
Research Note

**Description of the Border Areas of Russia with
Japan and Their Inhabitants in Witsen's
*North and East Tartary***

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Abstract: The aim of the *Witsen Project* is to publish a Russian translation of *Noord en Oost Tartarije* [*North and East Tartary*] written in 1705 by Nicolaas Witsen. For thirty years this Amsterdam mayor had collected data on the physical appearance, the fauna and flora and also, more in particular, on the peoples of the northern and eastern parts of Europe and Asia. For this article we used text fragments related to the border areas of Russia with Japan and to the people living there in the 17th century. We quote some relevant parts of the book, give our comments on these texts and clarify these with a number of annotations.

INTRODUCTION

In 1705, the Amsterdam mayor and amateur scholar Nicolaas Witsen completed the second edition of his book *North and East Tartary* with a very detailed description of the north-eastern territories of Eurasia, which until that time had been very little known. This bulky book is written in 17th century Dutch and presents a rather complicated mixture of various texts with encyclopedic details.

In 1945, the Ethnographic Institute (Kunstkamera) in Leningrad commissioned Wilhelmina Triesman (1901-1982), a Dutch citizen who had migrated to the Soviet Union, with the task of providing a Russian translation of this work. Although working conditions in the period immediately following World War II were difficult, Triesman was able to complete the translation of this extremely complicated text within about five years. Russian specialists of Siberian history acknowledged the unique importance of Witsen's book, but Triesman's translation was not published because the publication of such a long and complicated work was expensive and required much further study. Even plans in the 1970s to publish only those parts from *North and East Tartary* that concerned Siberia were not realized. Only much later, in the 1990s, could the preparation of the Russian edition start within the framework of the *Witsen project*, which had by then obtained financial support from a number of Dutch institutions.

In recent years, a group of Dutch and Russian scholars from St. Petersburg, Moscow and Amsterdam contributed to this project by producing a digital and corrected version of Mrs. Triesman's translation. They have prepared an



Figure 1. Title page of Witsen's *North and East Tartary* with illustration

Material Collection). The first author should like to thank the staff of this institute for the hospitality during his stays in 2004 and 2005. He expresses his gratitude to the people who gave him important advice, in particular Prof. Toshiyuki Akizuki and Prof. Mikhael Vysokov. The authors also thank Laetis Kuipers for preparing an adequate English translation of the difficult 17th century Dutch text fragments and for her further help in composing this article.

This article presents a number of quotations from *North and East Tartary* related to the border areas of Japan and Russia and to the ethnic groups living there, in particular the Nivkh (Gilyak) and the Ainu, who have at present been reduced to very small communities living in Eastern Siberia and Northern Japan, respectively. The authors intend to show how important the text of *North and East Tartary* is for the study of the history of these peoples and their territories.

NICOLAAS WITSEN AND HIS NORTH AND EAST TARTARY

During his whole life, Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717), devoted his time alternately to his political obligations and his love for scholarly activities. Thirteen

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times he was elected mayor of Amsterdam. He was also board member of the East Indian Company (VOC), extraordinary envoy to England and Fellow of the Royal Society. He was engaged in impressive correspondence all over the world and owned a highly reputed collection of maps, travel accounts, coins, antiques, shells, naturalia, curiosities, etc. He had personal contacts with Peter the Great, especially when the czar visited Amsterdam in 1697, and he was an important informant for the Russians regarding life and culture in Western Europe.

His interest in Russia was raised during his stay there in 1664, when as a young member he took part in a diplomatic mission sent to Moscow by the government of the Dutch Republic. During this mission, Witsen wrote a diary, which has been published in Dutch under the title *De Moscovische Reyse* (The Journey to Moscow). It was translated into Russian and published in St. Petersburg in 1996.¹

During the remainder of his life, Witsen kept a keen and lively interest in Russia and continued to collect information about this country, in particular about Siberia and its neighbouring countries, which he called North and East Tartary. He obtained these data from various sources. He consulted classical authors and Arabic medieval writers as well as his learned contemporaries in Europe. He used oral and written reports from Dutchmen working in Russia or sent to the East by the VOC. Most of his information about Siberia Witsen received through correspondence with many important people in the Russian empire, such as the Russian statesmen Golovin and Winius, and foreign scholars in Russian service such as the Romanian Miclescu (Spatharius) and the Croat Križanić. In 1687, he designed a new map of northern and eastern Eurasia on the basis of this information. This map represented the world from Nova Zembla to as far away as China, and in 1689 he dedicated this map to Peter the Great. The President of the Royal British Society compared the publication of this map to the discovery of America by Columbus.

