

A RUSSIAN DISCOVERY IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN AT THE TIME OF COLUMBUS¹

Leonid S. Chekin (AIRO-XXI, Moscow)

Abstract

In the last decades of the fifteenth century, at least three texts by Italian and German humanists included reports on an Arctic island newly discovered by the Russians. Modern Russian scholarship variously identifies this island as Spitsbergen (meaning a part or even the whole archipelago presently named Svalbard) or Novaya Zemlya. This article suggests that the still enigmatic Arctic discovery was largely shaped by theoretical assumptions of late medieval geographers. The rumors about the island closely followed the route through Europe of the famous German scholar and poet Conrad Celtis, and they may go back to one and the same source. A search for this Arctic island in Celtis's own body of work reveals its description in his poem, Germania generalis, and in one of his erotic geographic elegies, the Amores. It is further argued that Celtis may have left the only cartographic depiction of the island on his Barbara Codonea map, printed as an illustration to the fourth book of the Amores.

Keywords

Svalbard; Greenland; Sami; Yugra; Conrad Celtis; Hieronymus Münzer; Pomponio Leto; Mauro Orbini

In Germany and Italy in the last decades of the fifteenth century, rumors circulated about an Arctic island newly discovered by the Russians. The most heavily researched testimony is by Hieronymus Münzer, a doctor from Nuremberg, in a letter he sent on July 14, 1493, to King John II of Portugal. Münzer's main thesis concerned the advantage of a westward voyage to Cathay (he did not know yet about the return of Christopher Columbus from his first transatlantic expedition), but Münzer also reported on the gigantic island of Grulanda populated by the subjects of the Grand Duke of Muscovy. There is a considerable symbolic value in the fact that the report about the Russians' Arctic discoveries coincided with the beginning of the exploration of the Western Hemisphere, and with the transition from medieval geography to the discoveries of modern times.

Scholars outside of Russia, who had to comment on this passage, identified Grulanda with Greenland and considered the mentioning of the Grand Duke of Muscovy as Münzer's mistake, claiming that he either confused the Inuits with the Karelians (Hennig 1953, B. 3, 447; B. 4, 238–239, 277), or Ivan III with King Christian I, who allegedly sent an expedition to Greenland about 1476 (Ravenstein 1908, 113).

Soviet historians, having studied the letter since the 1950s, interpreted Grulanda as Spitsbergen, meaning a part of, or even the whole, archipelago presently named Svalbard, and included Münzer's report as an additional argument in favor of the discovery of Spitsbergen by the Russians. This interpretation was first suggested by P.A. Frumkin

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(1957) and, independently, even though several years later, in a little book *The Russian Pomors on Spitsbergen, and What a Nuremberg Physician Wrote About Them in 1493* (Obruchev 1964). The author of the book, Sergei Obruchev (1891–1965), was a geologist, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and a son of the geologist, traveler and writer Vladimir Obruchev, who was particularly famous for a science fiction novel about another Arctic island, *Sannikov's Land* (1926). The son was a gifted author in his own right, and the lasting value of his little book about the Russian Pomors on Spitsbergen resides primarily in its description of life in the high latitudes, based on both literature and his personal experience. Sergei Obruchev also provided useful materials on Münzer's circle of contacts and on geographical names related to Greenland and Spitsbergen, although his preoccupation with the priority of the Russian Pomors in the discovery of Spitsbergen prevented him from seriously considering other possible identifications of Grulanda.

Obruchev's interpretation of Münzer's letter was accepted in standard Soviet works on the history of discoveries (Lebedev and Esakov 1971, 82–83; Magidovich and Magidovich 1982, 224). To my knowledge, however, it has never been assessed by Norwegian scholars. In his fairly objective history of Svalbard, Thor Arlov listed and analyzed some other arguments in favor of a discovery of Spitsbergen before that by Willem Barentsz, but mentioned neither Münzer's letter nor other fifteenth-century sources (Arlov 2003, 51–54; see also Heintz 1963).

Samuel H. Baron, who wrote a critical overview of Soviet historiography on the subject of early Arctic explorations, was the first to notice that Münzer's Grulanda could be identical with an Arctic island described by Giulio Pomponio Leto (1428–1498) and Mauro Orbini (1563–1614). He suggested a common source and argued for the identification of the island with Novaya Zemlya (Baron 1991, 59–61).² Later, in Russian-language publications, I researched the available texts and maps which could explain the background for Münzer's ideas and identified additional references to the island in the poetry and art of the German “Arch-Humanist” Conrad Celtis (Chekin 2001, 2004); in this article, I will present my analysis in an abbreviated and updated form. In subsequent discussion, one reviewer attempted to come to a positive conclusion about the identity of the island, suggesting a certain fusion of ideas about Novaya Zemlya and Taymyr (Chaikovskii 2006). Despite all the efforts to find more texts and establish their interrelationship, one still cannot precisely connect the fifteenth-century testimonies to a known island or territory. Grulanda remains a phantom reality heavily dependent on theory and myth, like many other islands and peninsulas on the medieval and early modern maps of the Arctic region.

The letter of Hieronymus Münzer to John II of Portugal

The first half of Münzer's letter, copied by his Nuremberg fellow physician and bibliophile Hartmann Schedel, preserves the Latin language of the original. Unfortunately, the passage about the Arctic island of Grulanda is in the second half of the letter and is known only from its translation into Portuguese at the court of John II by the royal preacher (*pregador*), the Dominican Alvaro da Torre. The translation survived in

² Previously, in a skeptical assessment of Frumkin's hypothesis, Igor Shaskolskii also suggested that the identification of Grulanda with Novaya Zemlya would have been “not less if not more probable” (Shaskolskii 1958, 95, note 2).

two different books. The only known copy of one book is at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, while a copy of the other book is at the Biblioteca Pública de Évora. Neither of the two early editions is considered to be the *editio princeps*. The letter has been reprinted several times; of particular importance are Joakim Bensaude's facsimile reproductions of both early books (Regimento 1914, Tractado 1916/1917). Students of the letter have rarely consulted them: it is assumed that the differences between the two texts are purely orthographical, which is not exactly true.

