

Images of Pre-Discovery Alaska in the Work of European Cartographers

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INTRODUCTION

European pre-discovery maps of the area now known as Alaska concern four interlocked issues: (1) an extension of knowledge of California and the northwest coast of America; (2) the nature of the Arctic; (3) what lay north of Japan; and (4) the relationship between America and Asia — how wide was the Pacific?

A picture of the general outline of Alaska became clear to European geographers during the last half of the eighteenth century. Many questions concerning the arctic coast lasted well into the nineteenth century, and questions regarding arctic islands were not settled until the twentieth. This paper ends with the year 1728, however; well before Europe actually found out through the work of Du Halde (1735) about the voyage of Bering and Chirikov. By then, substantial information about actual discoveries in the far North Pacific had begun to appear on maps published in Europe. The many intriguing manuscript Russian maps, as well as maps produced in China and Japan, will only be dealt with to the extent that they influenced European mapmakers.

The maps that have been chosen for study are those which demonstrate concepts of the region where the North Pacific and the Arctic meet and which would clearly have influenced the concept of this region. There are literally thousands of maps produced before 1728 which, in some way, touch upon this region — every world map and every globe had to deal with it somehow. Many simply left it blank — which is a statement of a sort. Others copied the work of other mapmakers, often in muddled form or with less detail. These two categories are not considered here. In compiling a carto-bibliography of Alaska for publication (Falk, 1983) I have found roughly 550 relevant pre-1728 maps which are still available for study either in the original or in facsimile.

I will not list each map; they can be found in the carto-bibliography. Instead, I have organized these maps in terms of broad concepts and will discuss important examples. I have taken some liberty with the term "Alaska" since in certain cases the relevant area was thought to be all water, or deep in Asia. The first concepts will be dealt with quickly since they all precede the recognition of an "Alaska". Some might argue that they should not even be considered, but they do represent views held for a long time. It would be difficult to understand the development of cartographic trends without them.

PRE-ALASKAN MAP TYPES

No North America

We begin with the first concept: there is no North America. This was based upon an acceptance of Ptolemy's figure of the earth, and is best seen in two well-known maps drawn before Columbus returned from his first voyage to America, Toscanelli (1457) and Behaim (1492). Both of these maps attempt to reconcile with Ptolemy what was known of Asia and the islands of the Atlantic.

Minor Additions to Asia

The second concept is related to the first: new discoveries as a simple extension of Asia. Ruych (1508), Franciscus (1524), Schoner (1524), Fineaeus (1531), and Vopell (1542, 1556, 1558) all published maps that added to Asia without creating a discernible North American continent. For example, Ruych attached Greenland and Labrador to northeast Asia. Neither of these concepts allows for a North Pacific.

North America as an Island

The third category is a subarctic America not connected to Asia. North America is represented as one or more islands, or as a diminutive continent stopping short of the Arctic, sometimes with a break between North and South America. Though a great variety of land forms is represented, they all suggest easily navigated waters — with no substantial barriers on the way to the Orient.

This type of map really began with Waldseemuller's (1507); the tradition was continued by the "globe of Lenox" (Anon., 1510), Stobnicza (1512), Boulenger (1514), Schoner (1515), Glareanus (1519), Apianus (1520), Schoner (1520) (Fig. 1), Coppa da Isola (1528), Vadianus (1534), and a number of lesser maps and later copies. Variants of this type were later used to help in the propaganda campaign for expeditions to find a Northwest Passage. Some of the features and some of the terminology of areas such as "Terre Corte Realis" later were transferred to the North Pacific. While this model would allow for something of a northwest coast as we know it, there is nothing of a land bridging Arctic and Subarctic, nothing of a land bordering the North Pacific, Bering Sea, and Arctic