The book which accompanied and explained this map was also dedicated to czar Peter I and called *North and East Tartary*. It grew out into two large volumes with more than 1000 pages and 130 illustrations. Its first edition was printed in 1692. The second, enlarged edition appeared in 1705 and was reprinted in 1785. In this book, Witsen gave an account of all the information available to the Europeans at that time about the northern and eastern parts of Europe and Asia, and also about the Volga area, Crimea, Caucasus, Central Asia, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Korea and the neighboring parts of Japan.

The book *North and East Tartary* is a remarkable product of the economic and scientific prosperity of the Dutch Republic in its Golden Age, which represents a period of intense Russian-Dutch co-operation and exchange. The book

1 N. Witsen, *Moskovische Reyse 1664-1665. Journaal en Aenteeningen*, published by Th.J.G. Locher and P. de Buch ('s-Gravenhage, 1966). Nikolaas Witsen, *Puteshestvie v Moskoviiu 1664-1665* (St. Petersburg, 1996).

not only informs us about the flora and fauna of this huge territory, but it also provides details about the languages and traditions of the people living there. In the text, for instance, we find lists of 900 Georgian and 700 Kalmyk words and illustrations of the writing systems of Tibetan, Manchurian and Mongolian languages. Witsen provides word lists and other data on more than 25 languages.

Long ago, Russian scholars realized the importance of Witsen's book as a unique source of information about the history, geography, ethnology and linguistic data concerning the eastern part of their country. However, for most of them *North and East Tartary* stayed inaccessible, because of the fact that the book was a bibliographic rarity and written in 17th century Dutch. Therefore, the wish to obtain a Russian translation of the book was expressed many times. However, even in modern Russian, *North and East Tartary* is a difficult text for the present-day reader, who needs further explanation in order to understand peculiarities.

Many representatives of the intellectual elite in the Netherlands supported the views of modern scientists like Descartes and Newton. In all probability this was also the case with Witsen, although he made no name for himself as a systematic and rational thinker. It was as an extremely diligent and conscientious collector that Witsen tried to enhance our knowledge of the world. In most cases he could not check the reliability and truthfulness of the information he had gathered and therefore published it deliberately more or less in the form as he had received it. It remained the task of a future generation of scholars and explorers to find the full truth about the northern and eastern regions of Asia, but Witsen hoped they would use his book as a useful tool. Indeed scholars of the Russian Academy of Sciences, like G.F. Müller who took part in the famous 18th century expeditions to Siberia, took the trouble to study Witsen's work carefully. Müller praised the Dutchman, but he also complained about the chaotic composition of *North and East Tartary*. It is indeed difficult to read this book in which so much and so detailed information is stored almost at random.

The two maps of North East Asia in figure 2 and 3 were not included in the first (1692) and second (1705) edition of Witsen's book, but in the posthumously published third edition of 1785. They were therefore probably drawn by Witsen between 1705 and 1717, the year of his death.

WITSEN'S TEXT ON NIUCHE: MANCHURIA AND NEIGHBORING TERRITORIES

The first part of *North and East Tartary* (pages 1-157) describes the remotest areas of Eastern Asia, which Lattimore has called "the dead end of the great migration ground of Eurasia."² Here, not only the civilizations of Russia, China, Korea and Japan influenced each other, but for many centuries this was also the territory of many other ethnic groups, such as Mongolian, Tungusic and

2 Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria. Cradle of Conflict* (New York, 1932), p. 42.



Figure 2. Map of Eastern Tartary according to Witsen in *North and East Tartary*. This map shows the Southern Kuril Islands: Kunashir as a part of Hokkaido, Etorofu as Staten Eylant (State Island) and Urup as Compagnies Lant (Company Land). These last names are related to the government of the Netherlands and the United East-Indian Company (VOC) and were given to the islands after their discovery by the expedition led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries in 1643. Urup is supposed to be an island or a peninsula, maybe part of America.

Manchu. Witsen devoted a special chapter (pages 128-157) to Eso (Jesso), the northern border areas of Japan where in his days, the main inhabitants were the Ainu and the Nivkh – which form the topic of this article. But in other chapters, for instance on Niuche³ (pages 1-42) or Dauria (the Amur region, pages 63-128), Witsen also refers to the border areas corresponding to present-day Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands and to their inhabitants.

In the following sections, we reproduce text fragments with the related page numbers in the original *North and East Tartary* book at the beginning of each quotation. We have chosen text fragments concerning the border areas of Russia with Japan and China, and also related to the peoples living there.

3 This is one of the names for Manchuria, land inhabited by the Jurchen. In Chinese, these inhabitants are called Nü-chih (Niuchen, Nuchens, Jürchen) and they represented a relatively important ethnic group using a Tungus-Manchurian language. Later, this territory became known as the three Northeastern Provinces of China (Tungbei), namely Liaotung, Kirin, Heilungchiang. Manchuria is separated largely from Russia by the Amur, Argun, and Ussuri rivers; from North Korea by the Yalu and Tumen rivers, and from Mongolia by the Da Hinggan (Great Khingan). For an ethnic history see: Juha Janhunen, *Manchuria* (Helsinki, 1996).