Here is how Münzer lavishes praise on the King of Portugal:

Already the Germans, and Italians, and Ruthenians, Apolonians Scythians, *and* those who dwell under the dry star of the Arctic pole are lauding you as a great ruler, together with the Grand Duke of Muscovy; because a few years ago under the dryness of that star the great island of Grulanda newly became known whose coast runs for 300 leagues and which has a largest habitation of the people under the jurisdiction of the said lord Duke.³

Appealing to John II to look for Cathay, Münzer refers to a request by the “invincible king of the Romans” and the future Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, and it is not surprising that the list of the people lauding John II starts with the two main *gentes* of the Empire, the Germans and the Italians. Scholars have agreed that the mentioning of the Grand Duke and his subjects was an echo of the recent diplomatic activity between the Holy Roman Empire and Muscovy and of the heightened interest in the vast dominion of Ivan III, in particular in Siberia; “Ruthenians” was probably a general name for the Eastern Slavs. Our understanding of the other ethnic names depends on two editorial decisions. First, we have to decide whether to interpret the word *apolonios* as a separate name or as an attribute of the Scythians.⁴ Second, we have to choose between the Évora and Munich texts, which will determine whether the people who dwell under the dry star are the Scythians⁵ or a separate tribe (the Évora text does not have the conjunction “e” – “and” that I have italicized in my translation).⁶

³ The Munich text: Ia te louuam por grande principe os alemãos e italicos e os rutanos apolonios scithos. e os que moram debaixo da seca estrella do polo artico: con ho grande duque de moscauia. que nam ha muytos annos que debaixo da sequidade da dicta estrella foy nouamente sabida a grande Ilha de grulanda. que corre por costa .ccc. leguoas. na quall ha grandissima habitaçam de gente do dicto senhorio do dicto senhor duque (Regimento 1914, 62). The Évora text: Ia te louuam por grande principe os Alemãos e Italicos e os Rutanos. Apolonios scitos os que moram debayxo da Seca estrella do pollo artico. Com ho grande duque de Moscauia: que nam ha muytos annos que debayxo da sequedade da dita estrella foy nouamente sabida a grande Ilha de Grulanda: que corre por costa trezentas leguoas: na qual a grandissima habitaçam de gente do dito senhorio do dito senhor duque (Tractado 1916/1917, 36). Compare the English translation of the Évora text in HARRISSE 1892, 393–395. My italics are explained below.

⁴ No convincing identification has been suggested; the existing translations “the Poles” or “Apollonian” are just guesses.

⁵ Compare the legend *Hiperborei scite*, “Hyperborean Scythians”, written near the coast of the Arctic Ocean north of the mythical Hyperborean Mountains on the map of Sarmatia (Asia II) in the 1482 Ulm edition of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*. The book was in the library of Münzer's close friend and colleague Hartmann Schedel from at least September 1490 (Stauber 1908, 59–60).

⁶ This textual discrepancy was not noted in the joint edition of both the Munich and Évora texts (de Albuquerque 1965, 186).

The name “Grulanda” of the letter derives from the name of Greenland. It is assumed that Greenland’s connections with Europe were severed by the late fifteenth century.⁷ New information about the Russian discoveries in the Arctic evoked interest not only because they could lead to the opening of the North-East passage to China, but also because of the concern about the Norse settlements in Greenland that had been lost yet not forgotten. Identification of a newly discovered and populated Arctic land with Greenland was no less natural for a late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century geographer than the identification of the transatlantic islands discovered by Columbus with India.

The traditional Russian name of Svalbard, “Grumant”, also goes back to the name of Greenland and to the idea that Spitsbergen was part of it. As the Russian name has a similar vowel “u”, the Soviet scholars Frumkin and Obruchev made the conclusion that Münzer or his informants had heard the name of the island from Russians. Unfortunately, the Russian name “Grumant” is not attested before the early 18th century. Since that time there were many variations of the name, and one particular form was close to that of Münzer (*Gruland*) (Ogorodnikov 1889, 703–706), but when Russian sources of the 16th – 17th centuries mentioned Greenland or Spitsbergen, they used occasional calques and transliterations from various languages (Chekin 2004, 39–40). The name “Gruland” could have existed in the oral tradition of the Pomors without being recorded in surviving texts, but it is also probable that it was borrowed into the Russian language only in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century (perhaps from the Dutch *Groenlandt*).

In the fifteenth-century cartography, there were different ideas about the situation of Greenland, although the predominant tradition, associated with the name of Nicolaus Germanus, presented it as a peninsula at least from 1467. This tradition was related to the 1427 map by Claudius Clavus that showed, however, only Greenland’s southeastern coast (Björnbo 1912; Babicz 1993; Seaver 2013). Greenland was connected to the land of the Sami; the original Clavus designation of the latter, *Wildhlappelandi*, developed into other forms including *Pillapelanth*. Scandinavian Peninsula joined the mainland to the south of Wildhlappelandi, in an area designated with another Sami-related name, *Findhlappi* / *Finlappelanth* (in the north), as well as the name of *Findlandi* and its variants (in the south).

