

A Letter Dated 1577 from Mercator to John Dee

By E. G. R. TAYLOR, London

In a previous paper¹ the present writer described the efforts of John Dee to reform the map of North-east Asia, as recorded in his *Volume of Great and Rich Discoveries*.² The final chapter of this manuscript has the following title: "That all these Northern Isles and Septentrional Parts are lawfully appropriated to the Crown of this Brytish Empire: and the terrible adventure and great loss of the Brytish people and other of King Arthur his subjects perishing about the first discovery thereof. And the placing of Colonies in the same Isles and Regions by the same King Arthur. And an entire and general Description of all the part of the world within 12 degrees of the North Pole and somewhat more."

But in spite of this promising summary of what was to come, we find only a short account of how Dee set to work to collect information, followed by a transcript of the brief and disjointed notes sent him by Mercator. These notes are made even more difficult to follow by the fact that Dee's manuscript has been badly damaged by fire, so that there are many lacunae. Yet the notes—partly in old Dutch and partly in Latin—are of great interest, and so an attempt has been made to render their meaning by a rather free translation. But, as will appear, they raise anew several problems which still defy solution, and which will be discussed at the end of the transcript and translation. Dee dates this part of his manuscript June 8, 1577, but unfortunately he made no entry in his private diary³ for that day. He was however evidently very short of money at the time, for within the next fortnight he records borrowing a total of £ 87 from three individuals, in one case giving a gold chain as security. He would no doubt expect to recoup himself by gifts from patrons to whom the manuscript was to be shown.

TRANSCRIPT FROM COTTON MS. VITELLIUS C. VII (Folio 264 v. et seqq.)

And this matter of Discovery in hand, and chiefly of these most Northerly Countries and Isles, hath caused me (since the last yere) to send into divers places beyond the sea, and to mee there in our age rightfully [esteemed, to wit to the] / honest Philosopher and Mathematician, Gerardus Mercator and to that learned Geographer Abrahamus Ortelius / whose company also (syns my first *lettres* sent over) I / have had of late in my poore howse at Mortlake: / And of the other (in my youth) sufficient Record / is published of our great

familiarity. And the chief / pith of this Chapter will testify the honest and / philosophicall Regarde that he had, of my earnest / request to him. In as much as, speedily he / returned the very principal Authority whereupoo / he fashioned unto us that strange plat⁴ of / the Septentrional Islands /. That thereby our mee / (Adventurers and Discoverers) might understand, what / account is to be made, or what Credit is to be / given to the same Description. This then *with* / other matter, I receyved from him lately:-

A^o. 1577
apr. 20

Fol. 265 v.
April 20. 1577.

Clarissimo Viro D. Joannis Dee., Domino / et fautori suo plurimū colendo. / In aedibus Mortlacensibus juxta Tamesim / prope Londinū.

To the most famous Dr John Dee, his Master and much esteemed Patron.
At Mortlake oo the Thames, near London.
With three enclosures.

Clausis tri-/

¹ *Imago Mundi*, XII, pp. 103-106.

² Cotton MS. Vitellius C. VII.

³ J. O. Halliwell, *The Private Diary of John Dee* (1842).

⁴ Reconstructed phrases are placed in brackets. Reconstructed words in italics.

⁵ Fig. 2. Part of Mercator's map of 1569.



Fig. 1. THE NORTHERN PORTION OF DEE'S MAP OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, 1580
(From the MS. Cotton, Augustus Li. I., British Museum, London)

[fol. 266 r.] (lines wanting) mittere. Metuens ne tam cito quam tibi ... / erit, eadem transmittere non daretur. Scripsi / omnia quae de situ Septentrionalis habes, et his Cr.... / gavil &c.

Jacobus Cnoyen.

Jacobus Cnoyen van Tserdoghenbosche orbem peragravit, ut Mandevillanus sed meliore / judicio visa anootavit; Scripsit Belgica lingua. / Quae ante in eo ad Regiones Septentrionales sententia inveni sic (ut sequitur) ad verbum exactum/. Nisi quod quaedam brevitate, et accelerandi / Latine reddidi, si non semper verbum / sententia tamen reposui.

* Note that it is by / experience found that / nere the North Pole / in the very dead of winter tyme is a continual glimring / twilight at the least. The / farder help of light of / the Mones recourse / above their horizon / being not mentioned.

** atr. recepten. The most western / bound of the / great Cham his / land.

* Groeland to / me seemeth to be our Groelande.

... story /
... matter is: 8
... is there, /
... is but small /
... and yet in /
... news very true /
... of truth were /
... to receive /
... call or Poeticall /
... yet to the vulgar Readers or Hearers / Wyth pleasure & /

... Gestae / Arturi. A rare / testimony of great importance to the Brytish / title to the Septentrional Regions / Atlantis in particular

* Which Seas we call the Indrawing Seas.

Marvelous high / mountains.

* Some parte of Groeland doth stand betwene / thels Bowndes

* A kenning was 17-20 miles.

In Nortnorwegen, dat men dat duyster Norwegen / heet, ist tree maenden achter een donker, [geen] / sonneschijn, maer altift Dageraet.* Dit Norwegen leet legen over tconincrijk dat men heet / Provinciel van Obscur, latine Provincia Tenebrosa / Daer achter af staet nit in Mareus van ... / gien gechriften. En dit Obscur is ... / conincrijk van Cams lant. End tusschen / duyster Nortwegen ende Obscur, en is maer 12** milen Zees.

In Nortnorwegen en mach men niet commen* onder / Zughender Zee wille, die achter Groclant leet / Wantet noch vorder Nordwaert leet/. Dit Nortnorwegen comt tot aen tgeberchte dat / ront om gaet, om Septentrionem en het paelt / aen desen gheberchte mit, 17. Fransche mijlen / lants, anders ist all zee. Ende dit is dat geberchte da / [fol. 266 v.] (line wanting) lant / ontrent. 15. Franschen mijlen; et distat inde ad Orientalem partem. Ende hier teghen wonnen binnen / septentrion dat Clein Volck, daer oock in / Arturus Gesten of staet. Ende oock paelter / aen een schoon offen landt. Ende dit land leet / tusschen de Provincie van Obscur, eode van de / Provincie van Bergl, Maer tusschen elck van disen / Provincien, ende desen landen, leet een Zu-ghende Zee. Ende dese Provincie paele aen desen / gheberchte mit .72. Fransche mijlen lants. / Haec et plura de situ septentrionalis inveniuntur in / Principio Gestorum Arturi. etc. / Olim Insulae Septentriones sublectae, vocabantur / Cilliae, [forté Tyleae] nunc Septentrionales: in quibus Septentrio- / nalis Norwegia, et multi parvi Fluvii: som/twee, som een, som drie Kenningen evist, of / meer of min. ende sijn geheeste die / Zughende Zee, om* dattet water altoos so sterck / na septention loopt, dat gheenen wint en can een / Scip daer boghen doen op seilen. Ende hier ist / al ijce, van October tot Meert. Ende in dese / Latitud liggen hooghe gheberchten tot in de / Wolken: ende meest al ombegroeiide rootsen. / Ende meest altoos ist onder deser latitud mistich / ende doncker weder &c. En men weet / wel dat tusschen .70 ende .78. graet van lati / tud,

[fol. 266 r.] (lines missing) ... to send. Fearing it would not reach you quickly enough if transmission were delayed. I have written down everything you have about the Northern Regions. and to these ... etc.

Jacobus Cnoyen of Herzogenbusch travelled the world like Mandeville but described what he saw with better judgment. He wrote in the Belgic language. The ideas about the Northern Regions which some time ago I extracted from him follow word for word save where for the sake of brevity or speed I have translated into Latin when if not always his words I have retained his meaning.

In North Norway, which is called Dusky Norway, there are three months of darkness during which there is no sunlight but a perpetual twilight. This North Norway lies over against the country called the Province of Darkness (or Obscure Province); in Latin Provincia Tenebrosa. Concerning it, however, there is nothing written in Marco [Polo]. And this Province of Darkness is [the most western bound] of the Grand Cham's land. And between this Province and Dusky Norway there is only 12 miles of sea.

