

Sir Jerome Horsey's
Travels and Adventures
in Russia and Eastern
Europe

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Edited with an Introduction by

John Anthony Butler

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INTRODUCTION

The cold is rare, the people rude, the prince so full of pride,
The realm so stored with monks and nuns, and priests on every side,
The manners are so Turkish-like, the men so full of guile,
The women wanton, temples stuffed with idols that defile
The seats that sacred ought to be; the customs are so quaint,
As if I would describe the whole, I fear my pen would faint.

—George Turberville, “To Parker,” from *Tragicall Tales* (1587)

The Life and Times of Sir Jerome Horsey

The genealogy of the Horseys is, to say the least, confusing. We cannot even be sure what year Jerome Horsey was born in; Paul Hunneyball, for example, believes that Horsey’s parentage is “uncertain,”¹ and that his early life is equally difficult to trace. As Sir Edward Bond pointed out in his Introduction to *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, information on Horsey before 1573, when he first went to Russia, is extremely sparse. “We have little more to say,” Bond states, “than he has himself told us in his narrative.”² Horsey himself says that he is the son of William Horsey in a letter to Boris Godunov, and Godunov styles him “the son of William, gentleman.” Based on this information, Jerome’s father was probably William Horsey, a merchant from Exeter and brother to Sir Edward Horsey (1525-1583) of Exton in Devon, who is mentioned at the beginning of his nephew’s book and held the post of Governor of the Isle of Wight as well as several ambassadorships. His mother was most likely Elinor Peryam, about whom nothing much is known; she was probably from the same Exeter family as Sir William Peryam (1534-1604), a judge who rose to become Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, but cannot have been his

¹ Paul Hunneyball, “Sir Jerome Horsey,” in A. Thrush and John P. Ferris, eds. *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1604-1629*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), www.historyofparliamentonline.org.

² Edward A. Bond, ed. *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1886; repr. London: Forgotten Books, 2016), cxxix. References to this book will be given hereafter by the editor’s name.

daughter, because the chronology does not fit.³ It was most likely Sir Edward Horsey who first introduced Jerome to Queen Elizabeth, her principal adviser William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and the spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham, to whom the book is dedicated. We can say with certainty that the Horsey family was originally from Dorset, where they possessed estates at Clifton Maybank or Maubank and Melcombe Horsey. The former was the more significant property; it had been owned by the senior branch of the Horsey family since the fifteenth century, but really became prominent in the time of Sir John Horsey (d. 1564), who made it his chief residence and substantially expanded the house. The poet Sir Thomas Wyatt, a friend of Sir John's, died there in 1542. Melcombe Horsey, near the modern village of High Melcombe, is now a deserted village, and the manor has long since disappeared. Jerome Horsey was probably born in about 1550, although 1546 has also been suggested.



The Parish Church at Melcombe Horsey in 2015. Creative Commons.
Public Domain.

³ The Peryam family is also difficult to unravel. Sir William Peryam had a daughter Elizabeth, who married Sir Robert Barrett, but not one called Elinor or Eleanor. An Eleanor Peryam, whose date of birth is given as 1505, is an unlikely candidate because of her age.

The years from Jerome's birth to 1572 are blank; if he attended Oxford or Cambridge the records do not show it, nor do those of the Inns of Court.⁴ It is possible that he may have done some travelling in France or the Netherlands, sent there by his uncle or father to gain some continental experience (Thrush and Ferris, *History of Parliament*, n.p.n.). Jerome Horsey's first acquaintance with Russia took place around 1572 or 1573, when we find him employed there by the Muscovy Company as a clerk. How he got the job may only be guessed at; if his father was a merchant he may well have had contacts in the Company, or it might have been the first instance of help from Sir Edward Horsey, who by 1573 had been ambassador first to Flanders (1568), then France (1573) and was a close friend of the Earl of Leicester. In fact, when Leicester secretly married his mistress Lady Douglas Sheffield in 1571, Sir Edward had given her away.⁵ As Leicester was at that time still very much in the favour of Queen Elizabeth, it would have made Sir Edward himself quite influential at court, and the younger Horsey a peripheral member of Leicester's circle. "Nothing is known of the first seven years of his stay," Berry and Crummey state of Jerome Horsey's initial journey to Russia, "yet the time was not wasted,"⁶ and he would spend the better part of eighteen years in that country. Indeed, as Francesca Wilson points out, "of all the Tudor visitors to Russia, Horsey was the one who knew her best,"⁷ simply because he had spent more time there than anyone else. Those early years would have given Horsey ample opportunity to learn to speak Russian fluently (although he never learned to write it well) and to make himself acquainted with some of the history and culture of the country, for which he credits his friendship with Prince Ivan Mstislavsky, who "imparted to me many secrets observed in the memory and process of his time."

⁴ Jerome's son William did, however, matriculate from Queen's College, Oxford, in 1606, and was at Lincoln's Inn in 1610 (Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford 1500-1714* [Oxford: Parkes and Co., 1891], 2, 748), and *Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn: Admissions from A.D. 1420 to A.D. 1799* [London: Lincoln's Inn, 1896], 1, 153).

⁵ The nature of this marriage is in question. Lady Sheffield herself claimed after Leicester's death (1588) that they had been secretly married, but some historians dispute this.

⁶ Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey, eds. *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 225. References to the selections in this book will be given hereafter by the editor's names. Quotes from Randolph, Turberville, Jenkinson and Chancellor are all taken from this compilation.

⁷ Francesca Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 48.