Shortly before his letter to John II, Münzer himself made a map of Germany and neighboring countries.⁸ On this map, he combined two peninsulas, the Scandinavian and the Greenlandic, into one. The legend *Grvnland* is written on an isthmus which connects the “Russian” mainland with a large body of land accommodating the *Wildlappen*, *Finland*, *Sweden*, and *Norwegia*. This narrow isthmus has no resemblance to the great island of Grulanda of his letter. Something happened between the time when he made the map and the date of the letter that forced Münzer to change his ideas about “Greenland”.

The map of Germany appears at the end of the famous Nuremberg Chronicle, authored by Hartmann Schedel and first published on July 12, 1493. In addition to contributing the map, Münzer also edited one of the appendices to the chronicle;⁹ he testified to his contributions in a letter to Schedel dated July 15, 1493 (Goldschmidt 1938, 106–110).

⁷ See, however, a suggestion that some English ships “were still going to Greenland at least as late as 1480” (Seaver 1996, 251).

⁸ See <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/4108/view/1/688/>.

⁹ The description of Europe by Aenea Silvio Piccolomini, written in 1458, shortly before its author became Pope Pius II.

The layout of the chronicle is preserved in Nuremberg's Stadtbibliothek (Cent. II 98). It includes Münzer's corrections and his note, on fol. 323, which states that he had finished correcting the text on April 4, 1493 (Wilson 1978, 158).

Neither the appendix corrected by Münzer, nor the rest of the Nuremberg Chronicle mentions any Grulanda, Grvnland or Greenland. At the same time, Münzer inserted new information about the recent Portuguese discoveries in the Atlantic Ocean and about the sea journey of his acquaintance, Martin Behaim, whom he also named in his letter to John II of Portugal as someone capable of implementing his plan to sail westward to Cathay. A native of Nuremberg who spent several years at the court of John II, Behaim was back in his city of birth in 1491–1493. There, he created (in 1492) his famous globe which demonstrated that Cathay and the islands of the Orient were accessible to the seafarer who would dare to cross the Atlantic.¹⁰

The globe tells us of the Permians, the *permiani*, who may be similar to the northern Eurasian people of Münzer's letter: in the summer, the Permians migrate to a northern mountain "under the star named the Arctic Pole", but in the winter they go back to the south "towards the Russians" (the legend is related to a tradition based on the book of Marco Polo, see Ravenstein 1908, 92). This is the only real similarity between the globe and the letter. The globe shows Greenland not as an island, but rather as a peninsula, like on Münzer's map. Unlike Münzer's map, the Greenlandic Peninsula on the globe is separate from the Scandinavian Peninsula and is connected to the mainland both in the west and in the east, enclosing "The Frozen Northern Sea", *das gefroren mer septentrional*. This landform has several names written on it, including *Groenland*, *wildt Lapplant*, and *Venmarck* (probably Finnmark). Each of the two depictions of "Greenland", on Münzer's map and on Behaim's globe, is unique. It is probable that, in addition to their cartographic sources, both Behaim and Münzer had a narrative source with names of northern regions, which they depicted differently on the globe and the map.¹¹

Why did not Münzer record, either in the text of the Nuremberg Chronicle or on his map, the new data about an Arctic island under the rule of the Grand Duke of Muscovy, when he considered them important enough to convey to John II? It is reasonable to suggest that he received this new information in the spring or early summer of 1493, that is, during the short period of time between the end of his work on the layout of the Nuremberg Chronicle (April 4, 1493) and the date of the letter (July 14).

The decision to add the description of Europe to the Chronicle was justified by the fact that ancient authors had insufficient knowledge of Germany. As Michael Herkenhoff (1996, 124) demonstrated, this justification correlates with the patriotic scholarly and educational program of Conrad Celtis expounded at Ingolstadt in 1492. Celtis had close relations with the Nuremberg humanists and visited the city several times in the early 1490s (Hartmann 1889; Luh 2001, 25–26).

A suggestion about Celtis's participation in the Nuremberg Chronicle (Briefwechsel 1934, 99, Anm. 2) has not been accepted outside of the Polish historiographic tradition which recognizes him as either a source of information or even the author of the section about Kraków (Banach 1957; Grabski 1968, 47). It is known, however, that on November 23, 1493, Sebald Schreyer (1446–1520), one of the sponsors of the Chronicle, signed a

¹⁰ For digital images and literature, see <http://wisski.cs.fau.de/behaim/>.

¹¹ For the globe of Martin Behaim, such a source was suggested in: Nansen 1911, 502–503.

contract with Conrad Celtis for a new edition, which would include a new appendix on the geography of Europe (*mit sampt ainer neuen Europa*) (Goldschmidt 1938, 52; Rücker 1980, 190–191; Herkenhoff 1996, 114; Müller 2001, 286–289). The planned new edition never materialized.

Celtis almost certainly stayed in Nuremberg in June and July 1493, when the Chronicle was being printed.¹² We have many testimonies to the friendly relations between Celtis and Münzer (Goldschmidt 1938, 37–40). Most probably, Celtis critiqued the Chronicle and its European appendix already during that stay; he was not happy about the latter, which is evident from his contract with Schreyer. It is fair to suggest that Celtis also could have been the source of the knowledge of Grulanda, that Münzer conveyed to John II in his letter of July 14, but which he demonstrated neither in his map nor in the Nuremberg chronicle.

Lectures on Virgil by Giulio Pomponio Leto

The earliest of the other testimonies to the discovery of an Arctic island by the Russians survived in the lectures on Virgil by Giulio Pomponio Leto (Julius Pomponius Laetus), an Italian humanist who had travelled in Eastern Europe in 1479–1480. The lectures were first published in Brescia in 1487 and 1490 by Daniele Gaetano (Daniel Caietanus) of Cremona; Pomponio tried to disown these contraband and imperfect editions, but modern researchers have confirmed his authorship (Zabugin 1914, 105–106).

