SH-201 THE HISTORY OF SVALBARD

2 The Early Exploration of the Arctic and the Discovery of Svalbard

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Content of today's lecture

1st half:
- Early exploration of the Arctic
  - Concepts of the Arctic geography
  - The search for a northern passage to Asia
- The Discovery of Svalbard
  - Barentsz' last voyage 1596–97

2nd half:
- Was Barentsz really the first visitor?
  - Alternative hypotheses on the discovery of Svalbard

Problem:
- Which were the driving forces behind the exploration of the European Arctic?
- Who discovered Svalbard, and when?

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Today's Cultural Heritage Quiz

What is this?

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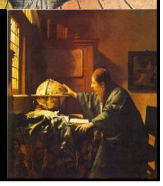
200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600

The Concept of the Arctic

- Classical geography: Ptolemaios and the spherical Earth
- The Norse concept of the Arctic
- Medieval misconceptions, renaissance revival
- The rise of early modern geography
- The theory of the open Polar Sea



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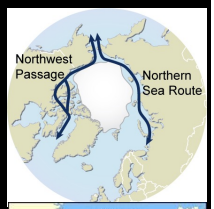
1490 1500 1510 1520 1530 1540 1550 1560 1570 1580

The Northern Passages

- The search for a northern sea route: motives and means
- The Northwest Passage
- Turning East: Willoughby, Chancellor and Borough 1553
- Steven Borough 1556
- Pet & Jackman 1580
- Oliver Brunel 1584



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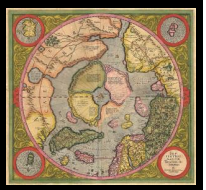
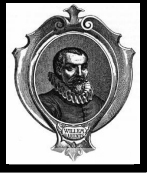
1550 1560 1570 1580 1590 1600

The Dutch and Willem Barentsz

- The Netherlands – the tiny great power
- Competing geographical paradigms: Mercator vs. Plancius
- Who was Willem Barentsz?
- The expeditions of 1594 and 1595





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The Discovery of Svalbard

- 1596: Barentsz goes north again
- Historical sources: De Veer (1598) and Gerritsz (1613)
- The discovery of Bjørnøya and Spitsbergen in June 1596
- Barentsz parts with Rijp at Bjørnøya and goes east
- In well-known waters: Novaya Zemlya

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Shipwreck and wintering

- Heemskerk, Barentsz and 15 men
- 27 August: Stuck in the ice at Ijshaven (76° N)
- Medio September: ready for spending the winter in ”Het behouden huis”
- Life during the Polar Night
- 13 June ‘97: Starting for home

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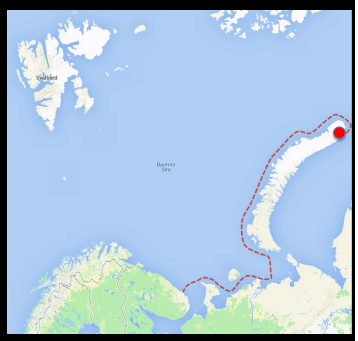
The long voyage home



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15 minutes break

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The legacy of Barentsz

- The 1598 map proves the discovery of Svalbard and shows ”state of research”
- De Veer’s account (1598) and Barentsz’ logbook (Gerritsz 1613) provide good evidence

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Discovery: Alternative hypotheses

- A Stone Age settlement on Svalbard?
- The ”Viking” hypothesis: Svalbard discovered in 1194?
- Russian pomors: hunting and trapping in the 16th century?

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The Stone Age hypothesis

- C.S. Hansson's flint finds 1899
- Christiansson & Simonsen 1970: "Stone Age finds from Spitsbergen"
- H.B. Bjerck's archaeological survey in Bellsund 1997

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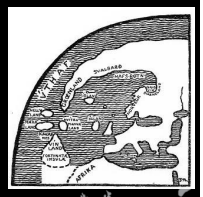
The «Viking» hypothesis

- Icelandic annals: "Svalbard found" 1194
- 13th century sailing descriptions: "Svalbard north in the sea"
- Svalbard in the mythical sagas
- … but what was "Svalbard" (= the cold coast?)
- No archaeological evidence



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The Pomor hypothesis

- Russian pomors: hunting and trapping before Barentsz?
- Oral traditions; historical sources
- Dendro-chronological analysis
- Artefacts, inscriptions
- Topographical analysis

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Summing up

- Driving forces of exploration:
  - The quest for knowledge, a growing scientific world view
  - Economic and strategic interests: the search for new trade, sea routes and territory
  - Technological advances in navigation
- The discovery of Svalbard:
  - Barentsz' discovery 1596 is a historical fact
  - The Stone Age hypothesis is rejected
  - Norse 12th Century discovery is not proved, nor are 16th Century visits by Russians
  - Does it really matter?

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Next time on HOS

Whaling and sealing

- BIG GAME
- BIG MONEY
- BLOOD

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End of 2nd lecture

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