceed farther in our intended discovery of the Ob."²⁰ Because his superiors subsequently gave him a different assignment, he did not follow through. Borough's failure to discover a northeastern passage may have led the company to concentrate more on gaining access through Russia to the trade with Persia.

However, it is somewhat misleading to say, as does Boies Penrose, that after Borough's failure "attempts to reach China around Russia flagged for many years."²¹ While another expedition was not launched for almost twenty-five years, we have ample evidence of continuing English interest in finding a way to Cathay. When in 1559 the company representative Anthony Jenkinson was sent to request the tsar's permission to travel on his employer's behalf through Muscovy to Persia, he was also instructed to seek out a land route from Persia to Cathay.²² His effort to carry out this directive proved fruitless — he advanced only as far as Bokhara — but surviving documentation provides several glimpses of the persistent desire to discover a water route. Indeed, the same year that Jenkinson was dispatched to Moscow (1558), another company agent named Thomas Alcock gave testimony on this point. Alcock, who was arrested in Poland on his way overland to Russia, told his captors that he had been sent thither "to provide a ship to be sent to pass the [northern] seas and to discover Cathay."²³ Although nothing came of this so far as we know, clearly the Muscovy Company was far from abandoning the search.

The idea's feasibility was distinctly reinforced in 1559, with the publication of the second volume of Gian Battista Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni i Viaggi*. This work included a

19 Clearly the Russian boats were well adapted to sailing the northern seas. Moreover, although they could sail only with the wind, they did so with such speed that Borough kept up with them only because one of the men who had befriended him deliberately slowed down his vessel. These points prove how erroneous was the judgment of Morgan and Coote (and not they alone) that "the Russians [in the sixteenth century] had no taste for seafaring and knew nothing of nautical science." See Hakluyt, II, 328; E. D. Morgan and C. H. Coote, eds. *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia*, 2 vols. (London, 1886), I, lviii. For further discussion of such matters see my "Shipbuilding and Seafaring in Sixteenth Century Russia," in *Essays in Honor of A. A. Zimin*, ed. Daniel Waugh (Columbus, O., 1985).

20 Hakluyt, II, 334, 390.

21 Penrose, p. 173.

22 Hakluyt, II, 164.

23 Hakluyt, III, 398.

translation of some writing by Abulfeda Ismael, a tenth-century Arab author heretofore virtually unknown in Europe. Abulfeda asserted that the Asian coast north of China trends northwestward to the confines of Russia. So saying, he appeared to authenticate from the Asian side the belief fostered by Jovius and Herberstein from the European side in the existence of an all-water route around the northern coasts of Asia to Cathay. The scholar John Dee, a prime figure in the English schemes for reaching the orient, was greatly heartened by the Arab's views.²⁴

In 1561, when Jenkinson went to Moscow to request permission for a second voyage through the tsar's realm to Persia, he was charged by his superiors, in case permission should not be forthcoming, to search for the passage by Novaia Zemlia.²⁵ As he secured the hoped-for permission, he undertook no such endeavor, but it plainly fired his imagination. In 1565 he himself presented to Elizabeth an optimistically reasoned case for resuming the quest.²⁶ Seemingly it went unheeded, but what followed suggests otherwise. An Act for the Corporation of Merchant Adventurers issued by the queen in 1566 is relevant. The act, which set out the rights and privileges of the Muscovy Company, expressed the wish that "by God's grace," the company would "discover also the country of Cathay, and other regions very convenient to be traded into by merchants of this realm, for the great benefit of the same."²⁷ This may seem like nothing more than a pious hope, but there is evidence that the matter was not being entrusted to God alone.