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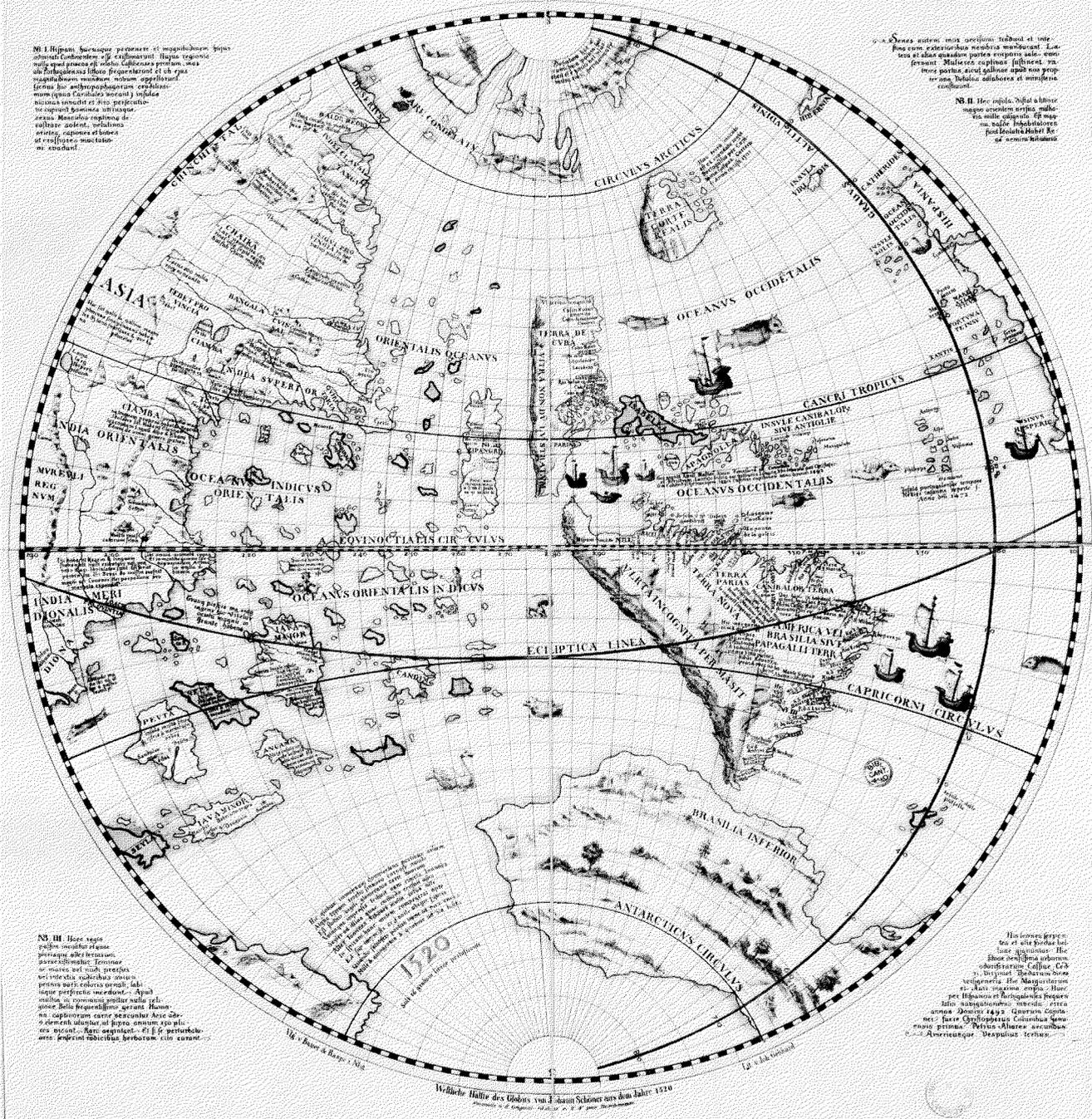


FIG. 1. "Westliche Hälfte des Globus von Johann Schöner aus dem Jahre 1520". Reproduced in Chillany (1853). Courtesy Cambridge University Library.

Ocean. Note that on the Schöner map (Fig. 1), Terra Corte Realis is an island, and North America, also depicted as an island, is called "Terra de Cuba" and only extends to 50°N. North America and Japan are separated by less than 10° of longitude.

North America Joined to Asia

The fourth category shows a distinct and essentially complete North America connected to Asia. The connection is

wide, usually starting at about 40°N and continuing to above the Arctic Circle. The first published map of this type that I have found is Gastaldi's "Universale" (1546). A number of other Gastaldi maps (1548a,b, 1562) with this feature were issued up through the 1560s. Other maps, such as that of Homem (1559), look as if they were intended to represent this feature, as the map runs off the sheet. (This should not be confused with a later desire to vastly extend North America across a wide Pacific to a strait near Asia.) In 1560 Paolo di Forlani

(1565, 1574) began issuing maps very much like those of Gastaldi, which continued to appear until 1590. Johannes Honter (1561) issued a map like this in Basle, as did Velho (1560, 1561) in Lisbon. Sideri produced one in 1563 and Cimerlinus in 1566.

These maps differ considerably in their nomenclature and in the way in which they render other features. The original Gastaldi map calls the northern part of the Pacific (Mir del Sur) "Golfo de Tonza" and places an early representation of Japan in the center. Other maps move Asiatic islands quite close to America. Gastaldi himself did not remain consistent. In his "Carta Marina Nova Tabula" (Gastaldi, 1548a) he placed a large bay just north of California, which reaches deep into North America. The Arctic Ocean appears as a closed sea; Scandinavia, Greenland, Labrador, "La Florida", and Asia are connected in that order. In his "Universale Novo" (Gastaldi, 1548b) there is an open Arctic Ocean with a great mass of land attached to North America, leaving a narrow passage just above Scandinavia. This map type makes no provision for a connection by water between the Pacific and the Arctic oceans, and thus leaves no possibility of the existence of a Northwest Passage.

Asia to the North

The fifth category is closely related to the fourth. In it, Asia and North America could be connected but for a Northwest Passage or a strait which separates North America on the south from Asian territory to the north. Two maps by Gemma Frisius which appear in the publications of Petrus Apianus (1529, 1530) show a diminutive North America below Greenland and Labrador, which are attached to Asia. A variation of this occurs in Mercator's (1538) engraved cordiform world map, and in some Florianus globe gores from 1550: Greenland is incorporated in an enormous arctic land attached to Asia just east of Scandinavia. Labrador, "Baccalaem Regio", is separated from this land by a long narrow strait which meets the Atlantic. The North American coast slopes to the southwest. Japan, "Sipango", is located in the center of a narrow Pacific Ocean below the arctic land mass. Sebastian Munster's (1540) "Typus orbis universalis" places North America below two Asian lands. One of these land masses is attached to Asia near Scandinavia, and the other almost meets Asia above North America from "India Superior". Some 1540 globe gores (Anon., 1540) provide for a long Northwest Passage beginning below Asia and continuing all the way around the north of North America, widening only slowly as it turns into the North Pacific. North America is in the shape of a large letter "C". Neither these maps nor various copies of them give a particular shape to the northwestern tip of North America.