It seems that after a few years Horsey, possibly through Mstislavsky, managed to attract the attention of the tsar, Ivan IV, known of course as Ivan the Terrible, and over the years claimed to have developed a kind of relationship with him that was never achieved by any of the other English envoys or merchants at the tsar's court. In 1580, for example, Ivan decided to employ Horsey on a secret mission to England in order to obtain a number of military supplies such as lead and powder, which was the first of several quasi-diplomatic errands Horsey would run for him, as well as serving as an unofficial ambassador for Elizabeth I when he returned to Russia. Berry and Crummey state that Horsey managed his diplomatic errands with "a delicate blend of ruthlessness and charm" (250), qualities which made his relationship with Ivan successful. Horsey's first editor, Edward Bond, also notes in several places that Horsey could also be vain, self-important, and sometimes rash, but in the end he seems to have developed a kind of love-hate relationship with Russia and its people. Francesca Wilson calls him "an unscrupulous knave," although she praises him for his love of the Russian language (*Muscovy*, 48); Isabel de Madariaga thinks that although Horsey's writings on Russia were "slapdash and haphazard," at the same time, though, she believes "there is usually a kernel of truth in what he reports."⁸ Felicity Stout perceptively sees Horsey as having "an ambiguous and fluid identity,"⁹ which partially explains the inconsistent nature of his narrative if not the egregious errors of chronology he occasionally falls into, and the continuing enigma of his character. The fluidity which Stout noticed certainly presents itself to the reader of Horsey's own writings; he comes across sometimes as kindly, sympathetic hero, sometimes as victim, sometimes a truth-teller and sometimes an outright liar. He can be disingenuous, too, which makes an exact "reading" of both the man and his text difficult. Much of what we know about him, including his later career as a politician, consists of complaining letters against him, negative gossip and Horsey's replies vigorously defending his reputation in writing.

Horsey was, even by his own admission, frequently in trouble both in England and Russia; he fell out with the English ambassador Sir Jerome Bowes and got along badly with Andrey Shchelkalov, one of the most powerful (and most likely corrupt) advisers to both Ivan IV and his successor Fyodor I. Horsey's dealings with his employers the Muscovy Company were also up and down; he was on more than one occasion accused of dishonesty, illegal personal trading and even theft, as we will see

⁸ Isabel de Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible: First Tsar of Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 284.

⁹ Felicity Stout, *Giles Fletcher the Elder (1546-1611) and the Writing of Russia* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008), 48.

later. Horsey seemed to have problems keeping the good relationships with his patrons in both England and Russia that he needed if he wished to pursue a smooth career, and over the years his enemies hatched various schemes to discredit him, from falsely accusing one of his own servants and having him arrested by the Russians, who tortured him (this was all false), to embezzling Company funds to line his own pockets as well as setting himself up as a private trader, which was illegal, even if everyone else did it. He also borrowed a great deal of money from various Russians as well as from the imperial treasury in order to facilitate his transactions, which he may or may not have repaid. Horsey retaliated against his English accusers by denouncing them to the Russians as foreign spies, which could lead to imprisonment and torture; he had friends at the Russian court who could arrange such things and he probably did not hesitate to use them. These included the future tsar, Boris Godunov, with whom Horsey cultivated a close acquaintance and a number of important nobles or *boyars*. His actions would soon come back to haunt him and cast some serious doubts on his reputation.

Horsey became a kind of double yet unofficial ambassador, moving between the Russian court and that of Queen Elizabeth and striving to retain the favour and protection of Boris Godunov, which was not always forthcoming. In 1589, for example, he was sent back home in what looked like disgrace, but after a lengthy communication with the Queen regarding his doings in Russia, he returned the next year as English ambassador, much against the wishes of both the Muscovy Company and of Andrey Shchelkalov, his powerful enemy at Fyodor's court. The latter succeeded in having Horsey sent off to Yaroslavl to await the tsar's pleasure, which was never communicated to him. Realising that his Russian friends and patrons no longer had his back, Horsey, together with the ambassador Giles Fletcher, left Russia in 1591. At home he still had to face the legal wrath of the Muscovy Company, which engaged him in a number of lawsuits, some of which will be discussed below, and may have occasioned him to begin writing the memoir known as the *Travels* as part of his defence.

Within a year after returning to England, Horsey married Elizabeth (1574-1607), the eldest daughter of Griffith Hampden of Great Hampden, Buckinghamshire, by whom he had at least one surviving child, William.¹⁰

¹⁰ Griffith Hampden (1543-1591) served as High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire; some genealogical sources do not mention his daughter Elizabeth. However, Robert Waters cites a will in which Hampden refers to "my said daughter Elizabeth" and to his having given Horsey £700 as part of a marriage-settlement (*Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley* [London: Robson and Sons, 1878], 1, 89). George Lipscombe states that Elizabeth was the daughter of John

We know very little about her, apart from the fact that she was an ancestor of the John Hampden (1595-1643) who famously objected to paying Ship Money to Charles I and who fought (and died) for the Parliamentary cause during the Civil War. Two years after Elizabeth's death Horsey married Isabella Brocket of Wheathampstead (c.1584-1618), the daughter of Edward Brocket (1543-1599) of Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire. Some records erroneously suggest that Horsey married a third wife, another Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir John North (1551-1597), but the dates point rather to his son William making the match rather than Horsey himself.¹¹ Unfortunately, there is little information available on either Horsey's second wife or his children; he does not mention them in his book, even though it was written many years after the events described in it took place, and therefore no impression can be given of what Horsey might have been like in a domestic setting. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any portrait of Horsey himself still extant or a physical description anywhere, so we do not know what he looked like. Possibly there is a portrait hidden away in some English country house, local museum or stately home, but we cannot guess where. There is a painting (1875) by Alexander Litovchenko (1835-1890) entitled "Ivan IV of Russia Showing his Treasury to Sir Jerome Horsey," but the figure of "Horsey" is a generic Elizabethan gentleman with breeches, doublet and a beard.

The latter part of Horsey's career is briefly narrated by himself at the end of the *Travels*, as he looks back on a long life of service to the crown. Knighted by James I, he settled in Buckinghamshire and sat on numerous commissions, worked as a justice of the peace and became High Sheriff. For thirty years he served as an MP for various places, and described himself in retirement as "an old ship that hath done good service, to be laid up in the dock unrigged," suggesting that he did not wish to do any more travelling. He doesn't want to leave what he called "thrice-blessed nation and angelical kingdom of Canaan, our England," where he hoped to end his life free from "all other experience and knowledge." Horsey died in 1626 at the age of

Hampden (c.1509-1565) and his second wife Anne Cave (*History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham* [London: J. & W. Robins, 1847], 2, 234), but if Elizabeth was born in 1574 this must be wrong. The article by William Archbold in the *DNB* also gives Griffith as Elizabeth's father (27, 378). Horsey quarrelled with his son William in 1621; he would have been an adult and therefore likely a child of Elizabeth's.

¹¹ See, for example, Edgar Cardew Merchant, "Sir John North," in *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-90), 41, 167. North was a soldier and Cambridgeshire MP who seems to have been of a rather quarrelsome disposition.

about seventy-six and was buried in the parish church of Great Kimble in Buckinghamshire, where his grave may still be seen.