Two years later (1568), the queen sent Thomas Randolph as an ambassador to the court of Tsar Ivan IV to negotiate the renewal of the company's privileges. But this was not the only business of his mission. Upon his arrival in Russia, he issued a commission to the company agents James Bassendine, James Woodcocke, and Richard Browne, directing them to undertake a voyage to the northeast. The plan of action, drawn up by William Borough, Stephen's younger brother, took up where the 1556 expedition had left off.²⁸ To maximize the explorers' time to carry out their task, they were to leave from the White Sea (rather than England) in the spring; they were to make use of the signposts Borough had charted, and follow the mainland south of Vaigach into a bay that would lead to the Ob. Not surprisingly, the instructions relating to the *terra incognita* east of Vaigach are uncertain. The mariners are advised to explore the mainland coast three to four hundred leagues past the mouth of the Ob, but are also advised that they may come upon Novaia Zemlia, which is perhaps connected to the mainland. Moreover, should they not achieve their goal, they were instructed to winter at Pechora or a White Sea port, presumably with a view to pressing on the following spring.

Randolph must have advised the tsar of the project and appealed for assistance. For among a series of "special grants" appended to the company privilege that the tsar approved in 1569 there appears: "A grant that at what time soever they send to the discovery of

24 A short passage from Ramusio's rendition of Abulfeda appears in Hakluyt, III, 412-3. On Abulfeda's influence on Dee, see Taylor, pp. 131-2.

25 Hakluyt, III, 12.

26 Taylor, pp. 98, 267-8.

27 Hakluyt, III, 86.

28 The plan of action is printed in Hakluyt, III, 119-24.

Cathay, they shall be licensed to repair unto this country, and have such conducts and guides, mariners, vessels, men and victuals as they shall stand in need of.”²⁹ This heretofore unnoticed item is remarkable on at least two scores. Firstly, it is the only extant instance of explicit consent by the Russian court to English explorations for a sea-way from Muscovy to Cathay. Secondly, although the wording of this grant is somewhat ambiguous, it appears to commit the Muscovite government to assist the English in their endeavors. Most suggestive is the indication that the English might secure the assistance of Russian guides, mariners, and vessels. Randolph probably had been prompted to request such aid by company officers, who recognized that Russian mariners knew the waters of the northeast far better than the English; and possessed vessels which, though more primitive than English craft in many respects, were better adapted for sailing through narrow and shallow straits. If our interpretation is correct, then this would have been the most auspicious moment in the annals of the English quest for a northeastern passage. All the more perplexing, therefore, is their failure to exploit the opportunity. The Bassendine expedition never took place, it is generally agreed, and the only explanation we have is the unelaborated assertion that it was cancelled for financial reasons.³⁰

A decade was to pass before another scheme for an expedition was devised. In the interval, Anglo-Russian relations had changed for the worse, and the English may have thought it unrealistic to expect Russian help. At any rate, if requested it was not granted, and they had to go it alone. The second resolute attempt to find a northeastern passage, which occurred in 1580, was well prepared. Arthur Pet and Charles Jackman were assigned by the company to pilot two vessels “for search and discovery of a passage by sea from hence by Borough’s straits, and the island Vaigats, eastwards to the countries and dominions of ... the Emperor of Cathay.”³¹ The instructions given them, again drawn up by William Borough, differed in some important respects from those he had drafted in 1568. The vessels were to sail beyond the Ob along the coast continuously until they came to Cathay. If they failed to reach it, they were to winter at a suitable place along the way, establish friendly relations with the natives, and sail on farther eastward the next year. In the event that the land inclined to the north beyond the Ob, they were to winter in that river, and reconnoiter its course the following spring. If the Ob proved non-navigable, they were to explore the western coast of Novaia Zemlia.³² To enable the expedition to carry out its difficult and extended mission, it was provided with two years’ provisions, and with additional expert advice from Richard Hakluyt the elder, John Dee, and Gerard Mercator.³³

Hakluyt stressed the importance of investigating all possible opportunities for trade,

29 Hakluyt, III, 119.

30 Taylor, p. 97. The reason for the Russian crown’s generosity to the Muscovy Company is not entirely clear. According to Willan, (pp. 109–10), who does not take notice of the item under discussion, the tsar’s openhandedness was calculated to secure political concessions from Queen Elizabeth.