EMERGING ALASKA MAP TYPES

The preceding five map categories depict various theories concerning the relationship of Asia to America. Alaska, as we know it, could not fit well into any of them. The following map categories all provide for a direct connection between the North Pacific and the Arctic Ocean. They show a variety of

forms, some of which approach reality. Some of them are extrapolations from actual discoveries to yet-undiscovered areas. Some mapmakers produced maps in several categories, and there are even maps illustrating conflicting theories in the same atlas.

A Wide and Open Sea

Few mapmakers subscribed to the opinion that there was an empty expanse of open sea between Asia and America. Some left the region largely blank, without committing themselves to a theory. Tramezini (1554) completed both Asia and America, leaving nearly 50° of open sea between them. Antonio de Herrera (1601) enlarged the distance to nearly 60°. Bartolomeu Velho (1560) made the distances between the two continents across the North Pacific roughly equal to the distance between Spain and the eastern seaboard of America. In contrast, most cartographers either placed the extremities of the two continents very close to one another or else filled the void with new lands.

A Long Strait with Japan at the Bottom

This concept was popular between 1540 and 1600. It is a major transitional form and most of the pre-discovery maps that followed were adaptations and variations of it. It was in this period that the term "Anian" became known. One of the first to show the general configuration, though not yet using the term Anian, was the map of America from the 1540 Basle *Ptolemaeus*. It placed Japan ("Zipangri") near the west coast of America among the "Archipelagus 7448 insularii". The first map to give full expression to this concept was Gastaldi's "Cosmographia universalis" (1562). Only recently discovered, it is now in the British Library. It shows a long and narrow "Streto de Anian" with Japan oriented east-to-west at the bottom. Anian itself is located in northeast Asia. The "Nova totis terrarum orbis" by Ortelius (1564) shows a somewhat wider strait, unnamed, with Anian in Asia across from "Quivir Regio" in North America. Forlani (1565) issued a map in Venice that was long thought to be the first to use the name "Strait of Anian" — a better-known second version was issued a year later by Zaltieri (1566). Among the most influential of all maps of this era were those issued in 1570 by Ortelius. The precise configuration of the Straits of Anian is not entirely clear on his "Typus orbis terrarum" (Ortelius, 1570a), but is best seen on his "Tartariae sive magni chami regni typus" (Ortelius, 1570b). It was re-issued frequently and was rather closely copied by others at least as late as 1600 (Metellus, 1600).

Di Forlani (1574) introduced a "Golfo Di Anian" full of small islands below the "Streto Di Anian". Sometimes the concept continued to be used even without the name, by then commonly known; an example is the beautiful Martines manuscript map of 1578. Other elements were sometimes changed. Milo (1582) oriented Japan north-and-south. De Jode (1593a), in his "Hemispheriv ab acquinociali linea" attached one of Mercator's arctic islands to northeastern Asia, making the strait even longer than usual.

Plancius Maps

The surviving pre-discovery maps looking most like Alaska were drawn by Peter Plancius and adapted by other cartographers from about 1590 to 1600. They continued to be reprinted, with minor changes, to beyond 1650. Plancius himself later became cartographer for the Dutch East India Company. This map type shares many characteristics with Mercator maps of the far northwest coast of America. Wagner (1937) reproduced the relevant portion of the 18-sheet Plancius planisphere of 1592. Quivira Regnum is located well north and west of California. It continues to Anian Regnum with a Bergi Regio on the Arctic coast. De Jode (1593b) further developed the concept with his “Quivirae Regnu cum alijs versus Borea” (Fig. 2), retaining the same names, but rendering Quivira Regnum much more angular and peninsulas much more pronounced. The apex of this trend was reached by Cornelius Wytfliet (1597) in his *Descriptionis Ptolemaicae* (see Fig. 3), the first atlas devoted entirely to America. (Verner and Stuart-Stubbs (1979:84) incorrectly state: “in many respects this map is the first printed map of Alaska...”. They apparently were

unaware of Plancius, claiming that this map was derived from Gastaldi.) One of the most interesting features of the Wytfliet map is that the Arctic Circle goes through something that resembles the Seward Peninsula in both shape and location. With some imagination, one can conjure up the Mackenzie, the beginnings of an Alaska Peninsula, and so forth. Blaeu adopted this form for one of his earliest works, a terrestrial globe of 1599. Both Wytfliet and Plancius went through a number of subsequent editions.



FIG. 2. “Quivirae Regnu cum alijs versus Borea” (de Jode, 1593b). Courtesy Helsinki University Library.



FIG. 3. “Limes occidentis Quivira et Anian” (Wytfliet, 1597). Courtesy Elmer E. Rasmuson Library.

With the Wytfliet map, Anian Regnum became the dominant name for the region. Quivira Regnum and Bergi Regio became less important. This type of map sometimes returned as an incidental part of other maps, as in Speed’s “Kingdome of China” (1626) (Fig. 4) where it appears as “Parte of America”. Notice how closely the coastline approximates that in Figures 2 and 3. Plancius provided the last new, specific, and detailed image of the northwest part of America. What followed was a return to old forms, or to generalized lines with ever-changing nomenclature. New configurations of the entire region also began to be suggested rather than set out in detail, through the introduction of new islands in the North Pacific. Anian frequently returned, as something north of an inlet, as an island just north of California, frequently surprisingly close to Hudson’s Bay as in Nicolosius (1670) (Fig. 5) or Scherer’s “Provinciae Borealis” (1703a) (Fig. 6). Note that in this case, Scherer left open the nature of Anian — it is impossible to determine whether it appears as an island or as a part of Asia.