The lectures include a generally traditional description of Scythia and the islands of the Ocean, but some of his information does not depend on the geographers of classical antiquity. In particular, as part of an extended commentary on the mentioning of *Ultima Thule* in the first book of Virgil's Georgics, Pomponio describes the following island:

There is also a large island in the very north, towards the east, not far from the mainland. There the day rarely, if ever, dawns. All its animals are white, especially bears; and we learn that the birds, which we call falcons because of their falcate talons, dwell in that area. Near the coasts of the Glacial Ocean, forest people live, the Ugari or the Ugri, who are Scythians. They are remote from other mortals. [...] They exchange goods with proximate [var. Permian] people or with the Zavolocenses.¹³ So I was told by those who live at the sources of the Tanais.¹⁴

Pomponio also provides original information about the Tanais. The ancients were wrong, he says, in considering it the border between Europe and Asia, as it does not flow from the Rhiphaei mountains, but starts in the middle of a plane and soon becomes navigable (Zabugin 1914, 80). Vladimir Zabugin, who edited the Scythia-related

¹² There are two letters from Johannes Tolhopf addressed to Celtis in Nuremberg, in the house of Sebald Schreyer; the letters are dated on June 30 and in July (Briefwechsel 1934, 103–108).

¹³ Inhabitants of Zavolochye, an area on the Northern Dvina and the Onega.

¹⁴ Est et magna insula sub ipso septentrione, quae ad ortum opponitur, et non longe a continenti, in qua raro aut nunquam illucescit dies: animalia ibi omnia sunt alba, et praecipue ursi: et aves, quas a falcatis unguibus Falcones appellamus, sub hoc aere degere invenimus. Prope glacialis Oceani oras, habitant sylvestres homines, Ugari sive Ugri. Scythae quidem sunt, et a caeteris mortalibus semoti. [...] cum proxima [var. Permian] gente mercimonia permutant, aut cum Zavolocensibus. Sic narravere mihi qui ad origines Tanais habitant (Zabugin 1914, 205, cf. Russian paraphrase on p. 80).

materials of Pomponio, suggested that the story about the island was the earliest mention of Novaya Zemlya.¹⁵

Some characteristics of the island are close to those in Münzer's text. Similarly to Münzer, Pomponio notes the large size of the island. There is no information on whether the island itself is inhabited, but Pomponio describes a Scythian people, the Ugari/Ugri, while Münzer names the Scythians, probably as inhabitants of Grulanda. We note the assonance between Münzer's "Grulanda" and "Ugari/Ugri": the choice of the name Grulanda could have been influenced by the name of the people mentioned by Pomponio.

The Ugari are, without doubt, the Yugra of Russian chronicles. In the fifteenth century, the name of the region, "Yugra Land", was generally connected to the lower Ob River (Lebedev 1956, 28–30); the Novgorod and Moscow raids on Yugra Land were noted by the chronicles of the second half of the fifteenth century, and on March 14, 1484, Ivan III included the name of Yugra in his autocratic title (Pliguzov 1993, 142).

As was noted in the beginning of this article, Samuel H. Baron had been the first to identify the island, mentioned by Pomponio, with Münzer's Grulanda (Baron 1991, 59–61). We can now offer an additional argument to support Baron's identification, as there is a link between Pomponio and Münzer: the poet laureate Conrad Celtis, who met with Pomponio in Rome between 1487 and 1489 (Briefwechsel 1934, 68, Anm. 2) and probably listened to his lectures. This acquaintance with Pomponio played an important role in the German poet's career: many of Celtis's initiatives, undertaken after his coming back to Germany, had been inspired by the Italian humanist. Celtis could have shared the wisdom of Pomponio in Nuremberg in the summer of 1493, when he was in close contact with Münzer and Schedel, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Nuremberg Chronicle.

***Il Regno de gli Slavi* by Mauro Orbini**

Another report on the island survived in a later source. It was introduced into Russian geographical literature by the Arctic explorer Fedor Petrovich Litke (Friedrich Benjamin Lütke, 1797–1882), who had referred to the Dutch statesman and traveler Nicolaes Witsen (1641–1717) (Litke 1948, 36–37). Witsen (1785, 928), in turn, quoted the Ragusan historian of the Slavs, Mavro Orbin, also known by the Italianized version of his name, Mauro Orbini. In Orbini's book *Il Regno de gli Slavi*, published in Italian in 1601, we see the following text:

The Russians of Biarmia (as is told by the Wagrian in Book II), while navigating in the Northern Ocean, about 107 years ago, discovered in that sea a previously unknown island, inhabited by Slavic people. As Filippo Callimaco reported to Pope Innocent VIII, it¹⁶ is subjected and condemned to perpetual cold and ice. It is called Filopodia, and it exceeds in greatness the island of Cyprus; and on modern maps it is given the name of Nouazemglia.¹⁷

¹⁵ In his Italian-language monograph that had been published earlier, the island was very tentatively identified as either Iceland or Spitsbergen (Zabughin 1910, 83); the suggestion about Novaya Zemlya appeared in a note in Zabughin 1912, 304.

¹⁶ Probably the people and not the island (compare the reference to Callimaco below).