From North Norway you cannot reach the Indrawing Sea, which lies beyond Groeland. For it lies still further northward. This North Norway stretches as far as the mountain range which encompasses the north pole, and borders on this mountain range for about 17 miles by land; the rest is all sea. And this is the same mountain range which [fol. 266 v.] (? comes close) within about 15 French miles and then stands further off towards the East. And near here, towards the north, those Little People live of whom there is also mention in the Gestae Arthuri. And there borders on it besides a beautiful open land. And this land lies between the Province of Darkness and the Province of Bergl. But between each of these Provinces and these lands lies an Indrawing Sea. And this Province (? the open land) has a mountain border of over 72 French miles by land. These facts and more about the geography of the North are to be found in the beginning of the Gestae Arthuri etc.

The islands adjacent to the North Pole were formerly called Cilliae (perhaps Thule), and now the Septentrionales: among them is North Norway. And there are many small rivers, some two, some one, some three kennings⁴ wide, more or less: and they are called "indrawing seas" because the current always flows northwards so strongly that no wind can make a ship sail back against it. And here it is all ice from October to March. And in these latitudes the mountains reach up to the clouds, and are almost all rock bare of vegetation. And it is almost always misty and dull weather. And it is well known that beyond

mentio-/ned, and yet
habitable / and inhabited.
Perhaps, / at that time
was none, / there inhabitant:
/ and the North
Cape of / Norway doth
lye in 71½ / whereabouts,
now, is good habitation /

* King Arthur his /
conquest of all the /
North Ilands. / *fortè*
heeren 4000 of King
Ar/thurs subjects con-
sumed with the Indraw-
ing seas.

** A°. Dñi. 1364 / .8.
men, being of the /
generation of them /
which went in King
Arthur his tyme: / to
these places discovering /

*** *fortè*, 25. / gradu.
I mean in / the 25
generatioo, at the / least,
after King Arthur / his
tyme allowing longer
Ages, thao now the
gene/rall rate is: at
betwene / 25 & 30 yeres
to a generation.

Note the Colonies sent /
by King Arthur into /
all the north Islands /
and by oame into Groc-
land, which I yet suppose
to be / the same which is
otherwise ancletotly called
Groenlaod / aod of that
you had the word before
owt of the *bake*. De
Priscis Anglorum
Legibus. /
* Geants in Groclandt /
abowt a thousand / yeres
sins. /

... *newes*: /
... be su- /
... Report /
... Drowning: /
aod proper / to be
declared /

* Arthur sendeth / people
to inhabit ye / isles,
wherof all=*most* half
perished / ..ted. /

aliter 64

To wit / the 34 yere / of

* The date has beeo inserted over a blank space in the text.

geen habitatio* eo is van menschen. Maer /
dese .78. graet van latitud gaen als een Circ- /
kel ront om Polus Arcticus: Als nñ hooge
ghe / berchten.

[fol. 267 r.] (line wanting) ... *Nordeo* /
deel van coninck Arturus heer ... / die
Nordeylanden bewocht en hem alte* maer /
daoich maecte. Ende men leest dat hem den /
Zugheode Zeen hij de 4000. volks ontrocken /
die noit weder en quaemen. Maer A° / 1364,
quamen 8: van** desen personē io *Norwegen*
tot / deo coninck. Ioter quos duo sacerdotes:
quorum / uous habebat *Astrolabiū*. qui
quoto*** gradu *descen*-/derat ex *Bruxellensi*:
uno inquam .8. Ge ... ha- / rñ, qui cñ
primis *Navibus* penetraverunt in / *Regiones*
Septentioales: /

Dat groet heer van Arturus hadde (A°/530)⁷
alle den winter ghelegen in de *Norteylanden* /
vao Scotland. End een deel daraf / over io
Islaot. 3. Maij. Doen waren daer / uten
Norden comen. 4. scepen vande vorseide
landt. / Ende warschouden Arturum van die
Zugende / *Zeen*. So dat Arturus deer niet
ghccoemen es / maer beeft alle die
eylandco tusschen Scotland & / *Islant*, eo oock
Groclaoit gepopuleert: (*Videt* / ergo di *Zuzeode*
Zee solum lociper ultra / *Grocland*). In hit
Grocland vant hij volcke lanck. 23.* voet, daer
men lande mede meet.

Ubi reversae fuissent. 4. *Naves illae*, erant
Nau/tae qui affirmarent se scire *ubi esseot*
Magnetini. /

[fol. 267 v.] (line wanting) .1800. vires, et
circiter .400. mulieres. Versus sep-/tentrione
oavigant. 3. Maij anno proximo qua pri/ores
Naves discessissent, *Atque harū* ..12. *Navirū*
.5. / per tempestatum impegerunt io *Scopulos*,
reliquae pene-/trarunt *altos scopulos* .18.
Junii. 44.* die postquam / solvissent. (*Strictiū*
fortè aliquae penetrarunt.) /

Sacerdos qui *Astrolabiū* habebat, narrabit
Regi / *Norwegiae* venisse in *Iosules* *Septen-*
trionis, A° Dñi, / .1360. *Minoritā Angliū*, ex

70 or 78 degrees of latitude there is no human
habitation. Moreover this 78th parallel goes
in a circle round the Arctic Pole, in the form
of a high mountain range.

[fol. 267 r.] (Lacuna) ... part of the army of
King Arthur which conquered the Northern
Islands and made them subject to him. And
we read that nearly 4000 persons entered the
indrawing seas who never returned. But
io A.D. 1364 eight of these people came to the
King's Court in Norway. Amooq them were
two priests, one of whom had an astrolabe,
who was descended in the 5th generatioo from
a *Bruxellensis*: One, I say: The eight (were
sprung from?) those who had penetrated the
Northern Reglons in the first ships.

That great army of Arthur's had lain all the
winter (of 530 A.D.) in the northern islands of
Scotland. And on May 3 a part of it crossed
over into Iceland. Then four ships of the
afoiesaid land had come out of the North.
And warned Arthur of the indrawing seas.
So that Arthur did not proceed further, but
peopled all the islands between Scotland and
Iceland, and also peopled Grocland. (So it
seems the Indrawing Sea only begins beyond
Grocland). In this Grocland he fouod people
23 feet tall, that is to say of the feet with
whch land is measured.

Wheo those four ships returned, there were
sailors who asserted that they knew whcre the
magnetic lands (?) were.

[fol. 267 v.] (Lacuna) [Arthur afterwards put
oo board a fleet of 12 ships about] 1800 meo
and about 400 women. They sailed north-
wards on May 3 in the year following that in
which the former ships had departed. And of
these 12 ships, five were driven on the rocks in
a storm, but the rest of them made their way
between the high rocks on June 18, which
was 44 days after they had set out. (More
precisely, perhaps, some of them made their
way.)

The priest who had the astrolabe related to
the king of Norway that in A.D. 1360 there
had come to these Northern Islands ao English

the triumphant / raigne
of / Edward thre /
Francisean / with some /
men the same / word
written. /

* ... the Northern /
Countrys, / Inventio /
Fortunatae or / Fortuna,
written for Edward the /
Third. /

Circular lying / great
Northern / mountaines
round / about the
Northern / Islandish Re-
gions /

* Note the Ocean /
round about this /
Mountain: aaving in /
North Norway only,
Arm of land issuing / in
one of the Northern /
great Iles, and is to be /
listned after; to whether /
Maynland it doth apper- /
teyn.

* Note that in di- / vers
places these Northern /
-ward Iles are almost /
within a keñing of the /
mayn lands opposite to /
them; but in no place els /
to touch but (as here is /
specified of) only one
place / in the East. With
an Isth-/mus worthy to
be known. / For this is a
prineipall / point, to
understand from whether
Mayn/land, this narrow
tayle of land ys-/sueth:
from Atlantis, or / from
Asia. Or if it / is a
peninsula, there-/to
annexed; and no part /
of any other mayn land. /

* This Inhabited / place
(of 10 degrees long / and
.6. degrees broad) may /
have an other more arti /
ficall exposition then so /
by dayes journeis to
understand the / degrees
of longitude. / in that
place about .80. degrees
of latitude. / And ao to
reckon .3. dayes / jour-
ney and $\frac{2}{3}$ upon one /

Oxfordt, qui erat / bonus Astronomus &c. hic
ab alij discedens, (qui / in Insulas has venerant)
profectus est ulterius / per totū septentrionē,
&c. et descripsit omnia / mirabilia errū Insularū;
deditque Librū Regi / Angliae quem Inscrpsit
latine Inventio* Fortunatae: qui liber incipit
ab Ultimo Climate: / videlicet a gradū / .54.
perueniens usq̄ ad Polum. /