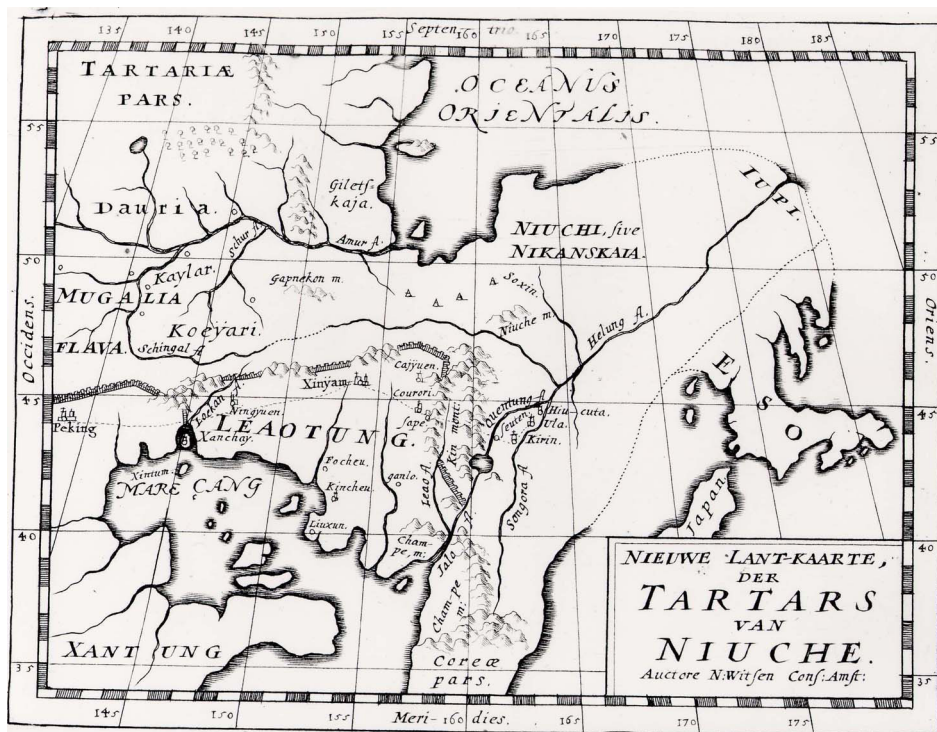


Figure 3. Map of Niuche (Manchuria) in the 1785 edition of Witsen's *North and East Tartary*

On pages 8 and 11 we find the first text fragments about the Nivkh and other peoples in the Amur region and on neighbouring islands:

[8] The inhabitants of Niuche, and those who live near the mouth of the Amur River, report the presence of various small islands near the coast, the inhabitants of which resemble the Japanese in their appearance. With them, one finds cauldrons, clothes and other examples of Chinese and Japanese manufacture, offering solid proof of their trade with the Chinese and the Japanese peoples.

[11] At the north side of the river Amur, it freezes very heavily in the sea near the coast; however not in deep water. Standing on a rock, near the exit of the Amur, one can see an island in the sea, where the people wear similar clothes to the Japanese. These people are said to be a tribe called Chilanes and they live not far from the river Amur.

The last text fragment mentions the Paleo-asiatic people of the Nivkh (here they are called Chilanes), who nowadays inhabit the North of Sakhalin and the Amur delta area with a total number of about 4000 people. In Witsen's days, they were probably more numerous and lived in a larger territory. Since then, their language and culture have become heavily influenced by Russian. On Witsen's map of East Tartary we find *Zemle Giletskaja* and west of it *Giliaki* indicating their territory. Later, Witsen reports what he heard about the Nivkh from a Chinese-Dutch interpreter:

[22] Because they live in a very harsh climate, they have to hide from the cold in closed tents during the winter; but in the summer they move north over the high mountains, where they find good pastures for their cattle and enjoy a pleasant, moderate air. This population tells us that from the top of these mountains, far over the sea to the East, they can see several lands, probably Japan, Eso or the land of America.

In the first pages of *North and East Tartary* we find a first mention of the geographic term Eso (also Jesso, Yeso, Esso). This is a general term for the territories north of Japan, in those days not very well known and indicated with uncertain borders on the maps available. Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands form part of it, as will be specified later on. In those days it was assumed that in the East, Eso had a common border with America. As such, the island Urup (Company Land) has been drawn as a possible part of America's West Coast. About the inhabitants Witsen writes:

[41] ...there is a large country full of savage people, close to the North of Japan. The inhabitants wear clothes from fishskin, are shaggy and have big moustaches. They are not impartial to wine, but also warlike and feared by the Japanese, under whom they are at present subjects - if not entirely, then at least in part.