New Lands in the North Pacific

New land masses began to appear in the seventeenth century, filling up the space between the two continents, quite unlike the small unnamed islands scattered around at random on maps of the preceding centuries. The most important elements were the various interpretations given to Dutch discoveries north of Japan, which seemed to confirm earlier reports of lands such as that of Joao da Gama, made after a voyage from

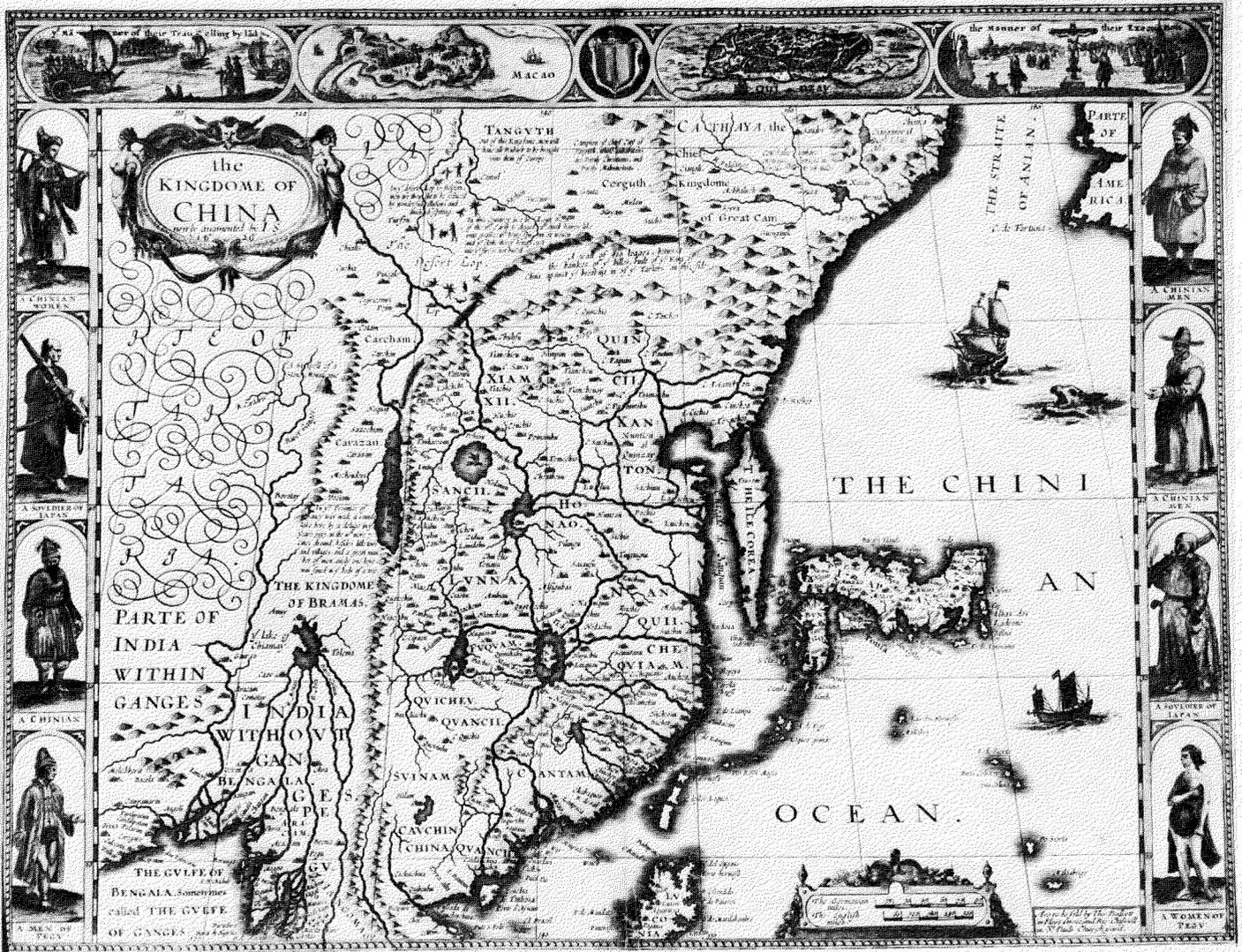


FIG. 4. "The kingdome of China, newly augmented by I.S." (Speed, 1626). Courtesy Elmer E. Rasmuson Library.

Macao to Acapulco in 1590. Prior to this time, the occasional large island had appeared on maps. For example, there was the *Isla de Plata* north of Japan in the *Ortelius Maris Pacifici* (1589). Some mapmakers vaguely indicated an unnamed land to the west of California, for example Goos on his "t'Noorder deel van West Indien" (1624). Still, it was only after reports concerning northern Japan and Dutch sea exploration, and by Jesuits such as Girolamo de Angelis, that these islands were given a definite form. The Dutch Governor General of India, Antonio van Diemen, sent Martin Gerritsen de Vries to look for islands around Japan in 1643. Plagued by fog, he sailed along Hokkaido, several of the Kuril islands, and part of Sakhalin. He was convinced that he had found the straits separating Asia from North America. Jesso and "Staten Eiland" were separated by de Vries Strait from "Compagnies Landt". The land Jesso (Iesso, Yezo, Sesso, Iezo, etc.) which started life as Ezo (Hokkaido) took on many shapes and sizes in the following years. These concepts were still very much alive at the time of Bering's second expedition and he wasted precious time searching for Company Land.