Sir Jerome Horsey's grave at Great Kimble Parish Church

Europeans and Others in Russia (or not) before Horsey

Legend has it that the first Westerner to visit Russia was one Othere or Othhere of Heligoland in 890, said by Hakluyt to have related his story to king Alfred a few years later in England. "He told his lord King Alfred," Hakluyt relates, "that he dwelt further north of any other Northmen,"¹² but that he had a dream of going even further north, which he did, and apparently sailed to the farthest north-west of what is now modern Russia and the mouth of the Dvina river. Other notable European travellers included Johannes de Pian Carpino (1245), sent by Pope Innocent IV as an envoy to the Great Khan, and Marco Polo (1271), and we have already mentioned the trading contacts established between Novgorod and the Hanseatic League in the following century. There were also early Arab travellers like Ibn Fadlan (887-960), Ibrahim al-Tartushi (d. 966) and Ibn Battuta (1304-1377), all of whom left written accounts of their experiences.

¹² Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries* 1, 56. King Alfred apparently appended Othere's account to his translation of Orosius's *Universal History*.

The Italian physician Paolo Giovio (1483-1552), who had never been to Russia himself, nevertheless compiled a work on Russia, the *Libellus de legatione Basilii magnum Princeps Moschoviae ad Clementem VII Pontificem Maximum* (1527), using information related to him by Dmitry Gerasimov (c.1465-1540), the Russian envoy sent to Pope Clement VII by Grand Prince Vasily III to sound the Pope out about an alliance against the Turks. As to the importance of this work, apparently recommended to Chancellor by no less an authority than Sebastian Cabot (Mund, "Discovery," 352). Marshall Poe has commented that "the respect shown at the time for the slight treatise of Paolo Giovio. . . is illustrative of the ignorance concerning Muscovy on the part of even highly-informed persons in contemporary Western Europe."¹³ Another writer who had never been to Russia, the Dutch theologian and mathematician Albertus Pighius or Alberto Campense (1490-1542),¹⁴ wrote a letter to Pope Clement VII in 1524 in which he warned of the strength and size of Russia, suggesting that an alliance with Russia against the Ottomans might be an idea whose time had come. He also thought that the Russian Orthodox Church could be helpful with the Counter-Reformation.¹⁵ Campense's father and brother, however, had both been to Russia, which probably gave his letter some reflected authority.¹⁶ Jacob Piso, an Italian who worked as a Papal diplomat as well as for the king of Poland, was another writer very hostile to Russia who had never been there, but he has the distinction of being the first person to call the tsar's government "tyrannical."¹⁷ Finally, there was Christian Bomhover, a Teutonic knight from Livonia, who wrote the first book wholly dedicated to Russia, *Eynne schonne hystorie van vadelyken gescheffthen der heren tho lyfflanth myth den Rüssen unde Tataren* (1508), another hostile treatise, again by a man who had never set a foot in the land he was attacking so vehemently. These writers, according to Felicity Stout, "represented the land as decidedly un-Christian, cruel and barbaric, Asian as opposed to

¹³ Marshall T. Poe, ed. *Early Exploration of Russia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10, 142. Giovio's book was translated into English by Richard Eden (1555) and included in his *Decades of the newe worlde or West India* (see below).

¹⁴ His Italian name was derived from his birthplace of Kampen in The Netherlands; his actual surname was Pigghe.

¹⁵ See Marshall T. Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern Ethnography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 12.

¹⁶ *Lettera d' A. C. che scrivo a l beatissimo Padre Clemente VII intorno cose di Moscovia* (1524, published 1543). See also Poe, *Early Exploration*, 10, 142.

¹⁷ Piso's account, *Die Schlacht von dem kunig Poln. und mit dem Moscowiter gescheen am tag Marie gepurt* (1514) is discussed by Poe, *Born to Slavery*, 21-22 and n. 29. Piso also wrote Latin verses in which he criticised Russian aggression.

European, and some even suggested that the Russians were in league with the Turks and Tartars to destroy Christianity" (*Exploring Russia*, 135), which explains the reference to Tatars in Bomhover's title.

Some early journeys were part of much larger forays into unknown territories other than Russia, and many were diplomatic; ambassadors from the Holy Roman Empire, for instance, were first sent to the court of Ivan III (r.1462-1505) in 1488-89, their "first envoy" being the previously-mentioned Nicholas Poppel,¹⁸ and, conversely, representatives from Russia were present at the marriage of the future emperor Maximilian I to Bianca Sforza in 1493. A few years before them (1476), the Venetian diplomat Ambrogio Contarini had stopped in Moscow on his way back from Persia, and was granted an audience with Ivan III. He has the distinction of being the first person to write about the customs, clothing and religion of the Russians, and in general takes a fairly hostile tone towards them.¹⁹ In 1506 Maxim the Greek, a monk from Mount Athos, went to Moscow "to translate various Byzantine texts into Russian," but fell afoul of the Orthodox Church and was thrown into prison, where he remained for thirty years (Mayers, *North-East Passage*, 113).²⁰

Perhaps the most important traveller nearer to the times discussed here was Baron Sigismund von Herberstein (1486-1566), whose book on Russia might well be considered the template for later accounts, and indeed was read and imitated by several English travellers after Turberville, including Horsey himself and Giles Fletcher.²¹ Indeed, as Poe states, "both the letter and the spirit of Herberstein's seminal book were borrowed by later writers, almost always without acknowledgment" (*Born to Slavery*, 7). Herberstein was a nobleman whose family was from Slovenia, which explained why he was so fluent in Russian, a cognate language to his own. As he says himself in his preface, "having the advantage of knowing the Sclavonic language, which is identical to the Russian," he was able to write down his experiences

¹⁸ Donald W. Treadgold, *The West in Russia and China: Religious and Secular Thought in Modern Times*, Vol 1, *Russia 1472-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 4. Poppel offered his services to Ivan III as a mediator with the Emperor if Ivan desired to be made a king. Ivan declined.

¹⁹ Contarini's account of Russia is contained in Chapter 8 of his *Viaggio al signor Usun Hassan re di Persia* (1487).

²⁰ Maxim the Greek (c.1475-1556), born Michael Trivolis, ended up in Russia because the person originally wanted by Vasily III as a translator was too old to travel so far. He was eventually accused of heresy, imprisoned and then exiled to Tver in 1531, where he remained for twenty years.