Here we find a first description of the Ainu and their relation to the Japanese. At the end of the 16th century, Japan started to colonize further parts of Hokkaido and there they obtained a monopoly position in commercial contacts with the Ainu people. This happened with a certain resistance on the part of the Ainu, who started a revolution in 1669, which was suppressed by the Japanese. Witsen describes this as follows:

[62] The northern neighbours are the *Jesoëns* of the island *Jesogasima*,⁴ who have been made subjects of the emperor *Jori-Tomo*, in the Japanese empire. The regions of Jeso called *Matsumai* en *Inabu* were governed from the large regions *Nanbu* en *Osiu* in the North of Japan. When they recently tried to get rid of their proud rulers, a large army of soldiers and three hundred horsemen were sent to them and the rebellion was suppressed.⁵

After the description of the island of Hokkaido, Witsen takes us further to the North, to present-day Sakhalin (on the map still linked to the North of Hokkaido), an area in the South of which also Ainu lived, and Nivkh in the North.

[63] Behind this island, to the North, lies the mainland of *Oku Jeso*, which is Upper or High *Jeso*. The Japanese are unsure about precise conditions in this land and about its size and shape. A certain sailor, who landed there a few

4 Jesoëns=first inhabitants of Jeso, name of the Ainu given by the Japanese; Jesogasima: Name of Hokkaido (also Ezo-ga-chishima). The Europeans were not familiar with the geography of this part of the world and also other areas, such as Sakhalin were indicated by this name.

5 Since 1970, this revolt by Shukushain in 1669, during which many Japanese and Ainu were killed, is commemorated in Shizunai by a statue of this Ainu leader.

years ago, reports to have seen among those uncivilised people some individuals dressed in fine Chinese silk, on the basis of which he concluded there must be a peninsula or at least an area in close and comfortable proximity to *Daats* – that is Tartary. In the year 1684 a ship was sent there to explore this unknown land, but after a period of three months had elapsed the ship returned with not much more news than what has already been said here. Another Imperial junk was then sent to the same destination from the east coast of Japan: a junk which ultimately – after roaming the sea long and fruitlessly – drifted off between forty and fifty degrees to land that was held to be *America*. There, the ship and its crew spent the winter in a cove they had discovered. The junk's crew was unable to shed light on the line of the shore towards the North-West, after which it was decided in Japan not to explore the foreign and distant lands.

Thus, according to Witsen, the Japanese decided not to explore these territories any further, whereas the Russians had not yet reached these eastern parts of Asia. As early as 1643 the Dutch had reconnoitred the area. At a time when they started to play an important role in Japan, an expedition of two ships led by Maarten Gerritszoon Vries was sent to these unknown parts of the Pacific Ocean. The Dutch hoped to find islands rich in gold and silver north and east of Japan, or the mysterious empire of Cathay, close to America. Neither the Japanese nor the Russians, but these Dutchmen discovered and drew the first map of the Southern Kuril Islands. In this respect, they played a primary role in the history of this part of the world.⁶

About the Japanese maps of these territories Witsen writes the following:

[63] The Japanese maps, which can be found in large manors, and also in *Symmi* or other temples in these regions, show *Jeso* bordering on *Daats*,⁷ and show its eastern shores lying more than fifteen degrees further east than *Japan*. They also show, between this land and *America*, a sea strait (*Fretum Anian* or *Strait de Vries*), but – as is the case with all other maps – this was done carelessly and without the mention of degrees. Thus, these maps cannot be relied on: especially those in which the names have been written only on the basis of their sound and in *Canna*, based on the alphabet, and drawn up in such a way that the entire work reflects only oral descriptions.

Here, we find critical comments on the way these regions were represented on Japanese maps. Later, Witsen mentions the Strait of De Vries (in Russian Proliv Friza), which was discovered by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries as the strait between the Kuril Islands of Etorofu (called Staten Eylant by De Vries) and Urup (Compagnies Lant). The latter was identified as an island or peninsula on the west coast of America.

6 See: *Voyage to Cathay, Tartary and the Gold- and Silver-rich Islands East of Japan*, 1643. The Journal of Cornelis Jansz. Coen relating to the voyage of Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries to the North and East of Japan. Original Dutch text and translation, edited, with an introduction, other relevant material and documents, notes, a bibliography and a geographical index, by Willem C.H. Robert (Amsterdam Philo Press, 1975).

7 *Daats*=name for Tartary. See: E. Kaempfer, *The History of Japan* (Curzon Pr., 1995), pp. 63, 149.