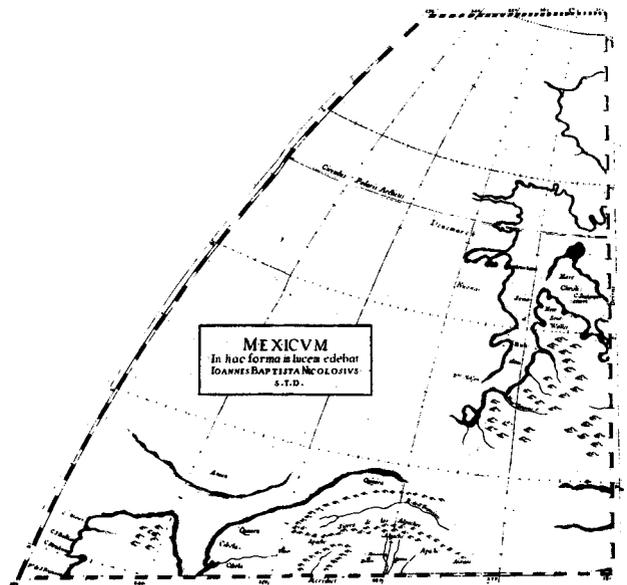


FIG. 5. "Mexicvm in hac forma a luce edebat" (Nicolosius, 1670). Courtesy Cambridge University Library.



FIG. 6. "Provinciae Borealis Americae", dated 1700 (Scherer, 1703). Courtesy Cambridge University Library.

At first some of the claims made for the size of Jesso were patently excessive. Sir Robert Dudley in his *Dell' Arcano del Mare* (1646) allowed for only a narrow passage between Tartaria and Iezo, starting as an island just above Korea (Figs. 7, 8). Iezo then stretches above Japan across the Pacific to reach "Il Stretto di Iezo" at about the Oregon coast. Dudley's Iezo is almost large enough to be a continent in its own right. One is left guessing how this configuration would alter the nature of the Arctic to the north. Iezo, in this form, precludes neither a de Vries Strait nor an Anian Strait.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether or not a North Pacific "Terra Incognita" derives from Jesso. In any case, maps of Japan and the Far East began incorporating this feature. Sanson d'Abbeville gave Jesso various configurations. In his 1652 map of Asia, it appears as an enormous land stretching off the map north of Japan. In a double-hemisphere map of the same year there is a faint outline filling the space between Asia and North America. In his *Description de la Tartarie* (Sanson d'Abbeville, 1654) a long and narrow "Destroit de Iesso" follows northern Asia all the way to the Arctic Ocean. In his "Les Deux Poles" (Sanson d'Abbeville, 1657), he left blank the area from this strait to Baffin Bay, thus at least suggesting that Jesso might, indeed, be part of North America. The very clear and conservative "Pascaerte Vande Zuyd-Zee" (1661) shows the de Vries discoveries with no embellishments or extensions at the latitude of California. A simi-

lar map, in a similar style, with the same title, was issued by Pieter Goos in 1666, but it includes more of California. These two maps place these new lands far to the south of what we now know as Alaska.

The 1669 Sanson map of Asia has yet another interesting feature: a peninsula called "Yupi" attached to Asia, well north of Korea. To the north of that is a "Mer des Kaimachites." Thus one side of the de Vries Strait becomes part of the Asian mainland. In a double-hemisphere map of the same year, Sanson again extended Jesso toward North America from Yupi, but called it "T. de la Compagnie" as well. Occasionally the "Destroit d'Anian" and the "Destroit de Vriez" were considered but two names for the one strait, but most often they were shown independently on opposite sides of the Pacific.

Perhaps the clearest example of the way most cartographers placed Anian and Company Land in relation to one another is Scherer's (1703b) polar projection (Fig. 9): everything north of "Fret. Anian" is left blank. The desire for treasure seemed to make these lands worth exploring in their own right. For example, the 1711 Senex map of Asia (Fig. 10) includes the following description of "Land of Yedso:" "Descov'd in 1643. Pike Anthony mines of silver". This map also includes the icy capes to the north with the statement: "It is not known where this chain of Mountains ends or whether they are join'd to some other continent." One can see how this image evolved