²¹ The remarks about the cannibalism of the Samoyeds were probably taken from Herberstein. See Sigismund von Herberstein, *Notes upon Russia*, ed. and trans. R.H. Major (London: Hakluyt Society, 1851), 2, 29.

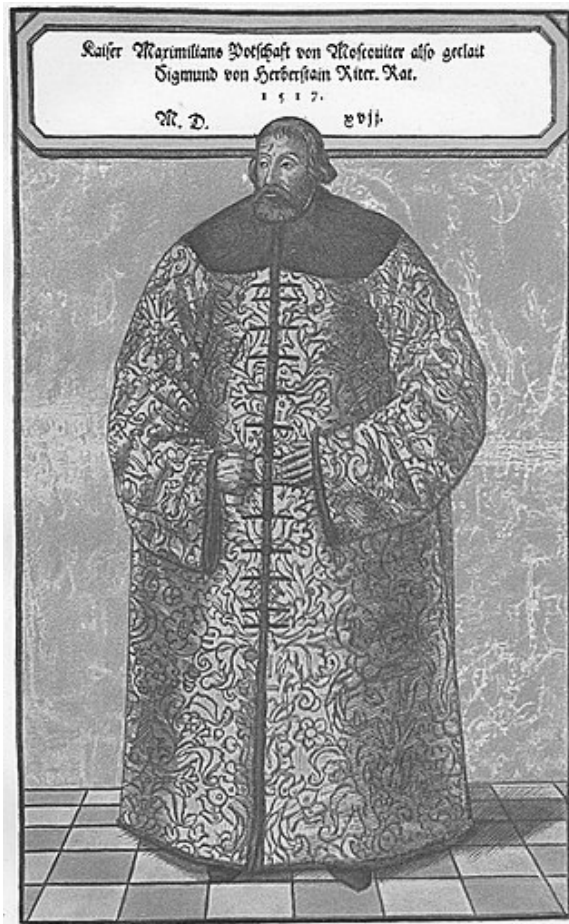
“not with any disguises in my description, but openly and freely.” (*Notes*, 1, 1).

Herberstein was twice (1516-18 and 1526) in Russia as ambassador, first from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I and then from Ferdinand I of Bohemia (later Emperor); his attractively-illustrated book was published in Latin (1549), followed by two further Latin editions (1551, 1556), with a full English translation finally appearing in 1576.²² It covered many subjects, including history, geography, religion, trade, agriculture and the state of the Russian army, as well as discussing how foreign ambassadors were treated and a description of Moscow and the court of Vasily III, father of Ivan IV. Like his successors, Herberstein found much in the country that shocked and dismayed him, such as married priests (he was himself Catholic, of course), the fact that the ruler, he felt, was a tyrant, and that the Russian people seemed almost contented to be treated like slaves. “The people are miserable,” he says, “and oppressed with heavy servitude” (*Notes*, 1, 94). Russian justice was another unpleasant surprise: “all justice is venal,” Herberstein wrote, “and that without much concealment” (*Notes*, 1, 106).²³

Herberstein, like Fletcher and Horsey after him, was also concerned to let the Russians know that his ruler was just as important as theirs, and to this end he deliberately omitted to observe some of the endless rules and regulations of conduct expected of him at official receptions, banquets and audiences, an omission repeated by Giles Fletcher. Nonetheless, it was “from him,” as Francesca Wilson states, that “the Continent took its stock notions of Russia, which lasted for hundreds of years” (*Muscovy*, 20), so much so that even in the accounts of Fletcher and Horsey it is sometimes difficult to determine what came directly from them and what they set down from their reading of Herberstein. His was the first substantial European account of Russia; Baedeker-like, his book accompanied other travellers either literally or figuratively on their sojourns in Russia, contributed to their

²² Richard Eden had issued a translation of parts of Herberstein’s book after the return of Chancellor. It is discussed by Mund (“Discovery,” 354-56). Mund also tells us that Eden was the “first English humanist who made known Western description of Russia to his compatriots” (363).

²³ In reference to “slavery,” Marshall Poe has pointed out that Russians “knew the difference between the ceremonial “slavery” implied by the language of salutation and the actual slavery that existed elsewhere in Muscovy.” It is quite possible that Western observers misinterpreted this finer point. For details, see Marshall A. Poe, “What did Russians mean when they called themselves ‘slaves of the Tsar?,”” *Slavic Review* 57 (1998): 583-608, here 587.



Sigismund von Herberstein in Russian dress, 1517. Public Domain.

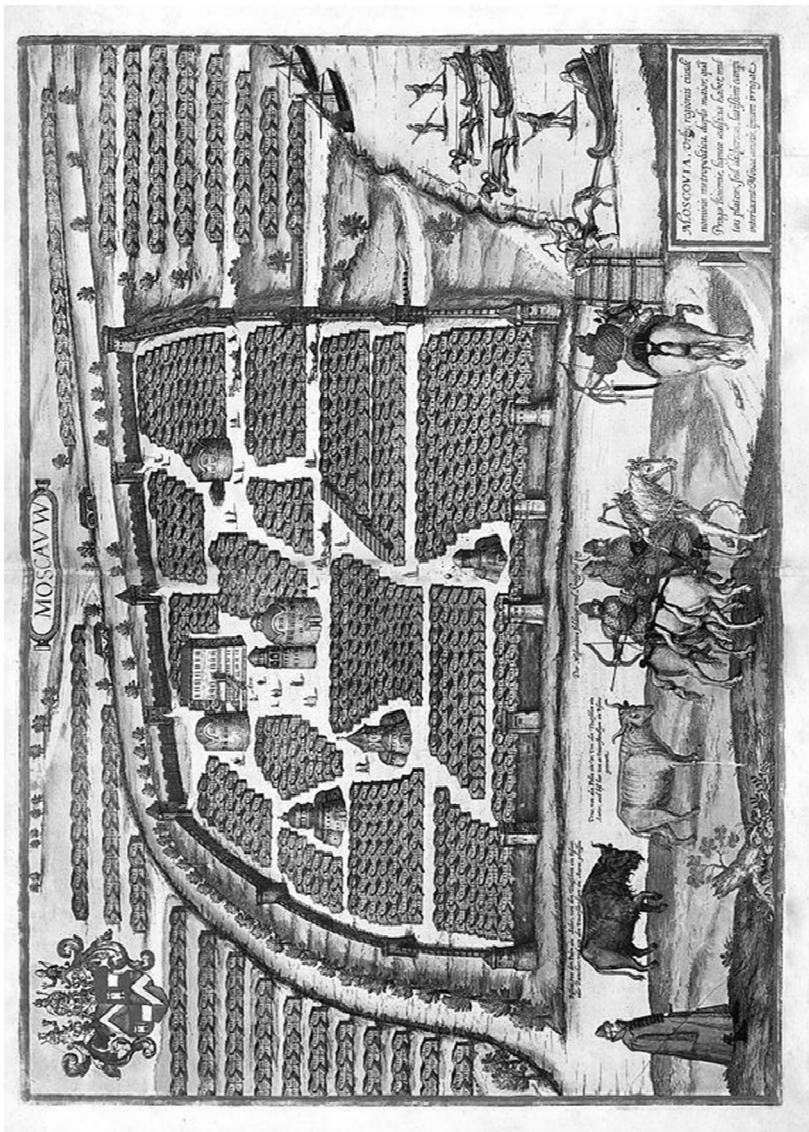
preconceived notions of Russia,²⁴ and, as Turberville had suggested, it was the place to look if one wanted the “truth” about Russia. For Herberstein, as we can see from the few examples quoted above, the truth was mostly negative, and his book was often, as in Turberville’s case, cited to justify the negative view of Russia acquired by other foreign visitors. They