Dese Monick seide dat dese gheberchten
ghingen ront / om septentrion gheijcke een
muer. Anders dan dat / daer door liepen (tot
.19. steden) dese Zugende zee / daraf de
wijtste bouen .12. Fransche mijlen niet /
breet en was: de nauste $\frac{2}{3}$ mijles. Ende doer /
de nauste en soude gheen selc connen comen
fom / den strengen loop des Waters. Dit
gheberchte / ligt rondt om in de Zee,* sonder
in dat Nortnor/wegen. Want dat Nordt-
weghese ge- / berchte comter aen ende is breed
ontrent .17. Fransche mijlen. Ende recht
benede de Nort / Sterre, tegen Norwegen over,
daer comt een / offen schoon lant aen, dat
onbewoont is: Daer veel schoon / [fol. 268 r.]
(line wanting) nit oosten comte een steert van
een ... / schieten: en es meest al bosch: ende
verl ... / altoos so varder, so meer; so dattet
bouen . / . / Fransche mijle niet breet en is,
daert aen ... / gheberdte vergadert. Anders
in roerter rondt / om gheen lande aen: Maer
tot menighe stede / is die Zee so enghe, dat
ment wo ... / van verr⁴ siet. /

Ende dit gheberchte duert in de breede .8.
mijles / Ende in al dien circkel / seide de min-
nebroer / en was gheen habitatie den aen die
oost ... / daer dat smalle landt voic ereben
aen quamen / waren 23 Leiden, bouen vier
voeten niet / waer of de .16. vrouwen
waren. Dese Monick / seide dat hij in twe
ander plaetsen vant te landt / waert in, een
grootte stick bordts van selpen ... / ander
balken, di in grootte scepen ghedient had ... /
ende veel truncken van boomen die in vordeden
/ tijden af waren gehouden, so dat hij w ... /
sach daer hier voormaels habitatie ghewesen /
was: maer sij was nū vergaen. Ende dit ... /

(Footnote in Ms. in another hand)

— Hugo de Hibernia, *Minorita*, *prolixā valde*
peregrinationē fecisse per mundū scribitur /
quot in tam videt itinere, sedultate nō modera
chartis commisit. Claruit / A° 1360, sub
Edwardo ejus appellatōis tertio Anglorū Rege.
Baleus, in / libro de Scriptoribus Hiberniae.
commerces dar si (Pygmaei credo dicti) in
waren / bat dan .6. gradus breet was (dats 20
daebvaer) / ende dat ment gaen mocht te
*voete: ende .10. gracte / lanek: dat is 33**
daebvaert. So laghe (seide hij) / aen dat costem
de cen Zugende Zee daerse .5. in / vergader-
den, (die door de gheberchte comen) / van

Minorite from Oxford, who was a good
astronomer etc. Leaving the rest of the party
who had come to the Islands, he journeyed
further through the whole of the North etc.,
and put into writing all the wonders of those
islands, and gave the King of England this
book, which he called in Latin *Inventio*
Fortunatae, which book began at the last
climate, that is to say latitude 54°, continuing
to the Pole.

This monk said that the mountain range
goes round the North like a wall, save that in
nineteen places the Indrawing channels flow
through it, whereof the widest is not above 12
French miles across, the narrowest $\frac{2}{3}$ mile.
And through the narrowest no ship would be
able to go, because of the strong rush of the
water. The mountain range is surrounded by
sea except in North Norway, when the
Norwegian mountain range reaches it for a
width of about 17 miles. And right under the
North Star, opposite Norway, there lies a fair
level land which is uninhabited, where many
beautiful [fol. 268 r.] ... (Lacuna) ... in the
east there stretches out an arm of land which is
nearly all wooded. And narrows continually,
(the farther north?) the more, so that it is not
more than one mile wide where it meets the
mountain range. Otherwise no land touches
the circumference (of mountains) anywhere.
But in many places the sea is so narrow that
one can see the far side.

And the mountain range covers a breadth
of eight miles (?). And in the whole circle
(said the Minorite) there is no habitation,
except on the east side where in that narrow land
(isthmus) already mentioned there were 23
people not above 4 feet tall ... whereof 16 were
women. This Monk said that in two other places
further inland he found a great piece of ship's
planking and other balks which had been used
in big ships besides many trunks of trees which
at some earlier date had been bawn down. So
that he could say with certainty that there had
formerly been habitation there but the people
had now gone. And that the country where
they (the pygmies I believe he means) lived
was more than 6 degrees broad (that is to say
20 days' journey) and one could cover the
distance on foot, and it was 10 degrees long,
that is 33 days' journey. Also there lay there
(said he) an Indrawing Sea of 5 channels
gathered together which came through the
mountain range out of the 19 channels
mentioned. And this Indrawing Sea is 12
French miles wide, and measures across about
4 days' journey.*

* A day's journey is evidently reckoned as 18 French miles, i.e. in terms of average land travel.

degree of longitude there / being but .10. of our miles. But a Degree of / latitude in all places is of / .60 of our British miles. But it may be understood of a great Circle, / as journeys by land / are made and discoursed / commonly.

* Notable Warning / of the making of the Indrawing Seas: / which to pass and / which to shoote, as belov dangerous. /

Much Brasill / growing here. /

A Whirl Poole / in the Midst, / about under the / North Pole. /

The Whirl Poole / 480 miles over, / or wide, except / the diameter / of the great Rock / in the middes. /

A wonderfull / great and high / rock, right under the North / Pole, and in the / midst of the fore-/said Whirl Poole. /

* *Allter Fortu-/natae.*

den .19. vorseven mereo. Ende dese Zo- / gende Zee is wift bij 12. Fraosche mijleo: / Ende ouer dese Zugede Zee, ontrent .4. dachvaert. /

[fol. 268 v.] End of den west commerce / is weder een Zugende Zee, in der welken drie / ander mereo (van den .19. vorseveo) ghingen. / Eode dat meer, daer sij (Naves credo dictae) / Inghecommeo waren, hep oock daer in. Ende alle* die meren die Crom loopen, wanneer sij wt de / gheberchte quamen, die setteo de scepeo flucks aen. / Maer wat mereo recht op de binneste meren loopen / daer de .19. mereo in vergaderen, daer moeteo die / scepeo, van ootswegeo, meerwaert driveo, eode / hlijveo verioreo. Oock selde dese minnebroer, dat / dese binoeste meren .4. wareo: en dat die aeo huer westeinde lagh, waer breet wel .34. Fraosche / mijleo. Ende dat op de ander seide van die Zee / waer dat beste eode ghesootste landt vao / al Septentrio. Oock seide hij, dat die / Zee die hem aeo doosteinde lagh, nommer-meer en / mochte befrisen: om datter so vele mereo in / vergaerdeo: eode sij daer toe eoghe Wal, dat / deo stroom seer sterck was. Maer die hem / aeo dat Westeinde lagh plach meest alle jaer te / befrisen: end hleef somtijt .3. maendeo / bevrosen. Ende in dit landt en hadde hij gheen / teckeo van habitatie vernomen: Maer in een / commerce di recht Nord teghen hem over lagh, / daer hadde hij die boorde vao scepen, ende trone/keo ghesleo. Alle dese 4 commerce sijo hooghe / offen laoden, sooder eenich ghebercht / dat .4. vadem [sic] hoogh ware. Daer sijn veel / boschen van Brasill. Waot deser Priester (cū Astrolabiz) /

[fol. 269 r.] (line wanting) dese 4 commerce leet een Drayena / daer dese 4 Zugende Zeen in vallen, die Septentrio deeleo: Eode dese Zee leet en we . . . / recht of sij onder gheghaen waer, eode of men / dwater ghoet duer eenen trechter. Sij is aeo all / sijdeo vao deo Polus .4. graet breet dat is d . . . / te samen wijt: sonder dat recht onder deo Pole / leet een blose rotse int middel vao deser zee . . . / in hareo omganck beest omtrent .33. Franches / mijleo, eode is al aymant steeo. Eode is so / hooghe (so de Priester selde) dat hem sijo . . . / gheselt hadde die vao de Minnebroer dat Astrolabiz voer een Testament ontfangeo hadden . . . / de deo Minnebroer selve hadde hooren seggheo . . . / dat men rontomme van deo cant van der See / siet een is slinkende swert. Ende daereo / wast niet aeo Want daer en is oiet so veel / als een bantvol oerdeo aeo. Dit waren / de scrifteo ende wordeo van den Minnebroeder die . . . / sindert () vijf werf to deo / Coolock van Ingelhart track om sakeo wille: / Die meo vint in eeno boeck dat meo heet / Inventiono Fortuoe*: dan dese Minnebroeder selve / Autor van is. Die vorseide Priester selde noch / tot den Coninck vao Norwegeo dattet in die commerce / daer hij woonde, niet ses werf