31 Hakluyt, III, 252.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 254–7.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 259–82. Mercator’s letter arrived in England after the expedition’s departure.

whether in Novaia Zemlia or Cathay. He emphasized, too, the desirability of securing control of some island or a strategically located strait (Vaigach?). The latter would confer upon its possessor "the trade out of these regions into the northeast parts of the world for himself, and for his private profit, or for his subjects only, or to enjoy wonderful benefit of the toll of the same" from merchants of other nations who might be allowed to pass.³⁴ Mercator rather glibly judged that "the voyage to Cathay by the East is doubtless very easy and short"³⁵; but, despite the elaborate preparations, the Pet-Jackman expedition demonstrated that he could not have been more mistaken. The ships left England on May 30, 1580, doubled the north cape on June 22, and arrived at Pechora July 17. They encountered no helpful Russians en route and presently ran into the same difficulties that had beset Borough twenty-five years before. After reaching Vaigach, they managed to pass through the strait into the Kara Sea, but could advance no further. Weeks of contending with adverse winds and currents, ice, and fog, led them to abandon the attempt for good.³⁶ The failure of this costly expedition was bound to dampen the company's ardor for further explorations to the northeast, even though Dee claimed its "rightful jurisdiction" to do so on the basis of Stephen Borough's "discoveries." Less confident of the English right, Mercator had wondered that "the navigation was not intermitted," that "the Emperor of Russia and Muscovy had [not] hindered the proceeding thereof."³⁷ Whether he or the English better grasped the situation was soon put to the test.

Though the English had thus far failed, their effort seemingly aroused the interest of both Dutch and Russian entrepreneurs. A key role in these fresh endeavors was played by Brussels-born Oliver Brunel. Brunel entered the service of some Dutch merchants in the mid-1560s, soon moving from their base at Kola to the Northern Dvina town of Kholmogory, where he intended to learn the Russian tongue. Because the English exercised a monopoly of the foreign trade in the White Sea region wherein Kholmogory lay, and accordingly looked askance at any intruder, they turned Brunel over to the Russians as a spy and he was imprisoned. Some years later, he was released at the request of two of the Stroganov

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 266–7. A dozen or so years later the Dutch merchant Balthazar de Moucheron advanced the idea of seizing and fortifying Kolguev Island. See Kordt, *SIRIO*, CXVI, xcv–vi. These prescriptions are certainly interesting. But as they were the ideas only of individuals, and were never acted upon, they hardly prove Belov's claim (pp. 73, 77–8, 81) that the Western maritime powers at this time had imperialistic designs on Russia.

35 Hakluyt, III, 279. In point of fact, it was not until 300 years later, in the late 1870s that the first successful attempt to sail around the northern coasts of Asia to the orient was made. The expedition that accomplished this feat was headed by the Swedish explorer A. E. Nordenskiöld. An extended account of the expedition is Nordenskiöld's *The Voyage of the Vega Round Asia and Europe*.

36 An account of the Jackman-Pet expedition is printed in Hakluyt, III, 283–303. Another account, by Nicholas Chancellor, may be found in the 1589 edition of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*, pp. 476–82. It must be kept in mind that other endeavors may have been undertaken, of which, owing to the loss of records, we are ignorant. In a document of 1584 the company agent Andrew Marsh reports having been told by a Russian that a company vessel had been shipwrecked at the mouth of the Ob. See Purchas, XIV, 292–5.

37 Hakluyt, III, 279; Taylor, p. 122.

brothers, and entered their service as a factor. From their base at Solvychegodsk, he often traveled overland north and east to procure furs from the Samoeds and others, and by sea to Kola and the Netherlands to dispose of the take. He reached the Ob on a number of occasions, at least once passed one of the Vaigach straits, and was brought by his Russian guide to the other.