²⁴ See, for example, Samuel H. Baron, “Herberstein and the English “Discovery” of Russia,” *Terrae Incognitae* 18 (1986): 43-54.

remained convinced of the superiority of their religion, laws, government and manners, an attitude which would last for a very long time. The marquis Astolphe de Custine, for example, writing as late as 1839, firmly believed in the superiority of French religion, government and culture; as Wilson notes, “Custine thought of the Russians as without a literature, without art and as merely vapid copiers of the West, absolute slaves of their absolute monarch [Nicholas I], not daring to have a thought of their own” (*Muscovy*, 218). Even as great a writer as Pushkin was dismissed by Custine as derivative and second-rate. Unlike Fletcher, Herberstein and Horsey, the marquis didn’t even need to learn Russian, as by his time everyone he met (almost exclusively aristocracy) spoke perfectly good French.

However, it might be well to keep in mind Paul Bowles’s astute observation that “the subject-matter of the best travel books is the conflict between writer and place. It does not matter which of them carries the day, so long as the struggle is faithfully-recorded,”²⁵ a remark that holds true as much as for Herberstein, Horsey or Fletcher as it does for Custine. Every travel-writer, it might be said, has some “conflict between writer and place,” and with someone like Turberville it shows up quite readily. He didn’t want to be in Russia and was not prepared to give the country any chance whatsoever, and Custine, with his disdain for Russian culture based on his own sense of French superiority, was no different. As Marshall Poe remarks, it is true that “in order to understand what the Europeans thought about Russia, one must take into account the nature of their mental furnishings” (*Born to Slavery*, 7). Given these caveats, it is possible to read all of these writers and learn something from them, although sometimes, as is often the case with a strong personality like Horsey, the account may seem more like autobiography or self-fashioning than an objective examination of the author’s experiences or observations. Giles Fletcher, the (mostly) dispassionate scholar-poet, may well be a “better” observer than Horsey in the sense that he is not as directly involved in the events he described, and is, as a narrator, far more self-effacing and objective, but even he demonstrates his “mental furnishings,” with his disapproval of Russian society and government. The conflict is still there.

²⁵ Paul Bowles, “The Challenge to Identity,” in *Travels: Collected Writings 1950-1993* (New York: Harper Collins), 240.



The earliest map of Moscow. From the second Latin edition of Sigismund von Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticum commentarii* (1556). Public Domain.

Russia and England: Early Contacts before Horsey

The earliest mention of Russia in English literature was once thought to be in the Prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c.1392), when the narrator introduces the Knight. "In Lettow [Lithuania] had he reysed and in Ruce,/ No cristen man so ofte of his degree" (l. 54-55), Chaucer tells us, which implies not simply that this particular knight had been to 'Ruce', but that others had been there, too, although not as many times. However, as William Urban has persuasively shown, no English knights have ever been identified as being in Russia, and 'Ruce' more likely refers to Rossenia, a small geographical area of Samogitia (now in Lithuania) situated between Livonia and Prussia, which was raided by the Teutonic Knights in 1390.²⁶ It may well be that Chaucer's knight had served as some kind of mercenary and had taken part in that action, but it is unlikely that he had been anywhere near Russia itself. Any contact Englishmen had with Russia or knowledge of it probably came indirectly, through the medium of merchants from the Hanseatic League,²⁷ which had been trading through Novgorod since the fourteenth century. The League had its depots in major German cities such as Lübeck and in many other centres, including London, and as early as 1486 we find one "Nicholas Poppel from Breslau" visiting Moscow on their behalf.²⁸

In Chaucer's time, apart from merchants' tales, Russia was virtually unknown, a situation that did not change much until the end of the sixteenth century, although a number of travellers had been there. It has been argued that even then, Russia was still "exotic" in the minds of most English people, not because they didn't know anything about it, but because what they did know suggested that it was vastly different from their own country in size, religion, social structure, government and the way the Russians lived. Simply put, Russians were perceived to be as different from Englishmen as the Chinese were. The Protestant Englishman, coming into actual contact with the Orthodox Church, "stored with monks and nuns and priests on every side," as George Turberville put it, would have found it not simply strange, but heretical, full of rituals and feast-days which might have reminded him of the bad old days of Catholicism. He would also have been

²⁶ William Urban, "When was Chaucer's Knight in 'Ruce'?" *Chaucer Review* (1984): 347-53, here 348.

²⁷ Originally founded in 1356, the Hanseatic League, a kind of conglomerate, consisted of over one hundred German cities and towns whose power was not just mercantile. It even fought and won a war with Denmark (1367-70), and through the Treaty of Straslund obtained major trade privileges in northern regions.