[fol. 268 v.] And at the west of the aforesaid country is another Indrawing Sea into which 3 more channels go out of the aforesaid 19. And that channel which they (the ships I believe are meant) had eotered also flowed therein. And all these channels which turn tortuously when they come out of the mountains drive ships immediately ashore. But whatever channels flowed straight into the innermost seas, into which the 19 channels gather, in these ships must of necessity be carried current wise (i.e. inwards) and become lost. Also, said this Minorite, these innermost seas number four: and the one which lies on the west side was quite 34 French miles broad. And on the other side of this sea was the best and healthiest land in all the North. Also he said that the sea which lay on the east side could never be frozen because so many channels united there. And it was narrow besides, so that the current was very strong. But that the one which ran on the west side used to freeze almost every year: and remained frozen sometimes for three months. And in that land he had seen no signs of habitation. But in a country which lay to the North opposite it, he had recognized planks of ships and tree trunks. All these four countries are high upon lands (i.e. plateaus) except some mountains four fathom [sic] high. There are many trees of Brazil wood. When this Priest (with the astrolabe) . . .

[fol. 269 r.] (Lacuna) In the midst of the four countries is a Whirl-pool . . . into which there empty these four Indrawing Seas which divide the North. And the water rushes round and descends into the earth just as if one were pouring it through a filter funnel. It is 4 degrees wide on every side of the Pole, that is to say eight degrees altogether. Except that right under the Pole there lies a bare rock in the midst of the Sea. Its circumference is almost 33 French miles, and it is all of magnetic stone. And is as high as (the clouds?) so the Priest said, who had received the astrolabe from this Minorite in exchange for a Testament. And the Minorite himself had heard that one can see all round it from the Sea: and it is black and glistening. And nothing grows thereon, for there is not so much as a handful of soil on it. That was the writing and words of the Minorite, who has since journeyed to and fro five times for the King of England on his loss. They are to be found in a book called Inventiono Fortunae, of which the Minorite himself was author. The aforesaid Priest said also to the King of Norway that in the country where he dwelt not six times a year did it rain: and even that was drizzle, lasting not more than 6 or 7 hours.

** No great / showers
of raine / in these Regio-
nes.

.....
.....
.....

* Fresh coole air all-
waies there.

des jaers en / regenden:** inde dat selve was
stofregen, dueren / de niet bouen .6. of .7.
uren. Ende dattet daer / [fol. 269 v.] (line
wanting) hijt so seer saen Walen dattet
een wart Mullen b ... / deghe mede soude
ghaen. Maer altoos is daer een / Coele* locht.
Ende die ander .7. die bij hem / de waren,
tuyghden hiet sij selve haer oudt / oock hadden
hooren seggen, dat sijt oock / noyt ghesien en
hadden.

Hacc sunt ad verbū omnia quae ex hoc Autore
ante multos / annos exscripti &c. Bene vale,
vir / doctissime, mihi que amantissime colende. /
1577 Gerardus Mercator
(End of Transcript).

... [fol. 269 v.] (Lacuna) the wind never blows
hard enough to drive a corn-mill. Furthermore
the air there is always cool. And the other 7
that were with him testified that they had also
heard such things [as he related] said by their
elders, but had never seen them.

This is word for word everything that I
copied out of this author [Cnoyen] years ago.
Farewell, most learned man, with my most
affectionate esteem.

1577 Gerard Mercator.
(End of Translation).

Dee's first inquiry on the subject of the North had been directed to Ortelius by a letter written in January 1577, which is printed as No. 67 in Hessels' *Ortelii Epistulae* (1887). In this letter the writer recalls that his friend had indicated the general expectation of Arctic discoveries from the British people, a matter which he himself had pressed long ago (i.e. 1553-1556). He was now urging, indeed insisting, that further attempts should be made. And he goes on to mention his researches into what the ancients had said and done in respect of this voyage, as well as his recent preparation of a new nautical manual for the sailors.⁹ But his particular inquiry at the moment was for the authority that Ortelius had used for inserting the names of Cape Paramantia, Los Jardinos and some others on the north coast of North America, names which appeared on no other map. He begged for an immediate answer "for our people are already maturing their plans for the northern seaboard. Last year they merely paid their respects to the Greenland Strait, but they concluded with good reason that the whole shore could be circumnavigated and they could reach the Eastern Ocean that way". There is no record of the way in which Ortelius answered Dee's letter, but he came over to England in the spring, when he saw William Camden and Richard Hakluyt in London, and came down to Dee at Mortlake on March 12th. Five or six weeks later Frobisher sailed on his second voyage, but in fact he was secretly commissioned to look for gold ore and not to search for the north-west passage.

Meanwhile Dee had been questioning Mercator as to the provenance of the circular inset of the Polar regions which appeared on his great wall-map of 1569, together with some accompanying legends (Fig. 2). The reply he received was dated April 20th 1577, and is that transcribed above. Disappointingly enough it provides no fresh clue to the identities of either Jacob Cnoyen or the author of *Inventio Fortunatae*. Yet it raises the question: must not the latter have visited Greenland and even Markland (Labrador), in view of the knowledge he displays? And again, what was the version of the *Gestae Arthuri* which all parties refer to familiarly, and yet which contains such strange new detail of that King's enterprises? Richard [Hakluyt the younger, now newly entering upon what was to prove his life's work, put some such questions to Mercator early in 1580, after seeing Dee's manuscript. But the great cartographer's reply was also disappointing. Dated from Duishurg, July 28, 1580, it contains this passage: "The historie of the voyage of Jacobus Cnoyen Buschoducensis, throughout all Asia, Africa and the North, was lent me in time past by a friend of mine at Antwerp (prohahly Ortelius). After I had used it I restored it again: after many yeares I required it again of my friend (no doubt to answer Dee) but he had forgotten of whom he had borrowed it".¹⁰

All we know about Cnoyen therefore is that he was a Hollander and a supposed world-wide traveller "like Mandeville". It is impossible to decide whether or not his story of the visitors to the king's court in Bergen in 1364 was one that he obtained at first hand. It is not unlikely, since the Norwegian city was a foreign staple of the Hanseatic League. And if he was indeed not there, whence had he the details of what

⁹ E. G. R. Taylor, "John Dee and the Nautical Triangle", *Journ. of the Inst. of Navlg.*, VIII, No. 4.

¹⁰ R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations etc.* (1589), p. 484.