Further down, we again find a description of the Nivkh (Gilyak) population and their way of life near the Amur estuary:

[87] Along the great river *Amur*, very high mountains stretch out and also areas of dark wilderness and forests. The river *Amur* flows into the Great Ocean in one single estuary. Opposite this river mouth lies a very large island in the sea. This island is inhabited by people who descend from the *Gilaitse* peoples. The *Giliaki* have huts or dwellings made from wood. In the summer, they wear clothes made from the skins of fish, seals and walrus; in the winter they wear the fur pelts of dogs. In the winter, they travel in high, lightweight sleds drawn by dogs, and in the summer they sail small, wooden vessels. These people keep as many as three, four, five and six hundred dogs in their kennels. Also, bears are kept. These people eat fish, dogs, bears and all kinds of sea animals.

On the following pages, we find a description of the expedition to the eastern coasts led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries and the position of the southern Kuril Island of Urup (Compagnies Land):

[94] It is remarkable how Captain de *Vries*, when he discovered the land of *Jezo* and set sail past Compagnies Land northwards through the Strait carrying his name, managed to sail as far north as forty-nine degrees north latitude. This is close to the mouth of the great river *Amur*, where – should he have decided to stay the winter – he would have found a safe haven and all the food and necessities he may have wanted. Also, his expedition could have profited from the purchase of fur skins and he could easily have discovered thus far unknown islands, shores, regions and rivers related to *Jezo* etc. I have described *Jezo* here as lying in the vicinity of Tartary's main coastland and I shall say more about *Jezo* itself later on.

[110] The *Straet de Vries*, lining the land of *Jeszo*, should be considered – or so it would seem – to be the same as *Straet Anian*; and Compagnies Land the same as the Point of *America* (if this Compagnies Land is not a peninsula, as was suggested by the crew of the Dutch ship *Breskens* – a ship which had sailed at the same time as the ship of de *Vries* in the year 1643 in order to explore Tartarye). This explains why today *Anian* is incorrectly situated by some in *Kalifornia* in the *West-Indies*.

In this section, Witsen again mentions the Sea Strait of De Vries and confuses this with the Strait of Anian, separating Asia and America. The coast of the island of Compagnies Land (Urup) is taken for the west coast of California.

WITSEN'S TEXT ON JESSO: THE TERRITORIES NORTH OF JAPAN

The following pages of the book *North and East Tartary* (pages 128-157) are mainly devoted to a description of the territories called Jesso (or Eso, Jezo, Ezo, Yeco), which correspond to present-day Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. At the beginning of the 19th century, this part of Witsen's book had already attracted the attention of Japanese scholars, and in 1806 it was trans-

lated by the noted scholar of Dutch learning Baba.⁸ In this article, we can only reproduce a few quotations from these pages and comment on the contents, in the same way as was done in the earlier section on Niuche.⁹

[128] The Region or District of *Jesso*, also called *Jezo*, *Eso* or *Yeço*, and named *Jeetzezín* by the Japanese, lies east of *Niuche*, at 45 degrees, and stretches out close to the land of the Dutch East-Indian Company – which also got the name “Compagnies Land” and is represented on the map and refers to what is believed to be a remote corner of *America*. The district of *Jesso* may rightly be classified among the Tartary districts, because the district itself borders on the region of *Tartary* and because its inhabitants’ appearance and way of life closely resemble those of the Tartars.

On page 129 Witsen quotes the Jesuit Lodewijk Frojus,¹⁰ who gives the following description of the inhabitants of Jesso:

[129] Bordering the northernmost part of Japan, at a three-hundred mile distance of Meaco, lies an immense region full of savage and wild people. These people are entirely dressed in animal hide, which they wear on their bare bodies. They sport terribly long beards, with impressive moustaches, which they lift with small sticks when they drink. These people are keen wine drinkers, courageous and brave in war, and much feared by the Japanese. When they sustain injuries in the fight, they clean their wounds with salt water. This is the only medication they have available. They carry mirrors on their chests. They tie their swords to their heads in such a way that the hilt hangs on their shoulders. They have no religion: they only worship the Heavens.

About the exploration of Jesso by the Japanese we read:

[131] This land Jesso is immense and has often been explored by the Japanese, who have travelled the region far and wide yet who have never managed to reach its final borders, as they commonly lacked food and found themselves forced to return empty-handed. Reports from explorers have also been such that his Imperial Majesty’s curiosity and interest in further investigations died: since the land – as was said earlier – is wild and rugged, and inhabited

8 Baba was one of the Japanese scholars who learned Dutch and studied the science and culture of Holland (Rangaku). A copy of his manuscript with a Japanese translation of the pages 128-157 of NOT can be found in the library of Hokkaido University (Northern Regions Material Collection). It has never been published and it is important to consider the publication of this manuscript together with a modern Japanese translation of the relevant texts and all details which the Witsen Project team has obtained in recent years.