²⁸ Kit Mayers, *North-East Passage to Muscovy: Stephen Borough and the First Tudor Explorations* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 113.

deeply disturbed by the tyrannical power of the Russian ruler, who wielded life or death in a display of autocratic absolutism unheard-of in most parts of Europe, and all visitors commented on the seemingly oppressed state of Russia's desperately poor peasants and common people. These kinds of observations by people who had been there were soon transmuted into stereotypes by those who hadn't, as we shall see later. Visitors learned to expect barbarity and ignorance, especially from the common people in Russia, who were often dismissed as little more than savages.

What Russia offered England on the purely practical side was the opportunity for trade, and English merchants were well aware of the possibilities. Michael Lok or Locke (c.1532-1621), a wealthy and well-travelled merchant who had been one of the backers of Sir Martin Frobisher's first voyage (1576) to seek a Northwest passage, wrote in 1575 that "the naturall comodities" of Russia were "in abundance," and that they consisted of "fysshe of divers kynds, salte, trayne oylle,²⁹ buffe hydes, cow hydes, tallow, fures of all kynds, iron, pitche, tarre, shipmaste and tymber, hemepe, cables and ropes for shippes and other marchandise." Lok also suggested that "the colde and rytche countries of Russia and Moschovia have great neade of the warme wollen comodities of England,"³⁰ apparently in spite of the fact that they themselves, as Lok himself stated, produced ample quantities of furs. For Russia, there were also benefits apart from trade and warm clothing; acceptance or recognition by other Christian nations, and possible maritime allies in the wars which its rulers frequently conducted against neighbouring northern powers such as Sweden and Denmark, or against Poland.

The history of the Muscovy or Russia Company had begun in 1553, when a group of London merchants combined to finance Chancellor's voyage to find a north-east passage to China (Cathay)³¹ and to open new markets in Asia for English goods, particularly cloth. Its first governor was Sebastian Cabot, the son of the explorer John Cabot. In 1555, on 26 February, a "Charter of the Marchaunts of Russia, graunted upon the discoverie of the said Countrey by King Philipe and Queene Marye" was issued.

²⁹ Fish oil. Oddly enough, this term may still be found used in Newfoundland.

³⁰ Michael Lok, "Certain notes touching the benefit that may grow to England by the traffyke of English marchaunts into Russia, through a fyrmie amytye between both the Prences" (Bond, ix-x), here x.

³¹ The idea of opening a north-east passage had been around since 1527, when Robert Thorne, a merchant from Bristol, sent two ships to look for a northern polar passage; one was lost and the other damaged. He could not arouse much financial interest from Henry VIII, so the idea of organising a larger expedition was shelved, and Thorne's death soon afterwards ended further attempts. Thorne did, however, publish a short treatise explaining his ideas which contained a map.

As we shall see, Ivan IV received the first English expedition under Richard Chancellor positively, and granted trading rights which in effect gave the English a virtual monopoly on Russian goods such as furs, tallow, wax, timber and other raw materials in exchange for English cloth. Ivan at first imposed no customs or tolls, officially even granting a monopoly in 1569; the English were not confined to coastal trading and they were allowed to go anywhere inland as well. It was, initially at any rate, what we might call a “sweetheart deal” as far as the Muscovy Company was concerned, and it lasted until Ivan’s death in 1584, after which the Company would have to fight for its monopolies and finally accept that other nations would be coming to trade with the Russians. Meanwhile, two buildings were rented by the Muscovy Company on Russian soil, one on Rose Island opposite St. Nicholas, the name being adapted by British writers and travellers after the botanist John Tradescant the Elder found a rare flower there in 1618 which he named *Rosa moscovita*.³² Another factory was acquired at Vologda, and by 1557 the Company had its own rope factory at Kholmogory (Mayers, *North-East Passage*, 118). In 1561 the Company acquired its first property in Moscow itself, where it remained until 1717, when it moved to Archangelsk.



The Seal of the Muscovy Company, 1555
Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain
The motto reads “Our refuge is in God.”

³² For details, see Prudence Leith-Ross, *The John Tradescants: Gardeners to the Rose and Lily Queen* (London: Peter Owen, 1984; rev. and rep. 2006), 58-75.

Much has been written about these early contacts between Russia and England, beginning with the voyage of Sir Hugh Willoughby (c.1495-1554) and Richard Chancellor (1521-1556) in 1553, sent by the Worshipful Company of Merchant Adventurers, and the corresponding “mythology” which grew up around this vast and varied land after a trading relationship was established and the Muscovy (or Russia) Company founded. John Milton much later wrote rather sneeringly in his posthumously-published *Brief History of Moscovia* (1682) that Chancellor’s voyage, “made first, of any nation that we know, might have seemed an enterprise almost heroic, if any higher end than the excessive love of gain and traffic had animated the design.”³³ Chancellor’s first voyage, which, *pace* Milton, was in fact rather an heroic enterprise and decidedly not the first (Arabs and Italians, for example, had been there), saw the beginning act of a long period of trade relations between the two countries. Following Chancellor’s second voyage, Muscovy Company employees would produce “no fewer than thirty-two travelogues on Muscovite Russia” in the succeeding years.³⁴

That first voyage could also be called an “accidental” voyage, in that Chancellor was actually seeking a northern route to the Indies in order to circumvent Spanish and Portuguese commercial competition, and was blown off-course after the other two ships under Willoughby in the ironically-named *Bona Speranza* were lost in the storm. According to Thomas Edge, a Muscovy Company merchant, those involved with this particular voyage had been “incited with the fame of the great mass of riches which the Portugals and Spaniards brought home yearly from both the Indies.”³⁵ Willoughby himself and his crew, according to some accounts, may have frozen to death on the island of Novaya Zemlya;³⁶ however, in

³³ John Milton, *Brief History of Moscovia*, in James Augustus St. John, ed. *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1868), 5, 418.

³⁴ Martin Aust, “Russia and Europe 1547-1917,” in *European History Online* (Mainz: Leibniz Institute of European History), 10. C. H. Willan observed that Chancellor’s voyage “may not have been a genuine discovery, for the [northern] route was known before, even if it was not used commercially” (*The Early History of the Russia Company, 1553-1603* [Manchester: Manchester University Press], 1956), 6.

³⁵ Thomas Edge, *A Brief Discovery of the Northern Discoveries*, in Purchas, 13, 5, cited by Mayer, *North-East Passage*, 17. Edge (c.1587-1624), who was also a whaler, had a career sailing around the area of Denmark and Greenland. His account was published by Samuel Purchas in 1625.