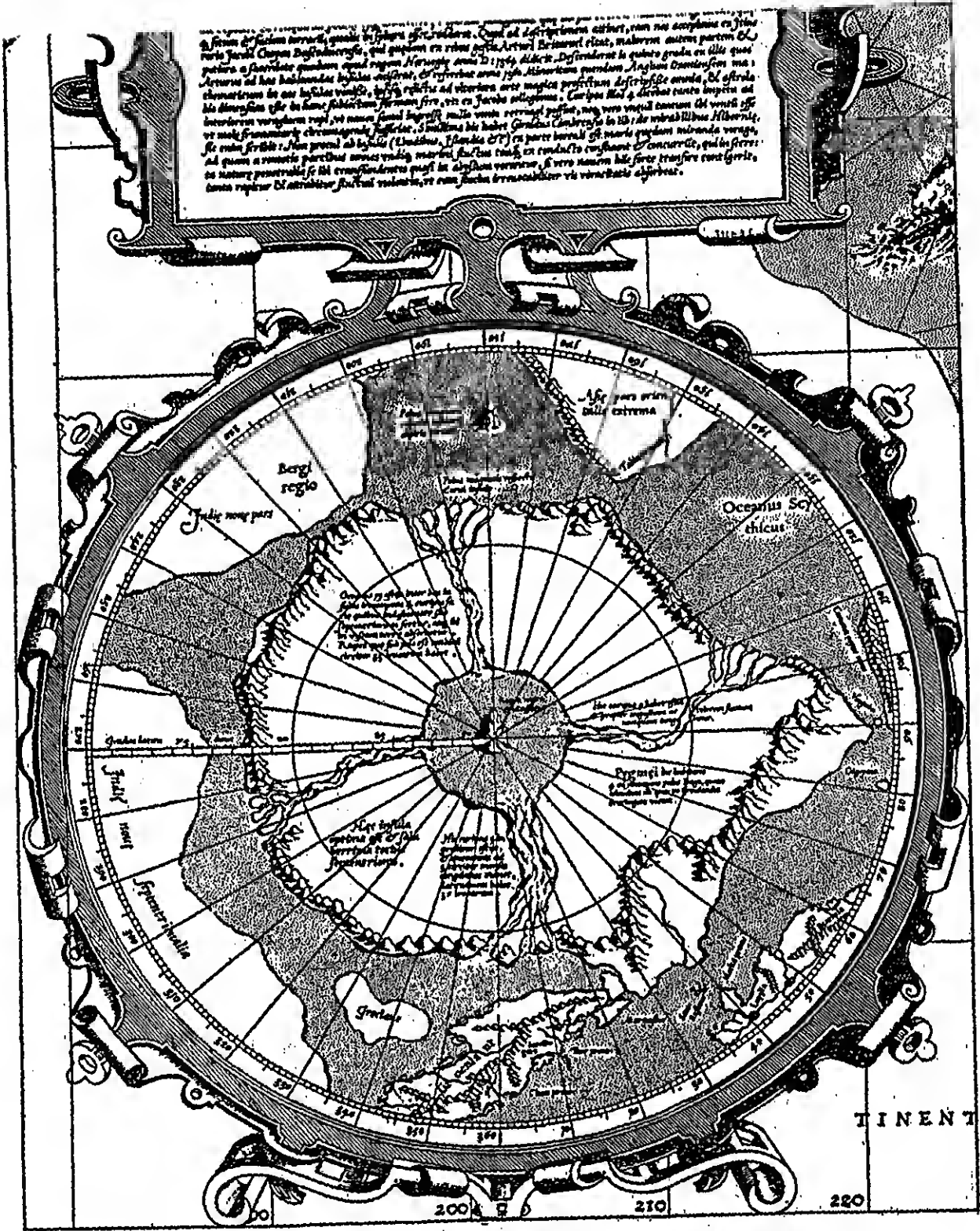


Fig. 2. The Arctic inset on Mercator's map of 1569 (Universitäts-Bibliothek, Basle)

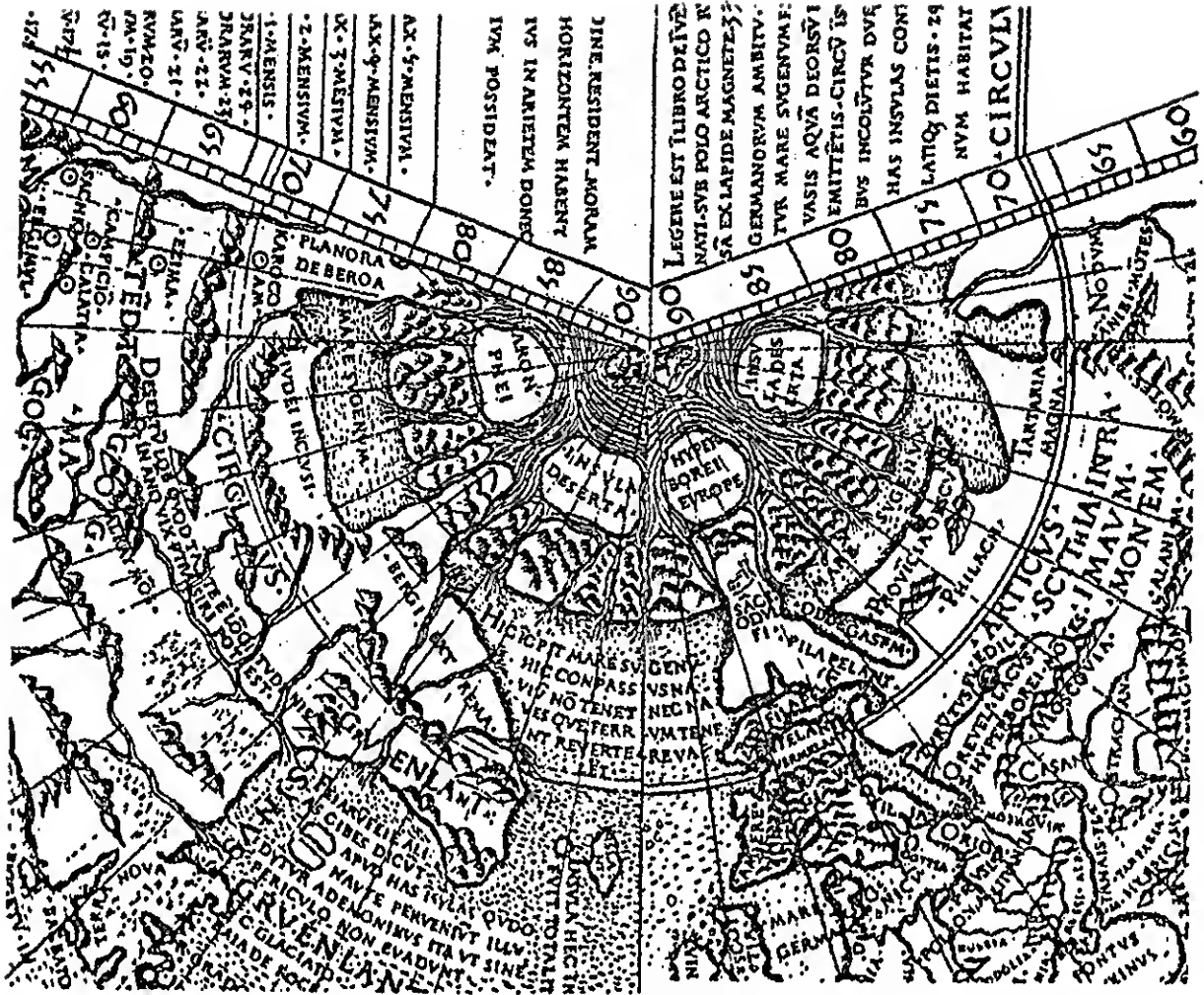


Fig. 3. The Arctic section of Ruysch's World Map in the Rome Ptolemy 1508. (From a copy in the possession of the Royal Geographical Society.)

the eight strangers told King Magnus, and the fact about the Minorite's journeys to and fro after he had written his book? That the book *Inventio Fortunatae* really existed does not depend on the evidence of Jacobus Cnoyen. Johann Ruysch¹¹ quoted from it and used it, John Dee made a marginal correction of its title,¹² and it is casually mentioned by Bartholomé de las Casas in his *Historia de las Indias* (1570) when, speaking of floating and burning islands in the Western Ocean, he says:¹³ "There is mention of the same in the book called *Inventio Fortunatae*". A comparison of Mercator's Arctic map with that of Ruysch¹⁴ in the Rome Ptolemy (1508), and with the same region on Behaim's globe¹⁵ of 1492, together with a study of all the map-legends, side by side with Mercator's letter, makes it possible to reconstruct at least the basic topographical information which the friar's book contained.

Briefly, according to the writer of *Inventio Fortunatae*, the world continent was bordered at some distance

¹¹ Ruysch, it will be recalled, was a German traveller of whose geographical knowledge his editor thought very highly. He had sailed westwards from southern England until in lat. 53° N. he had reached the Eastern shore of what was still generally believed to be a Tripartite World Continent. He had then passed "per angulum noctis", that is to say round the underside of the globe. He may therefore have sailed from Bristol with Cabot in 1498.

¹² See above, p. 59.

¹³ Book I, Chap. 13.

¹⁴ Fig. 3.

¹⁵ Fig. 4.

polewards by an indrawing or insucking sea, which by means of nineteen channels broke through a lofty circumpolar mountain range in lat. 78°–79°. These channels occurred in groups of three, four, five, and seven respectively, and the four groups gathered or flowed into four indrawing seas which all poured into a single central sea about the pole. Here there was a lofty shining black rock of magnetic stone, thirty-three miles (or leagues) in circumference—that is to say about ten miles across—and here the ocean waters swirled round in a whirlpool and were sucked down into the bowels of the earth. The four indrawing seas separated four land areas, of which two (as Mercator and Ruysch agree) were inhabited, and two not. Mercator puts pygmies or Scraelings in one of them, Ruysch puts a people called Arumphiae (*Arompheie*) who appear also in one of his imaginary Atlantic islands: *Fel Arumfeie alias Cibes*. Behaim, although he shows nineteen (or perhaps only eighteen) channels leading from the main ocean, and gives some vague indication of the high mountains, does not completely separate two of the four land masses, while the Pole is masked by the metal axis of his globe. The general resemblance of his outlines to those of the other two maps is, however, apparent (Fig. 4).