9 In the framework of the Witsen project, the complete Russian translation of the section on Jesso has recently become available and has been published in a series of articles edited by Dr. Mikhael Vysokov. See: T. De Graaf, B. Naarden, “Opisanie Nivkhov i Ainov i territorii ikh prozhivaniia v XVII veke po knige N. Witsena ‘Severnaia i Vostochnaja Tartarija,’” in *Kraevedcheskii Biulleten’*. *Problemy istorii Sakhalina, Kuril i sopredel’nykh territorii* 4 (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 2005).

10 Louis Frois, Portuguese missionary, who lived in Japan from 1563 until 1595. In his book *História do Japão [The History of Japan]*(1585) he mentions the Ainu population.

in some areas by a very hairy people wearing long hair and beards and resembling the Chinese, or rather the Savages, and other people.

People from *Jesso* and the Tartars from *Niuche* are very much alike: short and stocky figures; yet they have long, bushy hair and beards, so that their faces are almost entirely covered. Their Foreheads are shaved. The women do not have as dark a complexion as the men, and both have fine features. Some women have their hair cut in a round style, and others let it grow and pin it up like the Indian women. They colour their eyebrows and lips black and blue. No religious practices can be observed when they dine, except when they drink: for then, they pour out a few drops near the fire, in a fashion similar to the Kalmuks who spill some fluid first before they drink. In some places, they plant a few carved sticks made from pinewood in the soil and decorate them with curls and chips of wood. These ragged decorations, in front of which they seem to engage in religious practices, also adorn their houses or huts: very much like the Blacks in *Guinea* commonly do to worship the idol *Fetisso*. They are also said to worship the Heavens. When any one of them has fallen ill, they slice or peel long curls of pinewood with a knife and wind them around the head and arms of the person afflicted: similar to what the Samojedes do, too.

These peoples are lazy, and reluctant to work. They neither sow nor harvest crops, but manufacture fishing nets made of wild hemp. They go hunting with traps: they carry arrows, bows and chopping knives. They barter whale bones (the whales are caught with bone harpoons), oil and blubber, hides and birds with Japanese traders for rice, brass pipes to smoke tobacco, ear decorations made from lead and silver, axes, knives, tapestry etc. Their language is influenced by Japanese. They do not have a tendency to steal. Whoever is caught fornicating their women is killed: and in a like manner they punish their captivated enemies cruelly and harshly, and beat them to death with sticks. They are brave and warlike, and sometimes engage in major wars with their neighbours.

[133] The inhabitants of *Kontchoury* and *Acqueys*¹¹ are enemies of all the other inhabitants of the region of *Jesso* – as they reported to the Dutch. These *Ezo* or *Jesso* regions which our explorers have visited are high and mountainous and lie at 45 degrees and 30 minutes. Among these mountains is a very high one, the *Piek van Anthony* as we know it (*Anthony's Peek*), and which is reported to be rich in silver by those few people who inhabit the region. In this district, extraordinarily big, tall, straight, and thick oak trees, pine trees, fir trees, and spruces grow, suitable for the manufacture of ship masts and other things. The region's soil is clayey and heavy, on which flags and sorrel grow.

Here we find a description of the volcanic Mount Chacha (Chacha dake) on Kunashir, which has been named after Anthony van Diemen, Governor General of the Dutch East Indies. In later text fragments, Witsen presents more details concerning this island and the other Southern Kuril Islands. First, more information follows on the inhabitants and their customs:

11 *Kontchoury* and *Acqueys*=Kushiro and Akkeshi, towns on Hokkaido, Japan.

[134] The inhabitants of the region of *Jesso* strongly resemble one another: short and fat or of stocky build, and they have long hair and rough beards, shorn in the Chinese manner so that it almost covers their faces but their heads or crowns are bald.

They have fine features, black eyes and their noses are not flat. Their brows are low, they have a yellow complexion, and they have coarse bodies. The women are not as dark as the men, and some shave their hair in a round style so that it does not hinder their sight. Others grow long hair, and pin it up as the women in Java do. They colour their eyebrows and lips black and blue.

As far as one could notice, they have little or no religion, nor idols, and they dine like heathens: yet, when they are gathered round the fire and drink, they