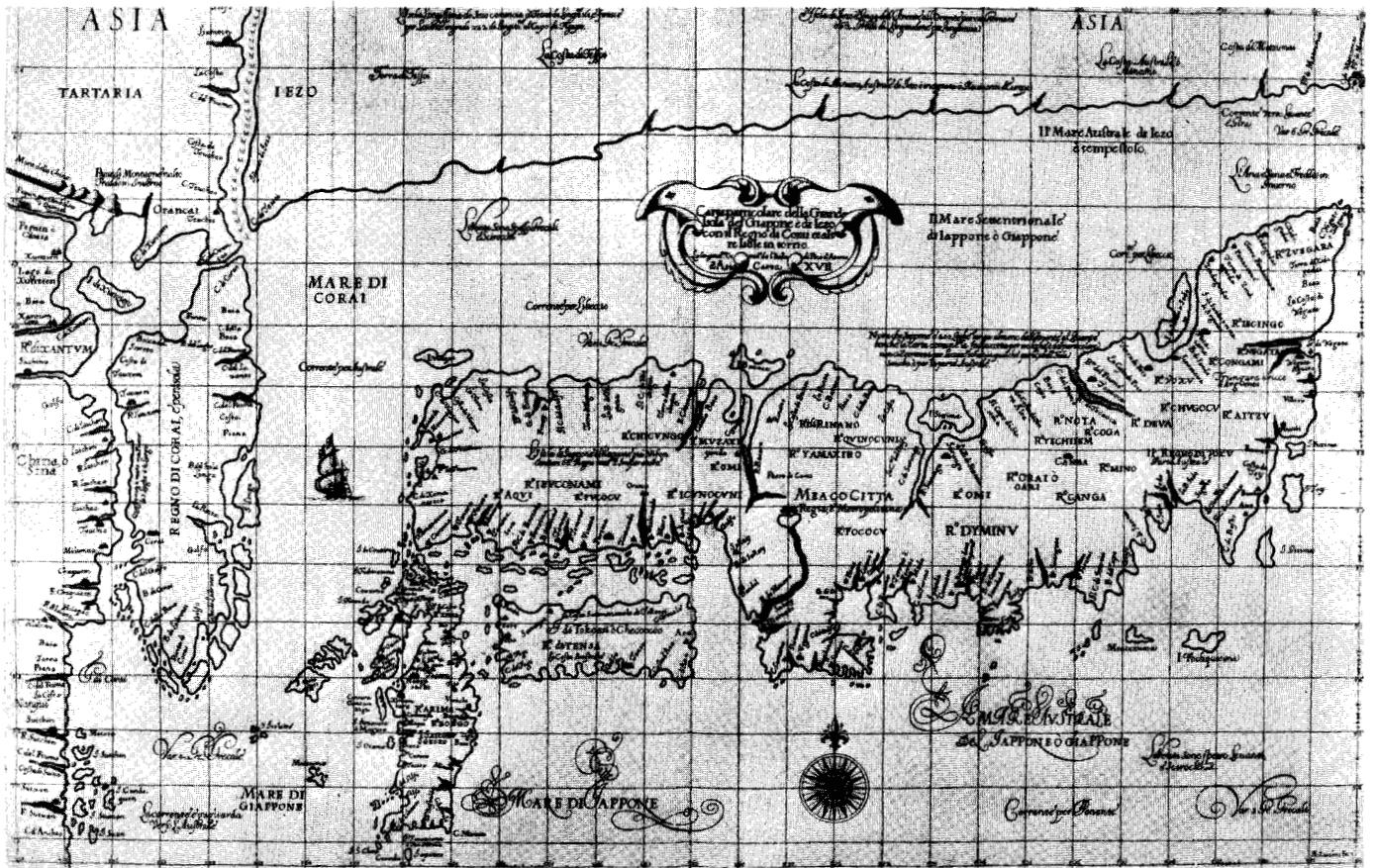


FIG. 7. "Carte particolare della Grande Isola del Giappone ed Iezo con il Regno di Corai..." (Dudley, 1646). Courtesy Helsinki University Library.