¹⁷ Li Russi di Biarmia (come racconta il Vvagiense al 2. lib.) nauigando l'Oceano Settentrionale, sono 107. anni in circa, trouarono in quei mari vn'Isola non conosciuta prima, et habitata da gente Slaua. La

To corroborate his knowledge about Filopodia, Orbini provides three references: to the second book of “the Wagrian”, to a report of Filippo Callimaco, and to “modern maps”. The first reference is enigmatic. Elsewhere Orbini refers to two different “Wagrians”, Vitichindo and Carlo. The search for these authors and their works, which Orbini cites as *Della Germania* (in case of Vitichindo) and *De Venedi* (in case of Carlo), has not produced any results.¹⁸

The second reference was identified by Sima Ćirković (1968, 396) as a report to Innocent VIII about the necessity of waging war against the Turks, written by the well-known author Filippo Buonaccorsi Callimaco (1437–1496). The report in particular deals with the origins of the Slavs in a region situated near the Northern Ocean and “condemned to cold” (Callimachus 1964, 84). As the report does not mention any Arctic discovery, the attempt to date the discovery of the island by the Russians within the pontificate of Innocent VIII (1484–1492), undertaken by Lebedev and Esakov (1971, 74–75), cannot be sustained.

The reference to Callimaco was evidently present in the text of the Wagrian quoted by Orbini, and its purpose was to embellish the text by mentioning the author, whom the Wagrian held in high esteem. We should note that Callimaco was acquainted with at least two other heroes of our study. A former member of Pomponio Leto’s Rome Academy, Callimaco worked in Kraków at the time when Conrad Celtis resided in the city. Both Pomponio and Callimaco were role models for Celtis as humanist scholars and poets. It is quite probable that we should look for the Wagrian or his source in this same circle of late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century humanists, to which Conrad Celtis also belonged.

Finally, the third reference is given to “modern maps” that show an island named Novaya Zemlya. The word “modern” (omitted in the translation by Witsen/Litke) testifies to the fact that the identification of the island with Novaya Zemlya is a recent scholarly hypothesis, probably by Orbini himself, who uses the new cartographic data to verify the more than one-hundred-year-old account. The older source named the island Filopodia. It looks like a corruption of one of the traditional designations of the land of the Sami, *Finlappelanth*. The name Filopodia may have been also influenced by *Ipopodes*, the island inhabited by a legendary people with horses’ feet.¹⁹ As for the other place name in the passage, *Biarmia*, where the discoverers originated according to Orbini, this originally Scandinavian name (*Bjarmaland*) could refer to a vast coastal area along the White Sea, but also to one further to the east.

The date on the title page of Mauro Orbini’s book is 1601, and the introduction to the book (that is, the end of his work) is dated March 1, 1601. When we subtract 107 years mentioned in his passage on Filopodia, the resulting date could indicate the discovery of the island in 1494. Taking into account the fact that Orbini mostly worked on his text in

quale (come esposse Filippo Callimaco ad Innocenzo ottauo sommo Pontefice) è soggetta, et dannata a’ perpetui freddi, et ghiacci. La chiamano Filopodia, et di grandezza auanza l’Isola di Cipro; et nei moderni Mapamondi le danno nome di Nouazemglia (Orbini 1601, 94). The book’s first translation into Russian in 1722 did not leave any doubt about the identity of the island: “they called it Filopodia or Novaya Zemlya” (называли его Филоподія или Нова земля, see Kniga 1722, 76).

¹⁸ Compare Ćirković 1968, 392, 419. A modern Russian translation by Iurii Kuprikov cites “Carl the Wagrian” in the passage about the island of Filopodia (Orbini 2010, 114); the translator used the second edition of 1606, which I have not been able to consult.

¹⁹ According to Pomponio Leto, Germany in the north extends *usque ad Lippos et Hippodas* (Zabughin 1910, 2.1, 81).

1600, we can make quite a probable conclusion that the date which Orbini (or the Wagrian) saw in the primary source was the same as the date of Münzer's letter, 1493. Could Orbini's *Filopodia* be identical with the *Grulanda* of the Portuguese text?

Beside the name, other characteristics of the island are similar in both texts. First, the island is large. Its coastline is 300 leagues (more than 1500 kilometers) according to Münzer, and its size is larger than that of Cyprus according to Orbini. Second, the island is inhabited by subjects of the Grand Duke of Muscovy according to Münzer, and by Slavs according to Orbini.²⁰ As the essence of both descriptions is the same, we can assume a common source.

***Germania generalis* and *Amores* by Conrad Celtis**

Conrad Celtis himself wrote about a recent Arctic discovery, but his information has never been compared to the texts of Pomponio, Münzer, and Orbini. He provided the following description of the northern seas in his poem *Germania generalis*:

The Codonean Sea and the Ocean named Germanic set the natural limits [for Germany] in the North. Behind those lie three kingdoms and the cold Briton, there is Thule surrounded by the Orkneys and the glacial island that has been recently discovered for the Hyperborean king and that reigns over the Norwegians, the Danes and the hard-drinking Swedes, who see the utmost stars of the frozen sky, who are deprived of spring and summer and who always endure eternal winter and perpetual snows from the dull sky.²¹

The fragment, which is followed by an extensive passage about the Sami, has grammatical problems, the most important of which is the participle *regens* (reigning). It agrees in case not with the Hyperborean king, mentioned in the previous line, but with the glacial island. Had that participle been in grammatical agreement with the king, that king could have been only Hans of Denmark, the supreme ruler of all the Scandinavian nations united by the Union of Kalmar. This is how Peter Luh in his dissertation identified the Hyperborean King, probably having assumed that Celtis had made a grammatical mistake. We ought to stress that this had to have been a mistake, and not a misprint,²² because the correct form would have broken the metric rhythm of the poem here.²³ If we

²⁰ The definition of the Slavic nation in Orbini's book is broad and includes both the Finns and the Norsemen (he derived the Slavs from Scandinavia, see Orbini 1601, 134–136). There is no doubt that the Finno-Ugrian population of the Russian North, the Urals, and Western Siberia belongs to this category.