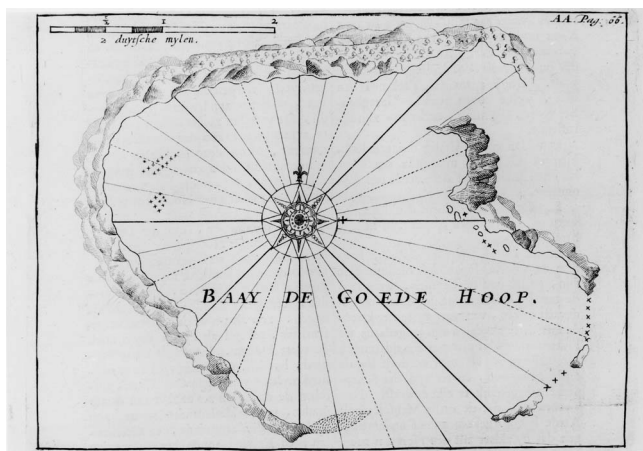


Figure 4. Coast line of *Baay de Goede Hoop* (Akkeshi Bay) on the south coast of Hokkaido, where the 1643 expedition landed and met with Ainu people

will first spill a few drops beside the fire in several places, as if these drops were an offering. In some places, they plant a few carved sticks made from pinewood in the soil and decorate them with curls and chips of wood. These ragged decorations also adorn the walls of their houses or huts. When any one of them has fallen ill, they slice or peel long curls of pinewood with a knife and wind them around the head and arms of the person afflicted.

During the expedition, the members of the 1643 expedition led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries visited Akkeshi Bay on Hokkaido, which they called *Baay de Goede Hoop* (Bay of Good Hope). A picture in *North and East Tartary* shows the configuration of this bay (Figure 4). The book continues with an account of the following event in Akkeshi, which took place during a winter:

[135] During a certain winter, many people died in *Acqueys* because of extreme colds and famine. Here, the graves of the dead were covered with the shells of oysters. In other places, the bodies lie in a small hut, in coffins placed on four posts above the earth. The hut is skilfully decorated with leafwork without any presence of offerings.

They find their food and nourishment especially in fish, whale blubber and oil, salmon, vegetables, and red rose buds – which grow in *Acqueys* in great abundance, have the size of a medlar when they are harvested, and which are dried during the summer to serve as winter stock. Also, poppy buds commonly serve as food in *Jesso*, and all kinds of birds they catch.

They have lacquerwork cups and square bowls in which they serve their meals: with each person using his own cup. They eat with chopsticks, in Japanese style, except for those who live at 48 degrees and 50 minutes, who

are still shorn in Japanese fashion, and also dressed in silk skirts, and who have a whiter complexion and speak differently, but who pick the food with their fingers and put it in their mouths without the use of chopsticks.

The inhabitants of *Jesso* share with the Japanese that they do not say prayers when they dine: and both eat properly without making a mess.

In his book, Witsen refers to stories told to him by other sailors who travelled Japan, visited the coasts of *Jesso* and met with the local population. One of them (Hendrik Obé) compares the aboriginal Ainu people to the American Indians whom he knows from his travels in the New Netherlands (in America), and he even supposes that similarities exist in their languages:

[138] The Merchant *Hendrik Obé*, a pious man and a sharp observer, has informed me several times to have heard in Japan from the reports of a certain Sailor from that nation how this man had discovered a large region, about twelve years ago when the Emperor sent him from the east coast of *Japan* and when he drifted far away to the northeast because of storms. This land appeared to be some sort of mainland and he spent the winter there, judging it to be the north-western coasts of *America*, in accordance with the indications on our maps and to the northwest of which – according to him – *Ezo* would seem to lie. If this were the case, it could be believed that *Compagnies Land*, and maybe also *Ezo*, is fixed to *America*, or may be neighbouring it with a series of islands grouped closely together. Said *Obé*, in his travels to the Court of *Iedo*, met some Travellers and Beggars from the northernmost parts of *Japan* who in condition, appearance and custom not only greatly resembled the North Americans, but who also used several words which were very similar to the language of New Netherlands – where he was born and raised – concerning their pronunciation and which had identical meanings, about which he was truly amazed.

Witsen received many letters from people who described the discovery of the islands and the coasts of *Jesso*. One of them was sent from Batavia in 1644 and gives the following details about his meetings with the Ainu people:

[142] The first people we saw in *Jesso* upon arrival were two men and a boy: ugly, black and with barbarous appearance: namely coarse and strong with heavy, black, unkempt beards and with large heads, their pates bald, just like the Japanese. Also, they let their black hair grow long – on their heads as well as their bodies – so that they look like the painted pictures of savages. They were dressed in all kinds of animal hides, from which they can manufacture clothes that resemble Japanese dress. They carried their arrows and bows with them in their boats, and also their swords and knives, which also strongly resemble those of the Japanese and the hilts of which are of fine silver inlay and carved with Japanese letters. When they were invited to come on board, these two men immediately boarded the ship to be entertained by our men: they were offered some rice and Arak, which they call *Sakki* as the Japanese do, too. They were also given a portion of rice and tobacco, which they eagerly accepted and were very happy with. In return, they gave us, to our great gratitude, some dried salmon and the hide of an elk.