The legends on Ruysch's World Map run as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Legere est in Libro de Inventione Fortunatæ sub Polo Arctico Rupem esse excelsam ex lapide magnetæ 33 miliarum Germanorum ambitum.</p> | <p>We read in the book <i>De Inventione Fortunatæ</i> that beneath the Arctic Pole there is a high rock of magnetic stone 33 German miles in circumference.</p> |
| <p>2. Hanc complectitur mare sugenum fluidum instar vasis aquam deorsum per foramina emittentis.</p> | <p>The indrawing sea surrounds this (rock), flowing as if in a vessel that jets water down a hole (i.e. a funnel).</p> |
| <p>3. Cirquæ insulæ sunt 4 equibus incoluntur duæ, ambunt autem has insulas contini montes vasti latque dietis 24 quibus negat hominum habitatio.</p> | <p>There are four surrounding islands of which two are inhabited. But they are hindered by huge mountains twenty-four days journey across, which forbid human habitation.</p> |
| <p>4. Hic incipit mare sugenum. Hic compassus navium non tenet nec naves qui ferrum tenent revertere valent.</p> | <p>Here the indrawing sea begins. Here the ship's compass does not hold, nor can ships containing iron turn back.</p> |

In note 1 the high rock is said to measure 33 German miles, units which are four times the French miles of the Mercator letter, while the latter on his map writes "33 leagues". This is typical of the current confusion as to measures of length. Mercator, besides, merely calls the rock 'lofty and black', without reference to its magnetic quality, for he had his own theory about the location of the magnetic pole. Ruysch's reference to the upsetting of the magnetic compass may have arisen from his own actual experience of its great variation in the Lahrador region, and he appears also to have put his own interpretation on the report that ships could not turn back once in the indrawing seas. Mercator's general legend (with Hakluyt's translation¹⁶) is as follows:

Quod ad descriptum attinet eam nos accipimus ex Itinerario Jacob Cnoeyo Buscoducensis, qui quaedam ex rebus gestis Arthuri Britanni citat, majorem autem partem et potiora a sacerdote quodam apud regem Norwegiæ anno D. 1364 didicit. Discenderat is quinto gradu ex illis quos Arturus ad has habitandas insulas miserat. Et referebat anno 1360 Minoritam quendam Anglum Oxoniensem mathematicum in eas insulas venisse ipsis que relictis ad ultiora arte magica profectum descripsisse omnia et astrolabo dimensum, esse in hanc subjectam formam fere, uti ex Jacobo collegimus.¹⁷ Buripos illos dicebat taoto impetuum ad interiorem voraginem rapi, ut naves semel ingressæ nullo vento retroagi possunt. Neque vero unquam taotum ibi ventum esse ut moiaæ

Touching the description of the North parts, I have taken the same out of the voyage of James Cnoey of Hartzevan Buske, which allegeth certain conquests of Arthur King of Britaine, and the most part, and chiefest things among the rest he learned of a certain priest in the king of Norway's court, in the year 1364. This priest was descended (in the fifth generation)¹⁷ from them which King Arthur had sent to inhabit these Islands, & he reported in the yeere 1360, a certaine English Frier, a Franciscan, and a Mathematician of Oxford, came into those Islands, who leaving them, & passing further by his magical Arte, described all those places that he sawe, & tooke the height of them with his astrolabe, according to the forme that I have set down in my map, and

¹⁶ R. Hakluyt, *l.c.* (1589), p. 249.

¹⁷ Hakluyt omitted these words, as Dee had noted such a small number of generations as impossible. *Supra*, p. 58. But the text seems to suggest that one man only came in the fifth generation from the "man of Brussels", though all were descended from Arthur's colonists.

¹⁸ Mercator, like Dee, used the term "magical art" in no perjorative sense. Natural Magic was based on the application of science and mathematics made by scholars.

frumentariae circumagendae sufficiat. Simillima his habet Geraldus Cambrensis etc.

as I have taken it out of the aforesaid Jacob Cnoyen. He said that those foure Indraughts were drawne into an inwarde gulfe or whirlepoole, with so great a force, that the ships which once entered therin could by no means be driven hacke againe, and that there is never in these partes so much wind blowing as might be sufficient to drive a cornmill. Geraldus Cambrensis hath certaine words altogether alike with these.

Hakluyt follows his translation with a further "Testimonie" taken from a summary which Dee had drawn up from Mercator's letter for the information of the Queen:¹⁹

"Anno 1360 (that is to wit, in the 34 yeere of the reigne of the triumphant king Edward the Third) a friar of Oxford, being a good Astronomer, went in companie with others to the most Northern Islands of the world, and there leaving his company together, he travelled alone and purposely descrihed all the Northeme Islands, with the indrawing sees: and the record thereof at his return he delivered to the king of England. The name of which book is *Inventio Fortunatae* (aliter fortunae) *qui liber incipit a gradu 54 usque ad polum*. Which frier for sundry purposes after that did five times pass from England thither and home againe".

Mercator has four further inscriptions, placed on the map itself, which are of assistance in distinguishing the four great polar islands described in the Letter. They read as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Hic euripus 5 habet ostiis et propter angustum accelerem fluxum nunquam congelatur. | This channel has five mouths (entries) and because of its narrow swift current it never freezes. |
| 2. Pygmei hic habitant 4 ad summum pedes longi, quem admodum illi quos in Gronlandia Scirelinger vocant. | Here live pygmies, at most 4 feet tall, who are like those in Greenland called Scraelings. |
| 3. Hic euripus 3 ingreditur ostiis et quod annis ad 3 circiter menses congelatus manet. Longitudinum habet 37 leucarum. | This channel is entered by 3 mouths and remains frozen for three months every year. It is 37 leagues long. |
| 4. Haec insula optima est et saluberrimus totius septentrionis. | This island is the best and healthiest of the whole oorth. |
| 5. Oceanus 19 ostiis inter has insulas irrumperat. 4 euripos facit quibus indesinenter sub septentrionem fertur: atque ibi in viscera terrae absorbetur. | The Ocean rushes in betweeo these islands by 19 mouths and makes 4 channels by which it is incessantly carried northwards & there disappears into the bowels of the earth. |

It must of course be remembered that all early descriptions of the Far North (c.g. that of Paul the Deacon A.D. 710-790) speak of a terrible insucking whirlpool, often identified with the Maelstrom at the tail of the Lofoten Is. Of this tide-rip Adam of Bremen writes:²⁰ "And behold the stream of the unstable sea there ran back into one of its sources, drawing at fearful speed the unhappy seamen . . . into the profound chaos . . . in which it is said that all the back currents of the sea, which seem to abate, are sucked up and vomited forth again, which latter is usually called the flood tide." Mercator was familiar with these writers, and after quoting from Giraldus Cambrensis added: "The Philosophers describe four indraughts of the Ocean sea, in the four opposite quarters of the world, from whence many do conjecture that as well the flowing of the sea (i.e. the tides) as the blasts of the winds have their first originall." Such ideas undoubtedly influenced the way in which the writer of *Inventio Fortunatae* methodised what he had seen, as they influenced the writer of the otherwise unknown *Gestae Arthuri* which Cnoyen quoted. This must have been a late compilation since the "Geography of the North" which it embodied seems to have contained features from Marco Polo's travels. The Province of Bergi, for example, which Ruysch maps as "Planora de Berga" can only be the "pianura de Bargu" similarly described in Book I, chap. 49 of the Travels.²¹ The detailed story of Arthur's colonizing experiences does not appear elsewhere, and Hakluyt had to fall back upon quoting Geoffrey of Monmouth, who merely mentions the conquest of Iceland. To this he added an "ancient manuscript" inserted by William Lambard in his *Archaionomia*, 1568, (from which Dee also had cited it) in which the following passage appeared: "Arthurus . . . subjugavit igitur sibi strenue Scantiam totam, quae modo Norweia vocatur, et omnes insulas ultra Scantiam, scilicet Islandiam et Gronland . . . jam qui sunt de appendicies Norweiae . . . et multis alias insulas ultra Scantiam, usque

¹⁹ See below, p. 68.