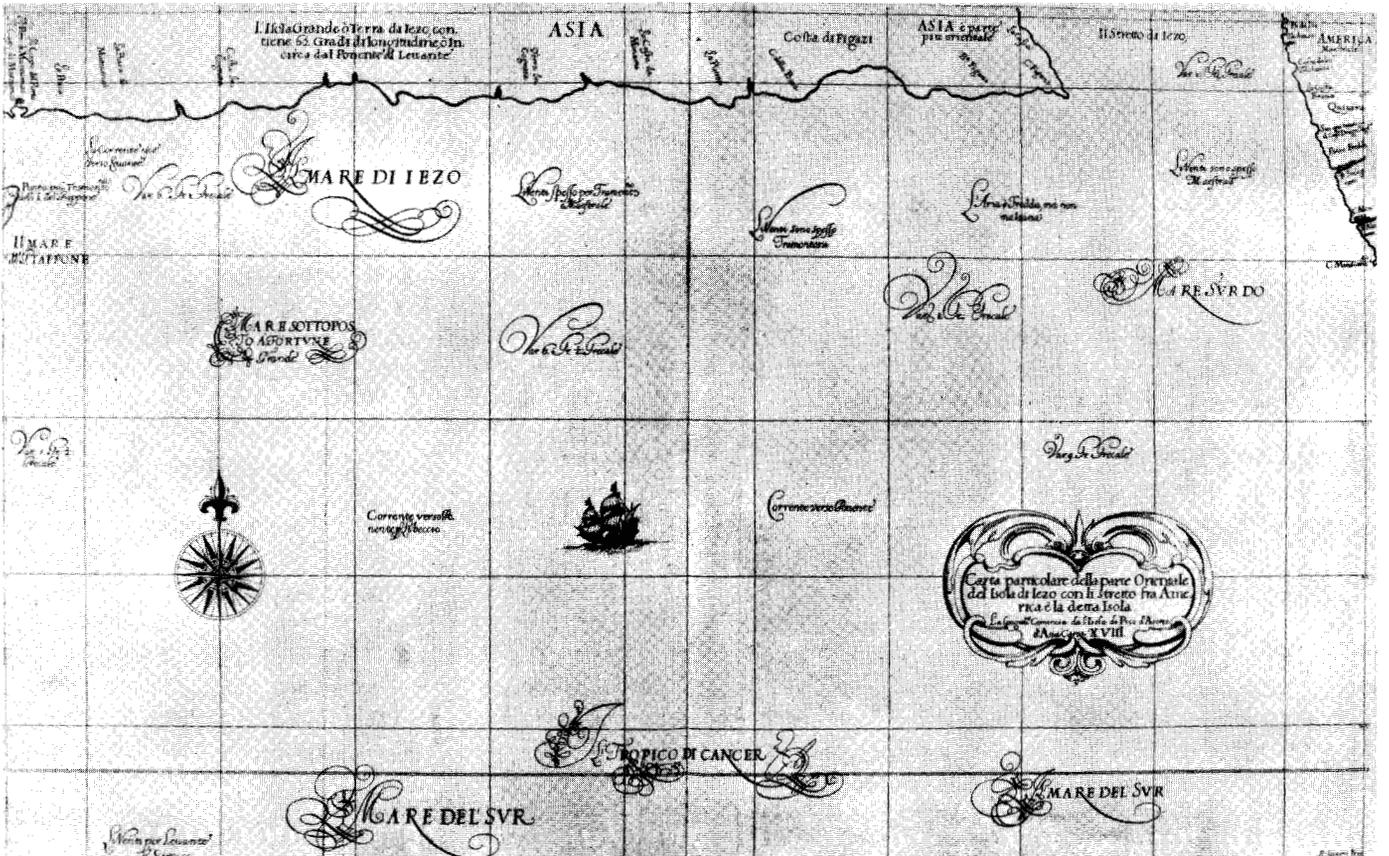


FIG. 8. "Carte particolare della parte Orientale del Isola di Iezo con Il Stretto fra America..." (Dudley, 1646). Courtesy Helsinki University Library.



FIG. 9. "Repraesentatio geographica itineris Maritimi Navis Victoriae" (Scherer, 1703b). Courtesy Helsinki University Library.

from the commonly accepted maps such as Porro's "Tartariae Imperium" (1596) (Fig. 11).

Russian discoveries on the Pacific coast became known through Jesuit missionaries active in China, and through direct contact between Russians and West Europeans. A rather clear concept of the existence of Kamchatka emerged, including the idea of a great icy cape to the north which might be attached to North America. It faded when Chukotka was recognized. This is shown quite clearly in Homann's *Atlas* (1725). Jean Bernard (1728) published a map (Fig. 12) showing new islands off northeast Asia which were said to pay tribute to Russia, similar to the more famous Philipp von Strahlenberg map published two years later. Englebert Kaempfer (1729) included this configuration as an inset on a map of Japan (Fig. 13). The stage was set for the public controversies of the 1750s, when various pieces of imaginary geography continued to be added to maps as cartographers began to take account of new Russian discoveries. An example of it is the various depictions of the old "Mer de l'Ouest" linked to a river-like Northwest Passage appearing anew on Mortier (1705) and subsequent maps.

CONCLUSION

What images of Alaska did European cartographers present? I have shown the principal ways in which they depicted the

North Pacific. In most cases, one must infer how Alaska was seen, if it was seen to exist at all. Some concepts, it is clear, made no provision for what is now Alaska. Others incorporated only partial representation of lands such as "Anian", i.e. bits of coastline. Most of the world maps by recognized masters such as Mercator and Ortelius were highly generalized. Only the Plancius type offered detailed rendering. Whether or not one presumed an Alaska to exist depended on how one defined the relationship between Asia and America, what lay north of California, and how the Arctic was constituted. All of these questions had to do with cosmography and contemporary concepts of the figure of the earth, which were philosophical issues as well as questions of physical geography.

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FIG. 10. "Asia Corrected from the Observation communicated to the Royal Geographical Society at London and the Royal Academy at Paris" (Senex, 1711). Courtesy Cambridge University Library.



FIG. 11. Ptolemy (1596), *Geographiae Universae*, Giovanni Maginni, ed. Courtesy Helsinki University Library.

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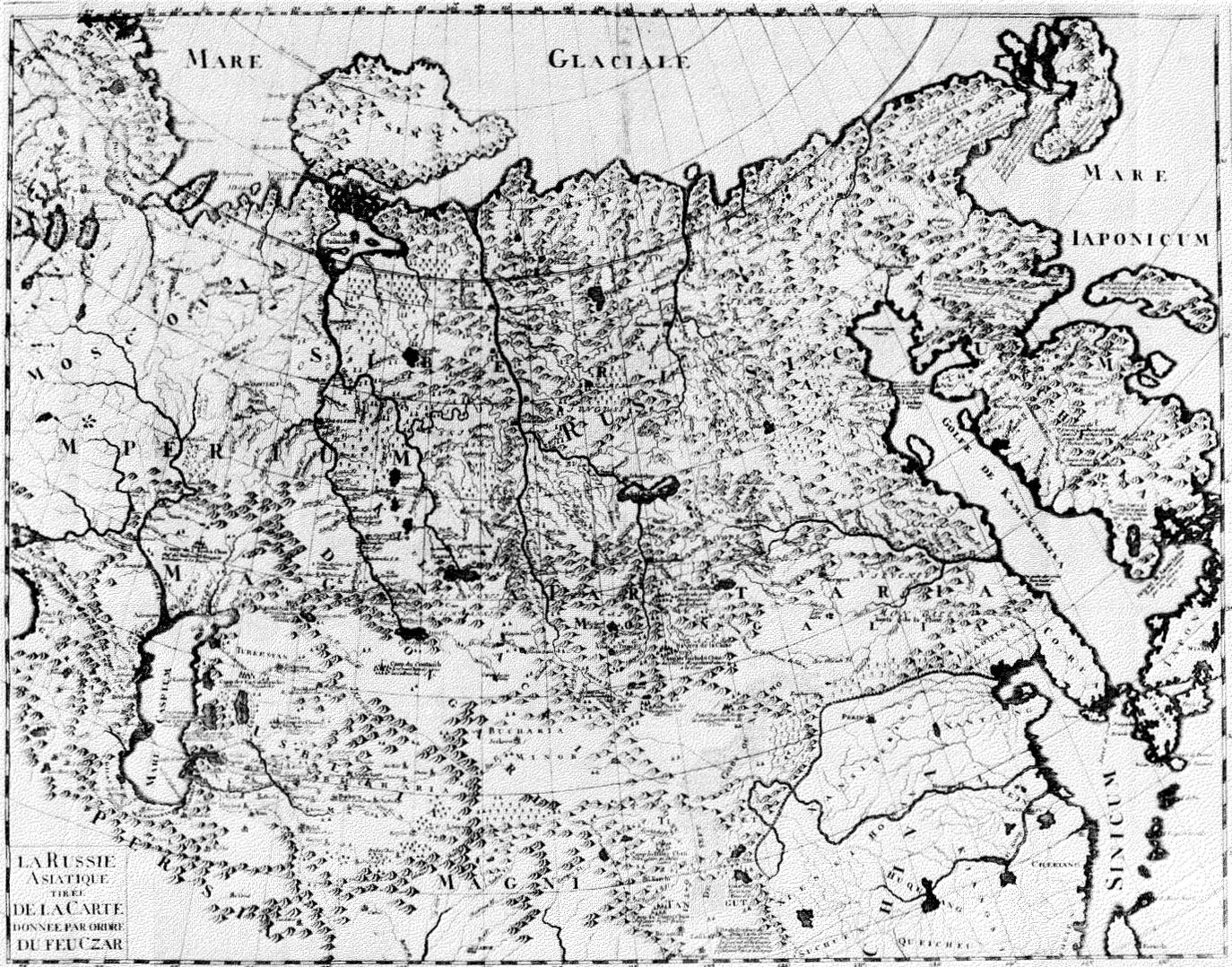