²¹ Sed mare Codoneum Germano et nomine dictum

Oceanum fines posuit natura sub Arcton,

Quos ultra tria regna manent gelidusque Britannus,

Orcadibus qua cincta suis Tyle et glacialis

Nuper Hyperboreo que inuenta est insula regi

Noruegos Dacosque regens Suedosque bibaces,

Ultima concreti qui cernunt sydera celi

Estat verisque inopes hiememque perennem

Perpetuasque niues celo paciuntur inertis (Müller 2001, 98; in both editions published during Celtis's lifetime, the words *dictus Oceanus* are in the nominative instead of the accusative case).

²² Like *dictus Oceanus* in the first and second verses, see the previous footnote.

²³ In 1515, an unknown editor of version D of the poem (according to Müller) had to add a whole line to achieve the same meaning: Et cincta Orcadibus Thule: prestansque sub axe / Nuper Hyperboreo que inuenta est insula regi / Noruegos Dacosque feros Suedosque bibaces / Tutanti vnanimi scepro: que noctis ad

understand *regens* grammatically, however, then the “reigning” entity will be the island, not the king. “Reigning” will mean, for example, “prominent” or “occupying the uppermost position on a northern-oriented map,” and the identity of the Hyperborean King will no longer be obvious.

The modern editor of *Germania generalis* found it, therefore, difficult to interpret the line about the glacial island and the Hyperborean king. He speculated that “Glacialis” was not the name of a separate island, but one of the attributes of the legendary Ultima Thule (Müller 2001, 99), noting that “Celtis seems to be referring here to the discovery of an island in the north. ... Perhaps he identified the already discovered America with Thule?”²⁴ As for the adjective “Hyperborean”, Celtis used it in his poetry with the broad meaning of “northern” (Müller 2001, 146).

Celtis also mentioned both Thule and a glacial island in the last of his four books of erotic geographic elegies, the *Amores*, published as one volume in Nuremberg on April 5, 1502. In each of the four books, one of his lovers appears as the symbol of one of four parts of Germany, which correspond to the four seasons of the year, four ages of the life of man, and four times of the day. Each book opens with a map, the drawings for which were prepared by Celtis himself, and the woodcuts made by artists from Dürer’s circle.²⁵ The fourth and the final book is about the north (winter, old age, night), personified by Barbara Codonea, a Dane, whose name is derived from the ancient name of the Baltic Sea, *sinus Codanus*.²⁶ With this lady, depicted together with the poet in the middle of the map of the north (fig. 1), Celtis plans a journey “into the Arctic sea, where Ultimate Thule is encircled by the Orkney Islands and where the glacial island (*glacialis insula*) is at the extreme pole visited by the waves.”²⁷

According to Peter Luh (169–170), “Glacialis” represents here a Latinized form of the name “Iceland”. Even though this Latinized form did exist and went back at least to Adam of Bremen (Björnbo 1912, 147), such identification would not explain why Iceland had been, according to the *Germania generalis*, “recently discovered for the Hyperborean king”, even if we assume that the Hyperborean king was Hans of Denmark. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Danish-Norwegian kings never lost sight of Iceland because of the necessity to curb the expansionist intentions of both the English Crown and the Hanseatic League (Seaver 1996, 192–205).

The map of the north, entitled with the name of *Barbara Codonea*, provides in addition a complete picture of Germany; as Peter Luh (2001, 173, 175–176) suggested, the map of the north is more general in nature than the other three maps because it serves not only

umbras / Ultima concreti prospectat sydera celi... (Thule surrounded by its Orkneys and the island that is the most proximate to the pole, that has recently been discovered for the Hyperborean king, who with one scepter protects the Norwegians, the savage Danes and the hard-drinking Swedes, the nations who in the dark of night see the utmost stars of the frozen sky...).

²⁴ Celtis scheint sich hier auf die Entdeckung einer Insel im Norden zu beziehen. ... Identifiziert Celtis vielleicht das gerade entdeckte Amerika mit Thule? (Müller 2001, 136).

²⁵ The attribution of the woodcuts to Hans von Kulmbach has not been sustained, see Luh 2001, 348.

²⁶ Celtis preferred the spelling *Codonus* (Müller 2001, 136–139, 144).

²⁷ Tunc ego qui fueram peregrinus in orbe decennis

Cogor ad arctoum pergere forte sinum

Orcadibus qua cincta suis Tyle et glacialis

Insula ad extremum quam videt unda polum (Celtis 1501, 59v). The quote is from the second elegy of the fourth book entitled *Odiporicon a Rheno ad sinum Codonum et mare Balticum et Tylem insulam*. The map is on fol. 57v.

as an illustration to the fourth book of the *Amores*, but also as an illustration to *Germania generalis*, one of the versions of which was printed in the same volume, right after the *Amores*. There exist also schematic copies of the same maps, made by Hartmann Schedel prior to September 9, 1500. Their relationship with the printed woodcuts is controversial, in particular because there are discrepancies both in their spelling of several place names and in their degree scale. According to a detailed study by Peter Luh (2001, 171, 327–328, 355–356), Schedel had probably copied the initial versions of Celtis's own sketches of his maps, while the discrepancies were mistakes by the artists responsible for preparing the maps for transfer to woodcut. Several discrepancies in the spellings, the scale, and the depiction of the night sky look like results of conscious editing efforts (see Chekin 2004, 30–31). In particular, some corrections agree with the 1482 edition of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, printed in Ulm by Lienhart Holl, which was one of the sources for the *Barbara Codonea*.²⁸

Let us look at the northern islands and peninsulas of Celtis's map. Many of them can be found in the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia*, which, like most Ptolemy atlases, includes a general map of the world and a series of regional maps. In the south of the Scandinavian Peninsula, the map of the world (fig. 2) has the legend *Dacia*, similarly to Celtis's map (*Daciae pars*). Both maps show *Scandia* and *Gottia*; on the map of the world, *Gottia* is shown twice, as a part of Scandinavia (Götaland) and as an island in the Baltic Sea (Gotland). On both maps Thule (*Tyle/Tile*) is in close proximity to the Orkney Islands (*Orcades*), which supports Thule's identification with one of the Shetland Islands (Geiger 1896, 25; Luh 2001, 169–170).