Word of the English effort to open a route to the orient apparently reached the Stroganovs, and inspired them to attempt what the English had failed to achieve. Perhaps Brunel had put the idea into their heads, for he was much better acquainted with the northern seas and coasts than the English. At any rate, he figured prominently in the Stroganov plans. They had ordered two ships built by a Swedish naval architect at the mouth of the Northern Dvina, and in 1581 they dispatched Brunel to Antwerp to hire skilled crews. Despite their earlier benevolence to him, Brunel betrayed his employers, and instead sought to enlist the support of Netherlands merchant-adventurers for a Dutch expedition to Cathay under his command. A shrewd operator, Brunel apparently envisaged a strategy something like that the English had in mind when in 1568 they seem to have gained a Muscovite government commitment to assist them. Of course, in view of his behavior vis à vis the Stroganovs, Brunel could hardly count on Russian governmental support. But he did intend to proceed to the mouth of the northern Dvina and there employ Russians whom he knew spoke the Samoed language and were familiar with the Ob River area. Brunel had learned that the Samoeds, and the Russians following their example, passed from the Kara Sea (east of Vaigach) to the Ob, not by rounding the peninsula that lay between them and that extended far to the north, but rather by crossing the peninsula in small boats through a series of rivers and lakes. He proposed to proceed in that manner, with the aid of locally procured boats and guides, and was confident that a journey of a few days down the Ob would bring him to Lake Khitai and thence to Cathay. Though encountering difficulties in the Netherlands, at last, in 1584, with Balthazar de Moucheron financing the endeavor, Brunel set forth on what proved to be an ill-fated voyage. He failed to pass through the strait into the Sea of Kara, much less from that sea across the peninsula. On the return trip, his ship laden with a valuable cargo was wrecked.³⁸ Brunel made no second attempt, and the fact that nothing is known of a Stroganov attempt suggests that they had relied heavily on Brunel's leadership and expertise. Moreover, it may be surmised that the Dutch adventurer's perfidy affected the English adversely.

In 1581, the Russians finally lost the grip on the Baltic port of Narva that they had exercised for 24 years, and with that Muscovy's trade with Western Europe shifted back to the White Sea area. Possibly in anticipation of Narva's loss, the Dutch had for the first time begun to send their trading vessels to the mouth of the Northern Dvina in 1578, and their competition soon threatened to undo the English. Understandably, the latter made strong

38 This account of Brunel and his activities is based upon the very important letter of John Balak to Gerard Marcator, printed in Hakluyt, III, 453-7; and S. Muller, *Geschiedenis der Noordsche Compagnie* (Utrecht, 1874), pp. 24-34. A good summary of Muller's findings, which were based on research in the Dutch archives, is presented in K. Beynen's Introduction to De Veer, *The Three Voyages of William Barents*, pp. vi-xv.

representations to Ivan Groznyi for the preservation of the monopoly right he had earlier granted them. It so happened that at roughly the same time the tsar resumed pressure on Queen Elizabeth for an offensive and defensive alliance of the sort that he had demanded in 1569–70.³⁹ As the queen's failure to satisfy him on the earlier occasion had led to the cancellation of the company's privileges, the raising of the issue anew must have alarmed its leaders. Muscovy's deteriorating position in the Livonian War might conceivably have prompted the tsar to grant the company's wish in exchange for the English alliance. As a rule, he gave priority to "princely affairs" — that is, state interests — when these conflicted with the interests of Russia's merchants.⁴⁰ But the time was long past when gratitude for their having opened the northern sea route to Russia had enabled the English to secure extraordinary privileges without a *quid pro quo*. A looming crisis was manifest in 1582–3 when Ivan's ambassador, F. A. Pisemskii, having failed to obtain the desired alliance in London, flatly asserted that Russia's ports were open to the ships of all nations.⁴¹

To Sir Jerome Bowes fell the unenviable task of going as the queen's envoy to Moscow to persuade the irascible tsar to give something for nothing. The surviving Russian record shows that the negotiations in Moscow,⁴² though marked by interminable wrangling and stormy sessions, produced no movement on either side with respect to the main issues. The same message is communicated in Bowes's account of the parleys; and the standard histories of early Anglo-Russian relations by I. Liubimenko and T. S. Willan mirror these documents on this score.⁴³ However, a comparison of the Russian record with Bowes's report compels us to conclude that Elizabeth's ambassador misrepresented what had occurred in order to conceal just how badly he had fared. Bowes requested, in accord with a privilege of many years' standing, that none but the English be permitted to trade at a whole series of places: Vardo (Wardhus) and Kola on the coast of Russian Lapland, the mouth of the Dvina, Kholmogory and Mezen' in the White Sea basin, Pechora and the Ob to the east.⁴⁴ It is curious that Bowes evidently brought up the matter of the Pechora and Ob even though his instructions said nothing on that score — presumably because this was not thought to be at all in question.⁴⁵ A search of the records ordered by the tsar revealed that the English had indeed been given exclusive right to trade at all those places and some others at least as far back as 1567. But thenceforth, he decreed, the Dutch should be allowed to trade at the Pudozemsk mouth of the Dvina, and French merchants at Kola, while the English were to be excluded from those places. On the other hand, the English were confirmed in the exclusive right to trade at the Korela mouth of the Dvina, Kholmogory, and several other points in Lapland and the White Sea basin. Most significantly for our purposes, the English were