²⁰ Quoted by F. Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, p. 195.

²¹ In Ramusio's version of Marco Polo's Travels.

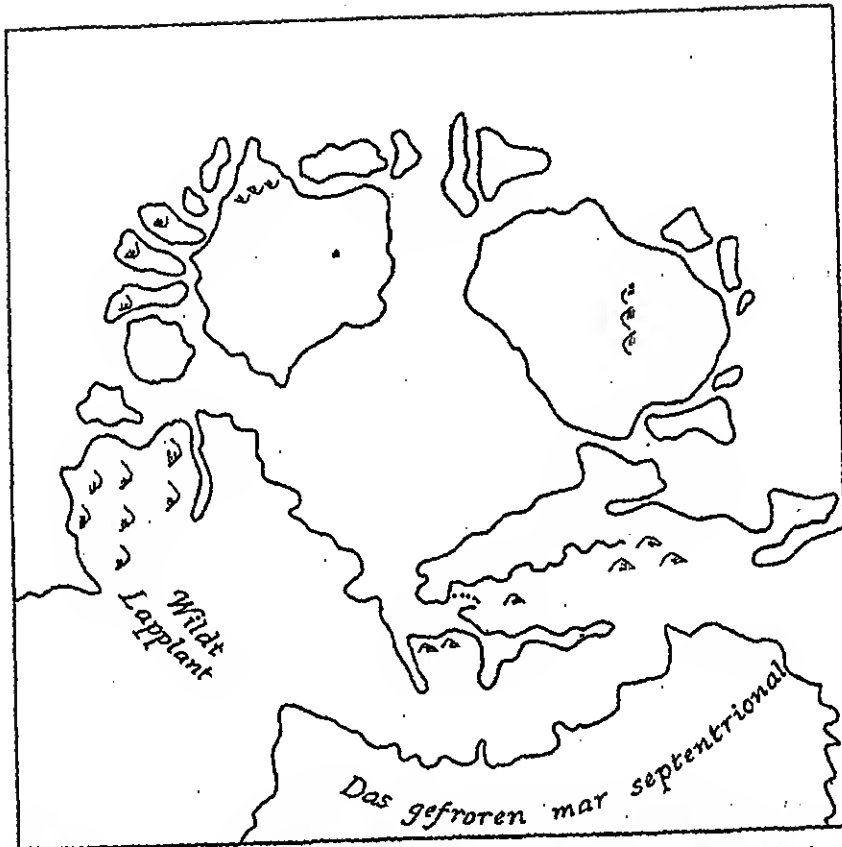


Fig. 4. The Arctic regions on Behaim's globe, 1492. The frozen sea is north of Asia.

dum sub septentrione (i.e. as far as under the pole) quae sunt de appendiciis Scanciae . . . Fuerunt gentes ferae et indomitae . . . Fuerunt autem ibi Christiani occulti . . ."

The suggestion that Christians would be found in remote islands in the far north and west crops up in many guises. They were living in the Island of the Seven Cities for example, which some identified with Antillia i.e. with An-Thyle or Thule.²² And there are strong suggestions that the romance of the Zeni brothers, containing adventures dated 1380-1387, had some foundation in old family papers. Here the relation of the Latin books found in the king's library in Estotiland, books which no one there now could read, could easily arise from a story of an Italian trader's visit to Greenland—or even to Markland. For Estotiland was said to be a thousand miles west of Frisland (Iceland) and to have trade with Greenland. Jacob Cnoyen reported that the eight visitors (including two priests) to King Magnus' court at Bergen, who arrived in 1364, were descended from Arthur's colonists. (Who was the Bruxellensis?) But it would appear almost certain that they were in fact a hand of the Norse settlers in Greenland, or even, since they excited so much interest, a group from Markland (Lahrador). There is a record in the *Islandske Annaler* for 1347 that: "There came a ship from Greenland: it was smaller than the small Icelandic trading vessels. It came into outer Straumfyrd. It had no anchor. There were 17 men on board and they had sailed to Markland but were later driven here by a storm at sea." According to the *Gottskalk Annals* these interesting travellers were brought the next year to the king's court at Bergen by a prominent Icelander, so that there is nothing improbable in a similar incident occurring in 1364. This was, in fact, the year in which an expedition sent to Greenland for a specific purpose in the royal *knorr* or trading ship, is considered to have returned. King Magnus had given orders in October 1354 that Paul Knutson should take command of this *knorr* and should have full authority to select his company. The voyage was to be made "for the sake of our predecessor who in Greenland established Christianity . . . and we will not now let it perish

²² Jordanus, *De Gothorum Origine*, Chap. I. Habet et in ultima plagae occidentalis aliam insulam nomine Thylen.

in our day".²⁵ That a friar should have been among the ship's passengers is therefore not unlikely, and that he was possibly a friar from Oxford is not to be ruled out. For just at this period there was active trade between England and Scandinavia, and a considerable English merchant colony lived in Bergen. As evidence of this we have the complaint made a generation or so later that no fewer than twenty-one English houses had been destroyed when members of the Hanseatic League sacked the town.²⁴ The sufferers in this case were said to be men of Lynn, but during Edward III's reign other eastern ports are mentioned as trading with Bergen, and even with Iceland.²⁵ In the well known *Libel of English Policy* (ca. 1436) the writer speaks of a recent revival of the Iceland trade, which 'of old' had been carried on from Scarborough, while as Hakluyt reports certain privileges for this trade had been granted to the men of Blakeney.²⁶ Blakeney, in north Norfolk, was an active fishing port where salt fish and stock-fish were landed. Hakluyt, who as we know consulted the records lodged in the Tower of London, dates the grants as made in the 2nd, 4th and 31st years of the King's reign, i.e. 1328/9, 1330/1 and 1357/8.²⁷ There is the further intriguing point that the British Museum possesses an English astrolabe dated "Blakene, 1342". But the only religious house there was Carmelite, not Franciscan. It is on a similar point, too, that Dee's identification of the Mathematical Friar of Oxford with Nicholas of Lynn has to be rejected. Though a famous Oxford mathematician, Nicholas was a Carmelite. Nevertheless there was also a Franciscan house at Lynn, and the period was that in which the Franciscans of Oxford were famous for their mathematical teaching, and notably for their teaching and practice of the use of the astrolabe, popularized besides by Chaucer.

Unfortunately the records of the Oxford friars²⁸ contain no mention of a far-ranging traveller, though such a man as Thomas Kingsbury would fit the circumstances so far as dates are concerned. And that he was among the mathematicians is suggested by the reference to him by calendar-making John Somer as his preceptor. That Thomas did service to the king, too, is suggested by the fact that Richard II sought preferment for him from the Pope. Alternatively, from the footnote added by Dee (or perhaps by Hakluyt) to Mercator's letter²⁹ one Hugh the Irishman was also considered as a possibility. In this case we have the record of a hook, but no hint of Oxford or of an astrolabe. Our sole authority is John Bale, who in his *Centuria Decimquarto*, XCVI writes:³⁰ "Hugh, called 'of Ireland', whose other name is unknown, was Irish by birth and joined the Franciscan order. He accepted the way of life they practised, and as a wandering monk is said to have travelled widely about the world. And whatever he saw on his journey he committed to paper with the greatest care. Now nothing remains of his unrewarded labours save his inclusion in the class of illustrious authors. For that Norfolk Benedictine monk who made a catalogue of ancient authors did not omit this man. Hugh (he says) of Ireland, a Minorite, wrote a certain journey in one volume. That is what he says. We read of no other work by this Hugh, but he is said to have flourished in 1360 A.D. in the reign of King Edward III."

It is perhaps worth noticing that this traveller was recorded by a Norfolk man, but unless fresh evidence appears, the actual adventurer cannot be identified. Nevertheless that he existed, and that he wrote *Inventio Fortunatae*, purporting to describe the world from lat. 54° northwards (i.e. what lay beyond the limits of the classical Seventh Climate) cannot be doubted. And the number of authentic touches to be found in the scanty notes we have of what he saw supports the suggestion that he visited Greenland and Markland. He mentions, for example, tool-worked timbers which indicated former human habitation, and on this point we have the independent testimony of the recent destruction of the Western Settlement given by the Greenlander Ivar Bardssen³¹ who was sent there in 1341 and found no human being left.

²⁵ P. Nørlund, *Viking Settlers in Greenland* (1936).

²⁴ R. Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (Maclehose ed.), II, p. 67.