North of Thule, Celtis's *Barbara Codonea* map shows *Islandi[a]*, but Iceland is not the northernmost island on Celtis's map: in the northeastern part of the ocean there is another, unnamed, island. We can find its name on the map of the world from the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia*, where the northernmost island, at the very top, is called *Glacialis*. On the regional map of Northern Europe, one of the "modern" maps with non-Ptolemaic content in the same 1482 Ulm edition of *Cosmographia* (fig. 3), Iceland (in the upper left corner) is named *Islanda*. When comparing the relative positions of islands and peninsulas on the world and the regional maps, which had different projections,²⁹ one could receive the probably incorrect impression that *Glacialis* and *Islanda* were two different islands and, as a result, identify *Glacialis* with a recently discovered island.

Moreover, in the western part of the Glacial Sea above the British Isles, the map of the world shows the island of *Scitlanda*. In one of Nicolaus Germanus manuscripts of Ptolemy (Schloß Wolfegg, Wolfeggianus latinus 9818), which Joseph Fischer identified as the model for the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia*, the same island on the same map is designated *Islanda*; because of that Fischer interpreted *Scitlanda* as a typo (Fischer 1902, 79). Halldór Hermannson listed other several instances when the name *Scitlanda*, although originally referring to the Shetland Islands, could be understood as Iceland (Hermannson 1931, 6–11). Because of this, historians of the cartography of Iceland have interpreted *Glacialis* of the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia* as either a duplicate Iceland (Hermannson 1931, 9) or an unknown Arctic land (Sigurðsson 1971, 83–84). It is not

²⁸ Celtis's own copy of this edition has been preserved in Debrecen (Tiszántúli Református Egyházkerület Nagykönyvtára, Ős143, korábbi jelzet U45; see Müller 2001, 266, 270, 383–384).

²⁹ For complete maps, see <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/Rosenwald.0088a.1> (images 145-146, 265-266).

surprising that Celtis could also present his own understanding of the glacial island at the very top of the world map.

Taking into account the fact that Celtis was connected to at least two of the three other authors who had reported on an arctic island discovered by the Russians, we can suggest that in this case he had in mind the same Grulanda/Filopodia, and that the Hyperborean king should be identified as the Grand Duke of Muscovy.

We have seen that the existing variants of the name of the island (Grulanda, Filopodia, and Glacialis) could have been originally associated with different objects on fifteenth-century maps of the Arctic. The word “island” itself is of limited help. The designation of an unknown Arctic land as an island or a peninsula could depend on a medieval geographer’s theoretical ideas about the structure of the northern periphery of the inhabited world, as well as on additional, originally Biblical, connotations of the word “island” that applied to some other isolated spaces, not necessarily surrounded by water.³⁰ The subjects of the Grand Duke of Muscovy could have directed their boats not only to Novaya Zemlya or even Svalbard, but also to a coastal area, for some reason perceived as an island.

Thus, a study of Celtis’s contacts, the fourth book of his *Amores* and the *Germania generalis*, and his *Barbara Codonea* map demonstrates that the humanist played a key role in transmitting knowledge about the northernmost “island” that was mentioned in narrative sources of the late fifteenth century and that some scholars understand as Spitsbergen. We can tentatively reconstruct the routes of transmission of this knowledge in the following way: Celtis first learned about the island in the late 1480s in Rome, from Giulio Pomponio Leto; in the late spring or early summer of 1493 he related this information to Hieronymus Münzer, who put it in his letter to John II. Approximately the same year this information reached “the Wagrian” or his source – a year when the air which the Nuremberg humanists were breathing was full of expectations of new and amazing discoveries and when no one could foresee that the Atlantic Ocean would reveal its mysteries much earlier than the Arctic. At the very end of the century, Celtis himself left both poetic and cartographic testimonies about the same island, when contemplating the maps in his Ptolemy atlas and recalling what Pomponio had said about the northern lands.

³⁰ Old Russian texts with such connotations have been the focus of an essay by the late philosopher of culture Vadim Tsyburskii (1997).