39 Willan, pp. 112–7.

40 On these concepts and their inter-relations, see my article cited in note, 14, pp. 568f.

41 Willan, pp. 161–2.

42 *SIRIO*, XXXVIII (St. Petersburg, 1883), 72–145.

43 The Bowes account is printed as an appendix to Hakluyt, III. See especially p. 470. Also Willan, pp. 163–7; Liubimenko, pp. 52–7.

44 *SIRIO*, XXXVIII, 93.

45 For the instructions, see Iu. Tolstoi, *Pervye sorok let snoshenii mezhdu Rossieiu i Anglieiu, 1553–1593* (St. Petersburg, 1875), pp. 201–19. See particularly pp. 218–9.

now explicitly forbidden to venture eastward from the White Sea to the Pechora and the Ob.⁴⁶ By this action the tsar not only barred access to those areas of Russia but also any further search for a northeastern passage to Cathay. It was this blow, all the more devastating for its unexpectedness, that Bowes concealed in the report on his embassy.

Although Ivan died before the formal conclusion of the negotiations, his decision that the old privilege should not be renewed prevailed. The new one granted by Tsar Feodor in May 1584 omitted the permission earlier given to travel to "all our inheritances in the north parts", and specifically to the Pechora and Ob.⁴⁷ They were never restored. Presumably Liubimenko and Willan failed to detect this momentous change partly because they were deceived by Bowes's mendacious account, and partly because the 1584 privilege and subsequent ones simply dropped the earlier favors rather than making the ban explicit. This critical change may have escaped notice too because, judging from the surviving company record, its managers were so intensely preoccupied with the loss of their monopoly right in the White Sea and the right of transit through Muscovy for trade with Persia that they expressed no concern for further travels to the east that had thus far proved fruitless.⁴⁸

One may wonder why the Russian side did not content itself with the cancellation of the English monopoly, and chose to ban eastward travel on the northern seas as well. How Ivan in the course of the negotiations explained his stand is worth quoting: "To venture to [Pechora and the Ob] is impossible," he said; "those places in our patrimony are far from [the locations] to which the English merchants come, and there are no landing facilities in those places ...; and only in those places are sables and gyrfalcons taken; and such expensive goods will go to England alone, and our state would be the worse."⁴⁹ If we dismiss as counterfeit the references to distance and the want of landing places — as I think we should — the issue comes down to present or future access to valuable resources. Whether this is a case of princes' affairs or merchants' is not immediately apparent. English access to the eastern places might conceivably result in some loss of customs revenues, although the Muscovite government generally sent out officials to look after its interests wherever trade

46 *SIRIO*, XXXVIII, 93–6. Some of the complexities of the documentation on the Bowes mission are sensitively explored in Robert M. Croskey, "Hakluyt's Accounts of Sir Jerome Bowes' Embassy to Ivan IV," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 61, No. 4 (October, 1983).

47 *SIRIO*, XXXVIII, 141–4.

48 There is no mention of the matter in the documents dealing with the efforts of the company to regain what it lost in the privilege of 1584. And in 1588/1589, in a comparison made in its offices of the privilege of 1569 and that of 1586 (which was in all relevant respects identical with that of 1584) the other losses sustained were indicated but not the right of travel to the Pechora and Ob basins. See *List and Analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series, Elizabeth I*, 2 vols. (London, 1964), I, 432. Both Liubimenko (p. 56) and Willan (p.166) seem to have relied upon the analysis in this document rather than make an independent one. The document they cite is the same one that I have cited, though in a different collection.