³⁶ Chancellor described the unfortunate Willoughby as “a most valiant gentleman and well-born” (Berry and Crumme, 11). He was a soldier and had fought in Scotland. Anthony Jenkinson noted in 1557 that he “passed by the place where Sir Hugh Willoughby with all his company perished, which is called. . . the river Arzina”

spite of this disaster, the expedition did manage to land the first Englishmen on Russian soil at St. Nicholas by the White Sea, a place a few years later (1568) described by Sir Thomas Randolph as “none more than about four houses near the abbey and another built by the English company for their own use” (Berry and Crummey, 66).

When he disembarked from his ship the *Edward Bonaventura*³⁷ onto Russian soil, Chancellor at first didn’t know where he was; no-one in London had said anything to him about Russia, so he never suspected that they had landed there. The first Russians they encountered were some fishermen, who were so frightened of the strangers (or perhaps of their large, well-armed ships) that “they. . . prostrated themselves before [Chancellor], offering to kiss his feet.” Chancellor, “according to his great and singular courtesy, looked pleasantly upon them, comforting them by signs and gestures” (Berry and Crummey, 18), and the Englishmen were soon made aware of the identity of their unintended destination. To what must have been their great relief, however, given what many of them might have heard about Russia, they were not mistreated at all, and when orders came from Tsar Ivan IV to bring the strangers to Moscow, to his further surprise Chancellor found himself and his men were suddenly metamorphosed into honoured guests. Far from ordering their imprisonment or death, Ivan was even quite considerate of their ordeal; “if by reason of the tediousness of so long a journey” they didn’t want to come to Moscow right away, he told them via his messengers, “he granted liberty to his subjects to bargain and traffic with them,” and he offered to pay for their transportation by post-horses when they were ready to journey to Moscow (Berry and Crummey, 19). This initially positive treatment as well as the considerate reaction from the Russian ruler may have contributed to the relative objectivity of Chancellor’s account of his experiences in Russia.

(Berry and Crummey, 50), in Lapland. However, the nature of Willoughby’s fate is by no means certain. There is, for example, a good case to be made for carbon monoxide poisoning, occasioned by the men blocking all access to fresh air to conserve heat and keep the cold out. See Eleanora Gordon, “The Fate of Sir Hugh Willoughby and his Companions: A New Conjecture,” *Geographical Journal* 152 (1986): 243-47. Willoughby’s own account of the voyage may be found in Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries* 2, 195-258; 3, 330-34.

³⁷ This ship was used by Chancellor and Borough in 1553, and after being refitted in England on its return, went to Russia and back again in 1555 (Johann Hamel, *England and Russia*, trans. John Studdy Leigh (London: Cass and Co., 1854, repr. London: British Library Historical Print Editions, 2011), 142.



Sir Hugh Willoughby. Artist unknown.
Public Domain.

Chancellor's voyage took place just at the end of the reign of Edward VI, letters from whom he presented to Ivan IV. Edward, however, had died on 6 July, 1553; Chancellor was already in Russia when the nine-days reign (10-19 July) of Lady Jane Grey came and went, followed by Mary I's accession amid political, religious and popular turmoil that would continue for most of her five-year reign. However, it is sometimes forgotten that there were other things going on in the reign of Mary than the burning of Protestants, the loss of the port of Calais and the Queen's unpopular marriage to Philip II of Spain, the ruler of the country with the greatest overseas empire in the early modern world. Chancellor's stay in Russia was one of these; he tells us that he recognised that "the wealth of the Spaniards and Portuguese by the discovery and search of new trades countries was

marvellously increased,” (Berry and Crummey, 9) and that therefore England might do well to emulate them. Chancellor included discussions of Russian law, religion, military strength and the emperor, as well as a fairly detailed chapter on Moscow, short descriptions of some major cities, and some references to such matters as clothing and houses, although, as Berry and Crummey note, overall he “paid relatively little attention to the details of the average man’s life” (7).

And so began the rather unromantic story of England’s “discovery” of Russia—the romance, stereotypes and mythology would come soon enough, and by the time Jerome Horsey came upon the scene these aspects of the English interpretation of Russia were already establishing themselves in the national conscience, as the following examples indicate. The most-quoted instance of Englishmen stereotyping Russians as dim-witted barbarians may be found in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost* (1597), where the Navarrese courtiers “apparell’d thus/ Like Muscovites or Russians,” try to impress the ladies. “Vouchsafe to show the sunshine of your face,” says Biron (whose name, coincidentally, could actually have been Russian) to Rosalind, “That we, like savages, may worship it.” The Princess, after saying good-bye with “Twenty adieus, my frozen Muscovites,” turns to her companions after they have left and says “Are these the breed of wits so wonder’d at?”³⁸ Richard Chancellor, in spite of his admiration for the tsar’s palace and the splendour of his court, nevertheless called the people themselves “barbarous Russes” (Berry and Crummey, 18), and Giles Fletcher told Queen Elizabeth in the Epistle Dedicatory to his *Of the Russe Commonwealth* a few years later that Russia presented the “true and strange face of a tyrannical state (most unlike to your own), without true knowledge of God, without written law, without common justice” (Bond, n.p.n). And George Turberville, who never minced words, declared that “Wild Irish are as civil as the Russies [*sic*] in their kind” (Berry and Crummey, 84).

Chancellor arrived in Russia at a time when Ivan IV had already been on the throne for twenty years. He was to remain on it for another thirty-one, an unusually long reign of fifty-four years, during which time he would make himself the first Tsar or Emperor of Russia (1547), and acquire the

³⁸ William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labours Lost*, V, 2, ll. 120-21, 202-03, 266-67. The “Russians” are accompanied in the scene by another stereotype, dancing “blackamoors,” who contribute to the exoticism. Several of Shakespeare’s contemporaries also mention Russia; for example, the daughters of the Russian emperor feature prominently in Robert Greene’s *Pandosto* (1588) and Thomas Lodge’s *A Marguerite of America* (1596) begins with scenes set in Muscovy.

nickname "Ivan the Terrible." He would make Russia known to the outside world, and while his domestic policy veered between wise decisions and



St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow, 1544. Artist Unknown. Public Domain.