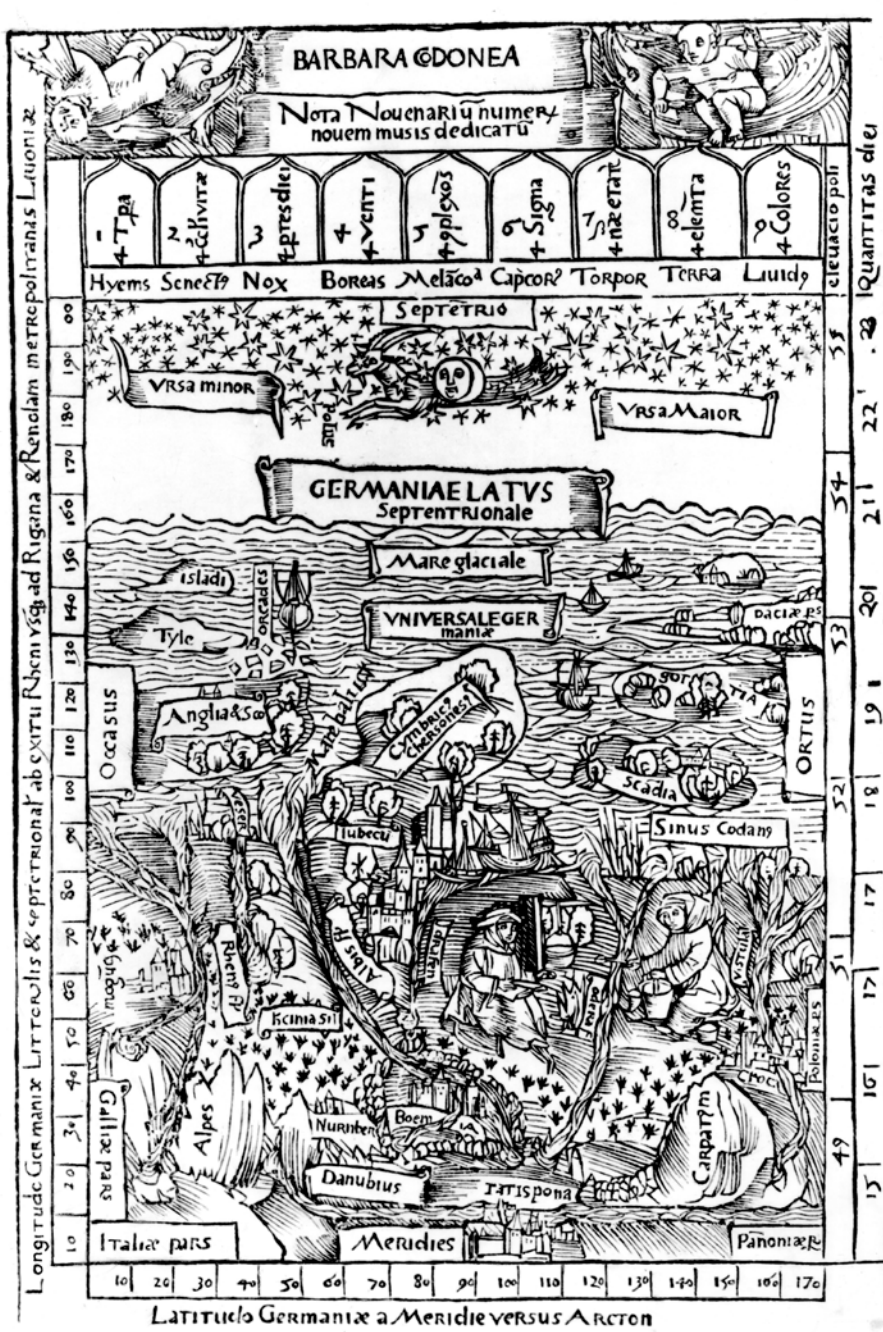


Figure 1. The Barbara Codonea map from Conrad Celtis' Amores (1502)



Figure 2. The northwestern portion of the map of the world from the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia*

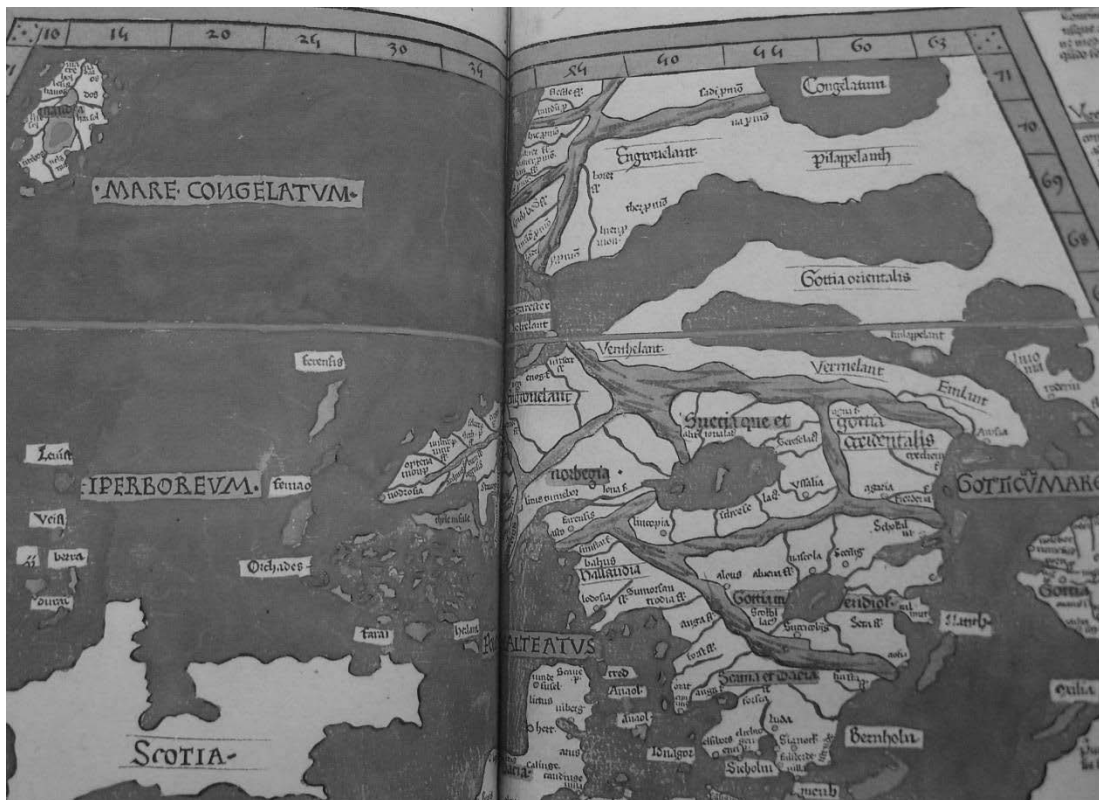


Figure 3. Part of the map of Northern Europe from the 1482 Ulm *Cosmographia*

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