49 *SIRIO*, XXXVIII, 127–8. Kordt (*SIRIO*, CXVI, xcvi) is one author who had some appreciation of this point, though he mentions it only in passing. It is merely mentioned, too, in Tolstoi's lengthy discussion of the Bowes mission, in "Poslednoe posol'stvo korolevny Elizavety k Tsariu Ivanu Vasil'evichu. Ser Eromei Gorsei," *Russkii Vestnik*, 36 (1861), p. 25.

centers arose. On the other hand, the greater Russian merchants who procured furs from natives and trappers in the north would almost certainly suffer from competition were the English to have access. The case for Russian merchant influence in the decision under consideration is enhanced by evidence I have compiled elsewhere of their real if not decisive role in shaping earlier privileges, and especially the severely restrictive one of 1584.⁵⁰

It is well to recall, too, that in 1589 (the campaign actually began a good bit earlier) a merchant-inspired move was afoot to bar foreign merchants from trade in Russia's interior, instead restricting them to traffic at Arkhangel'sk.⁵¹ These contextual circumstances suggest the likelihood of a merchant role in the decision prohibiting English access to the Pechora and Ob. It is difficult to believe that the Stroganovs did not have a hand in the matter. They had managed with considerable effort to gain a special position in the fur trade of those parts.⁵² They were sure to be hostile to penetration by outsiders under the best of circumstances, and the more so after their disagreeable experience with Brunel. Beyond that, if their own effort to find a northeastern passage had been frustrated, at least they could use their influence with the government to bar others from the waters that supposedly fed into the passage.

Two other important pieces of information that the government possessed are also likely to have influenced the decision under consideration. Firstly, there is a report that at some indeterminate time before 1584 a Muscovy Company vessel had penetrated to the mouth of the Ob, where it was wrecked and its crew slain by Samoeds. This report might have aroused concern that regular access to the area by the English was imminent. Secondly, we should consider the case of Andrew Marsh. This enterprising company agent, who somewhat reminds one of Brunel, had learned from a knowledgeable Russian named Bogdan the ways both by sea and by inland rivers to the Ob. Marsh employed the Russian, together with some assistants, to travel by the inland route to the area, where they bartered for a "rich" lot of sables and other fine furs. On the return trip, however, they were intercepted by the tsar's agents, their goods were confiscated, and Bogdan was arrested and knouted. When upbraided by the authorities for having dared to undertake such a venture, Marsh replied that according to the privilege granted the English "no part of the emperor's dominions were exempted from the English to trade or traffic in." His brief was brusquely rejected, and he was warned to refrain from any further action of the kind. Clearly the Russians intended to keep English competitors out of this fur-rich area; or, as another company agent put it: "It seems that they are very jealous that any Christian should grow acquainted with their neighbors that border to the northeast of their dominions, for that there is some great secret that way, which they would reserve to themselves only."⁵³

50 Baron, *Muscovite Russia*, chap. IV, 574-5.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 580-1.

52 S. F. Platonov, *Proshloe russkogo severa* (Berlin, 1924), pp. 98-9; A. A. Vvedenskii, *Dom Stroganovykh v XVI-XVII vekakh* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 30-33.

53 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, XIV, 292-5. From this document, it is impossible to say with certainty whether the Marsh episode occurred before or after Ivan IV rendered his decision. If it occurred before, then it very likely influenced the decision; if after, it demonstrates the government's resolve to enforce it strictly.

For many years after 1584 the English engaged in no further activities on the northern seas or coasts of Russia east of the White Sea. Discouragement, a compulsion to observe the Russian government's ruling (of which they must surely have become aware at some point), or both may have been determining. But during the Time of Troubles English interest again revived. A series of initiatives were taken to secure a foothold in the Russian north and to exploit possibilities formerly denied. These included a plan for taking some of the area under English protection, and another for developing a lucrative trade at Pechora and the Ob. The upshot of all this was a pair of government decrees of 1616 and 1620 barring sea travel, whether by foreigners or Russians, from the White Sea eastward to Pechora and the Ob. This culminating chapter of the story must await another occasion to be told.