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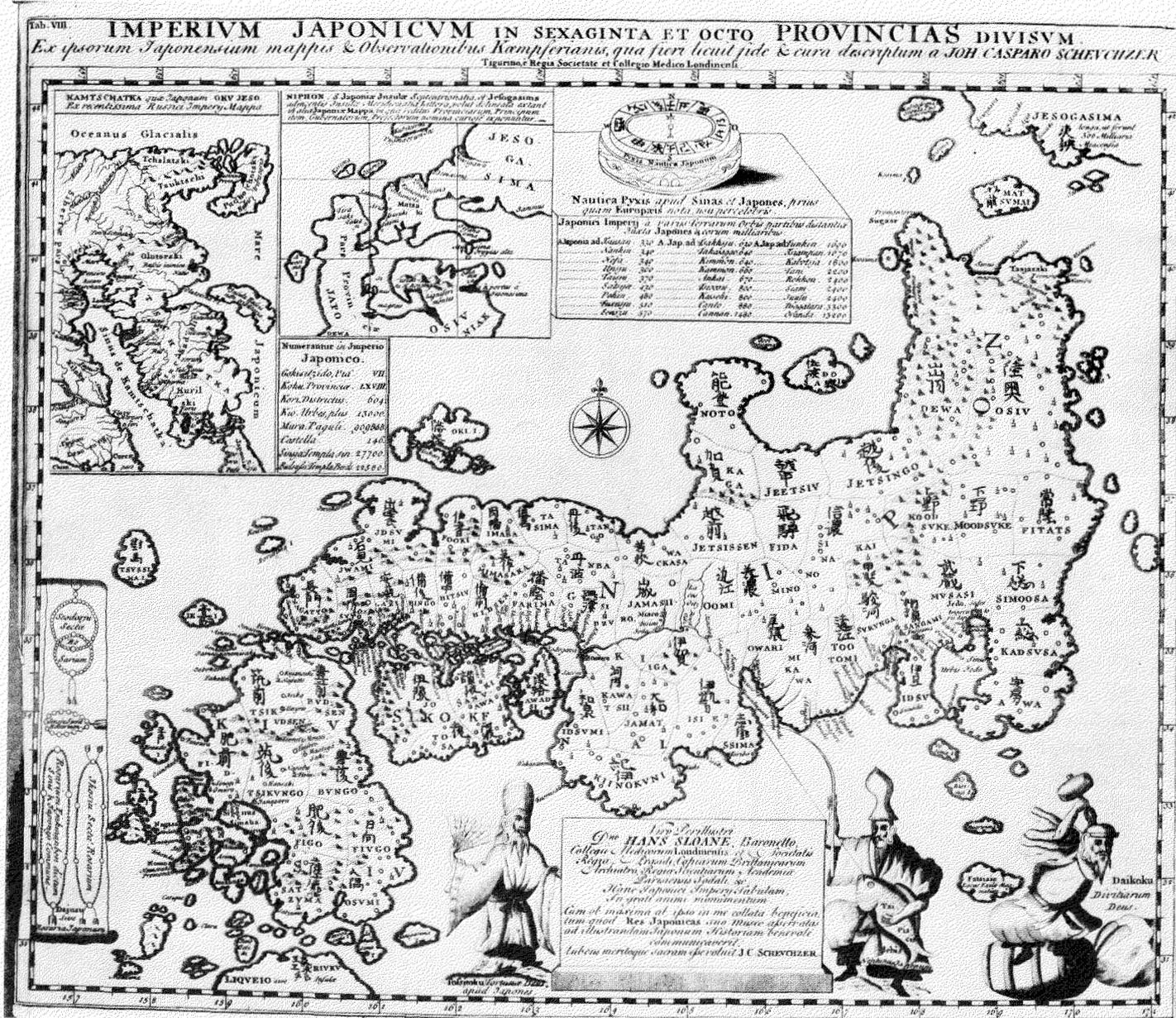


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