²⁵ See Calendar of the Patent Rolls for this reign, *passim*.

²⁶ Hakluyt, *l.c.*, I, p. 304.

²⁷ These grants are not listed in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, and the Calendar of Pipe Rolls for this period is not yet published.

²⁸ A. G. Little, *The Greyfriars at Oxford* (1892).

²⁹ *Supra*, p. 59.

³⁰ John Bale, *Scriptorum . . . Catalogus* (1557). The original note is in Latin. The reference "De Scriptoribus Hiberniae" in Dee's MS. is erroneous: Irish writers are not separately listed.

³¹ "The Description of Greenland", in *Voyages of the Zeni*, ed. R. H. Major (Hak. Soc., 1874).

Every glimpse of land, besides, on the long voyage out, would be of mountain girt shores. First the Faroes would be sighted, then Iceland, and finally the ship would pass round the lofty wall of south-east, south and south-west Greenland to the Eastern Settlement with everywhere deeply penetrating fiords. And he noticed that the striking contrast between waters that froze for many months and others (in the same latitude) that remained open, was contrast between east and west. A long ice-tongue creeps down the eastern shore of Greenland—i.e. the western margin of the Denmark Strait—and the same is true of Davis Strait, where the fiords of western Greenland on its eastern side remain open while those of Baffin Land are ice-bound. It is his mention of wooded land, and of the abundance of "brazil" wood, that points to a visit to Markland, the timbered fringe of Labrador, while it seems reasonable to suppose that the country he described as "the fairest and healthiest of all the North" was a wooded country, and hence part of America. The manner in which he schematized his picture of the "indrawing seas", with the nineteen channels of entry, should not blind us to the authenticity of the elements of which it is composed, including the strong currents and the whirl-pool. In the *Description of Greenland* we read, for example: "Further north of the Western Settlement is a huge mountain called Hemebrachi, beyond which no one who values his life dares navigate, because of the number of whirlpools with which that sea abounds." "That sea", of course, was Davis Strait, and when Frobisher was at its mouth, his lieutenant George Best reports: "This place seemeth to have a marvellous great indrafte, and draweth in to it most of the drift ice and other things which doe flote in the sea." And Davis himself enters in his Journal some ten years later: "which inlet or gulfe this afternoone and in the night we passed over: where to our great admiration we saw the sea falling down into the gulfe with a mighty overfal and roaring, and with divers circular motions like whirle-pooles". The friar's story, too, of meeting with a band of undersized people, under two dozen in number, of whom the majority were women, has on it the stamp of truth. Such a small group of Eskimos (Sraelings) would be normal, with several of the men away hunting or fishing. And how likely it seems that if he came upon one of the remote Christian settlements of the Norsemen, he should exchange presents with its priest, his astrolabe for a Testament.

But we are still left with the puzzle of who reported the story which the priest told to King Magnus, and who linked the eight men coming from the most distant Norse settlements (as they must have been) with King Arthur's colonists. Was it Jacob Cnoyen himself? Whatever the answer, the story suited John Dee excellently. He announced to his patrons (who included the rising favorite Christopher Hatton) that the Queen could claim empire throughout the Arctic, and in November 1577 he was summoned to Windsor. On the 28th day of the month, he wrote in his Diary³²: "I declared to the Queene her title to Greenland etc. Estotiland, Frisland". A summary of the evidence which he offered her is to be found on the back of a map³³ compiled for him, which is dated 1580, from which we learn that the British Empire ran from Terra Florida across the Pole to Nova Zemlya (which he identified with one of the Friar's four land areas). The English title to all these lands was "by discovery, inhabitation or conquest". There is no doubt that this map and summary formed one of the "two rolls of the Queene's Majesties title" which he presented to her at Richmond in October of that year. Unfortunately Lord Burghley did not show himself as very impressed, although the Queen was very gracious, and so we hear no more of the matter. But Dee secured for himself grants of land in the continent which he preferred to call Atlantis, both from Sir Humfrey Gilbert and from Sir George Peckham when their plans for colonization were afoot,³⁴ and by the time the first disasters to these enterprises had taken place, he was overseas chasing the will o' the wisps of alchemy and crystal-gazing in Prague.

³² J. O. Halliwell, *The Private Diary of John Dee* (1842).

³³ Fig. 1. Cotton MS. Augustus I.1.1.

³⁴ According to entries in his *Diary*.

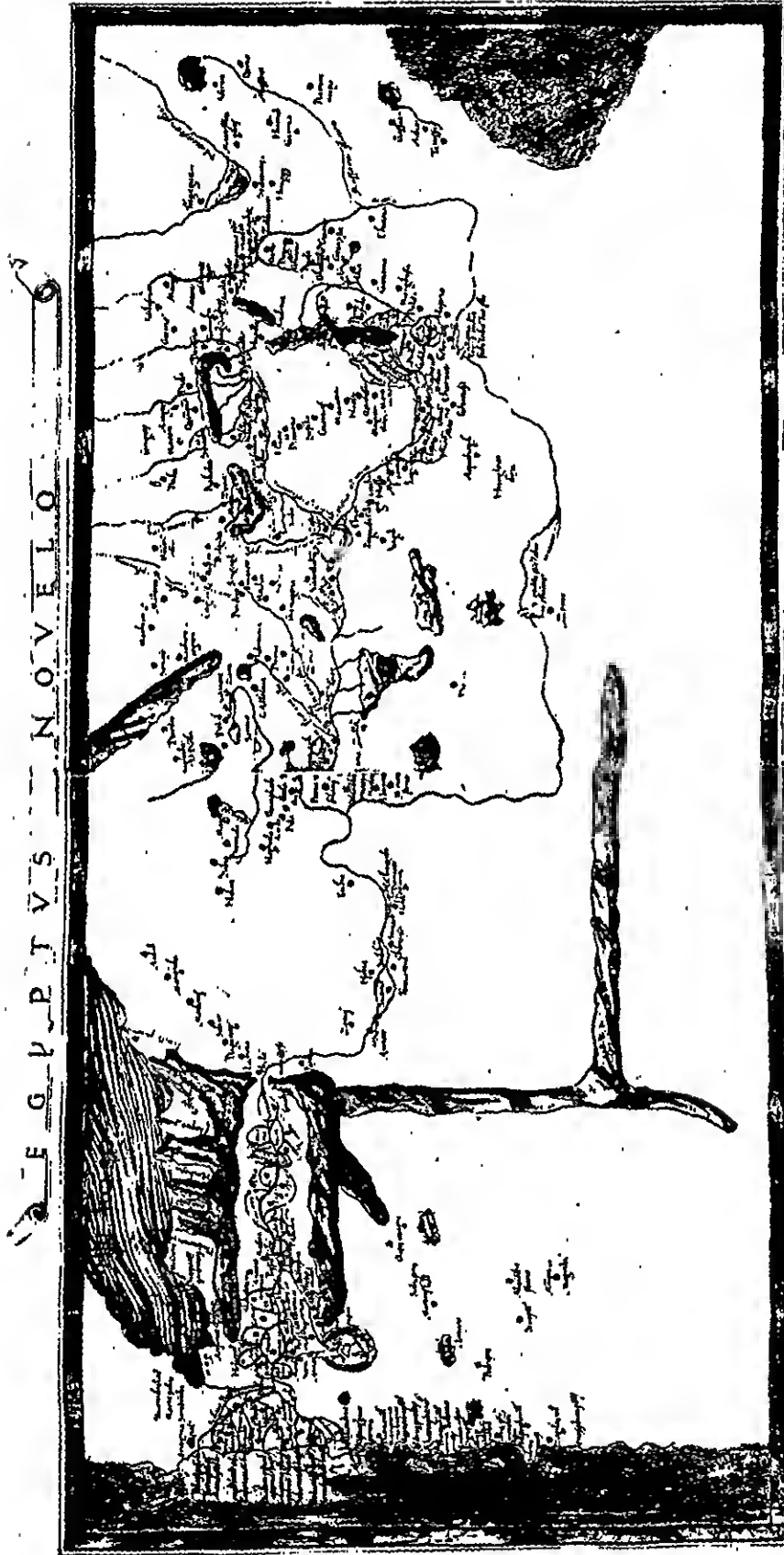


Fig. 1. "EGYPTUS NOVELO" BY JACOPO ANGIOLO IN HIS TRANSLATION OF PTOLEMY'S "GEOGRAPHY", 1441-1456
(Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)