indescribable cruelty towards his own subjects, Ivan certainly succeeded in making his country the most powerful nation in the Baltic area, conquering large parts of it and adding them to the impressive list of imperial titles which all ambassadors were made to cite when addressing the Tsar. Ivan's reign was punctuated by endless wars, multiple marriages, massacres, forcible removal of large populations and even a very temporary abdication. The historian Simon Sebag Montefiore, reviewing Isabel de Madariaga's biography of the tsar in the *Evening Standard*, aptly called him "a staggeringly degenerate monster who was both an appallingly sadistic criminal and a pathetically tragic victim of power," a view which was, at least in part, shared by many of Ivan's contemporaries and which reinforced later stereotypes. At one point we find Ivan, perhaps in a moment of either

self-awareness or panic, seriously contemplating taking refuge in England if his people ever managed to overthrow him, and there was even a rumour (unfounded, it turned out) that he would like to marry Queen Elizabeth. He was consistent, however, in seeing England as a useful northern power, one he could perhaps ally himself with against other northern countries such as Sweden and Denmark, with both of whom he fought on-again-off-again wars, all the time trying to play them off against each other.

For his first English visitor, Ivan had arranged a great deal of pomp and ceremony, complete with presentations of pageants, many-coursed feasts and solemn religious rituals, all of which Chancellor faithfully recorded in his account, and which contributed to his feeling like an honoured ambassador. Chancellor duly marvelled at the splendour of Ivan's court with its "very royal" throne and "a very honourable company of courtiers all apparelled in cloth of gold down to their ankles" (Berry and Crummey, 23). Chancellor was also complimentary about the army and the way the Russian judicial system worked; this last was something noted by many other English visitors including Giles Fletcher and Horsey himself. It was fast and it was efficient, if sometimes harsh even by English standards. He was suitably impressed by Moscow, or at least its size, but he seems to have found it rather disorganised, "built out of order and with no handsomeness," as he put it, and for him it lacked the "beauty and fairness" of London. Chancellor was there before the great fire of 1571, and when we read his account of Moscow it was indeed a great and vibrant city, full of wooden houses (as was London), but "their streets and ways are not paved with stone as ours are" (23). He managed to get himself on the good side of the tsar, who entrusted him in 1556 to escort Osip Grigoryevich Nepeya to England as Russia's first official ambassador, and they duly embarked for England from the port of Vologda on what was to be a fateful voyage for Chancellor.

Chancellor's account is important because it was the earliest in English, and because it set a pattern or template for most subsequent English writers on Russia to emulate or at least use as a guide; as Berry and Crummey note, "he gained a rather accurate picture of the country and its people and achieved a remarkable understanding of the forces shaping the society" (5). He was also, as Isabel de Madariaga pointed out, "in many ways less prejudiced than later English envoys from the Russia Company" (121), although after describing Russian burial-customs, for example, he decides they are "the foolish and childish dotages of such ignorant barbarians" (Berry and Crummey, 38). He appears to have dictated his book to one Clement Adams (1519-1587), a schoolmaster; Richard Eden, writing in 1555, tells us that Chancellor's account was "faithfully written in the Laten

tongue by that lerned young man Clement Adams, scole master to the Queen's henshemmen, as he received it at the mouthe of the said Richard



The "very royal" ivory throne of Ivan IV. Photograph by Stan Shebs.
Public Domain.

Chancellor"³⁹ Adams, who augmented Chancellor's account with some of his own material, even included a long paean to Chancellor's courage and

³⁹ Richard Eden, trans. *The Decades of the New World*, cited in Richard W. Cogley, "The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation of all the World": Giles Fletcher the Elder's *The Tartars Or Ten Tribes* (ca. 1610)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005): 781-814, here 783. Eden's book was a translation of Peter Martyr's *De orbis novo decades*

determination and an account of the foundation of the Muscovy Company, to which he belonged. Chancellor was, unfortunately, drowned off the coast of Scotland upon his return from his second voyage; Osip Nepeya, however, managed to swim to safety, eventually get hold of a horse and ride to London, where he was received by Mary and Philip.

Chancellor's colleague Stephen Borough (1525-1584), who had been with him on the 1553 voyage, made two subsequent journeys of his own in 1556 and 1557 to look for a north-east passage. The voyages were equipped by Sebastian Cabot, who ceased to be the governor of the Muscovy Company in 1557, and by John Dee, the eminent mathematician and astrologer, a former employee of the Company. Borough's importance lay in his being the first Englishman to land on the northern archipelago of Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic Ocean and encounter the reputedly fierce and pagan Samoyed people. Borough wrote about his meeting with the Samoyeds, whom he believed, along with others after him, to have once been cannibals, because the Russians had told him so, but "they appear to have been gentle enough, bringing the newcomers wild geese and white bearskins," but he still, however, "thought of them with terror" (Wilson, *Muscovy*, 46).⁴⁰ Borough also could claim to have been one of the earliest Englishmen to learn Russian. "It is clear," A. E. Pennington wrote, "that by 1556 Stephen Borough knew some Russian, as he communicates with the Lapps in that language,"⁴¹ and he even put together a word-list of the Lapp language (now known as Sami), the first of its kind.⁴² The Russians apparently told Giles Fletcher the same thing about the Samoyeds years

(1511). Eden (c.1520-1576) also translated parts of Sigismund von Herberstein's book (see below).

⁴⁰ This was because Chancellor and his men had been talking to Loshak, captain of one of the fishing-boats, who told them that the Samoyeds "will shoot all men to the uttermost of their power, that cannot speak their speech" and elaborated on their various gruesome habits, use of witchcraft and pagan sacrifices. For details, see Mayers, *North-East Passage*, 84-85.

⁴¹ A. E. Pennington, "A Sixteenth-Century English Slavist," *Modern Languages Review* 62 (1967): 680-86, here 680.

⁴² For details, see John Abercromby, "The Earliest List of Russian Lapp Words," *Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja* 13 (1895): 1-10, repr. in Roderick McConchie, ed. *Ashgate Critical Essays on Early English Lexicographers*, Vol. 3: *The Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2017), Chapter 25. On Borough's knowledge of Russian, see Mayers, *North-East Passage*, 80. We might add here that George Turberville, writing his verse-letters in 1569, inserted some Russian words into his verse, for example, "Aloft their shirts they wear a garment jacketwise/ Hight *odnoriadka*, and about his burly waist he ties/ His *portki*, which instead of better breeches be" (Berry and Crummey, 81).