A letter from Hieronimus de Angelis,¹² written in 1622, says the following about the Ainu and their customs and beliefs:

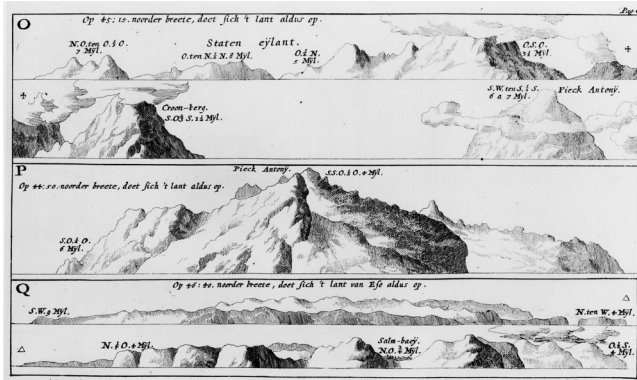


Figure 5. One of the seven illustrations in Witsen's book presenting the coast line of the territories north of Japan according to the drawings made during the expedition led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries in 1643

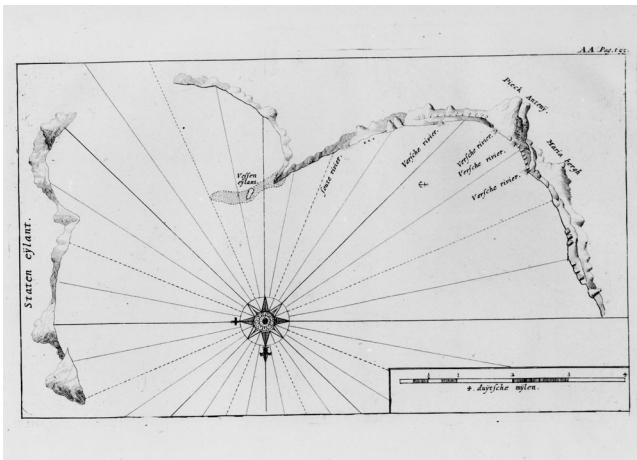


Figure 6. Illustration of the coast line of the islands of Etorofu (*Staten Eylant*) and Kunashir as seen from the north by the members of the expedition led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries in 1643

[145] The Lord of *Matsumay* assured me that the Inhabitants of *Jesso* came to buy fish skins, which they call *Raccon*, on three islands not far from their own region: a place where the people do not wear beards and speak languages very different from those of *Jesso*, but he did not know whether these islands lay to the north or to the south of *Jesso*.

They have hardly any knowledge – or none at all – of the Other World and the after-life. To some extent, they honour and worship the Sun and the Moon as the two most beneficial forces, and in addition also some mountain and sea devils. Because they mostly find sustenance in the mountains through hunting and wood chopping, and at sea through fishing, they hope to find abundant catches through their worship and hope never to experience a lack of wood to burn or use for building purposes.

They neither have Leaders, nor Priests, nor Temples or

any other place where they gather to conduct religious practices. None of them can read or write.

Each man has two legitimate wives of his own, but some only have one, although many men can still be found to have concubines, following Chinese customs. When the Man dies, the Wife often moves to the house of the Father-in-Law, or to one of the Man's friends, on condition that she shall never leave or remarry.

A Woman caught in the act of adultery is shorn completely, for all to recognize, and the adulterer, or with whomever she engaged in this filthy act, is

12 Angelis, S.J. (ca. 1567-1623), Jesuit priest, who visited Hokkaido in 1621. His reports form an important source for Witsen on the geography and ethnography of *Jesso*.

robbed of his sword and all his arms and jewels are taken away by the insulted man or by his friends whenever they meet him.

During the expedition led by Maarten Gerritszoon de Vries, the coasts of Kunashir, Etorofu and Urup were explored. In Witsen's book, several drawings of the coastlines were reproduced (see figures 4, 5 and 6).



[146] At 44 degrees and 50 minutes, on the Land of *Jesso*, they discovered

a very tall mountain, which they called *Piek Antony*, with a gallery round its top as if the mountain were a tower. This Peek can be seen at sea from a wide and long distance.

At the same altitude, to the north, they found many trees, beautiful valleys and waters flowing into the sea.

When we landed at 44 degrees and 42 minutes, we were welcomed by the inhabitants. They traded halibut and oil for rice, and we found much sorrel there and all kinds of vegetables. Our men also caught a lot of halibut and other common flatfish, salmon, herring and cod, and in some places oysters. Here, too – as in other places – the inhabitants managed to catch many *Whales*

In this region, the inhabitants paid great service to the Dutch. Their women are very honourable and keep their bodies covered. Their clothes are made of otter skin and other pelts which they cherish. They are very willing to trade or barter. They trade an otter's pelt for an axe.

On the beach, near the tall mountain named *Piek Antony* and north of it, the Dutch did not meet more than nine people, men as well as women and children. They did find a large number of pine trees, fir trees, birches and elm trees, suitable for ships and the manufacture of masts, rudders and topmasts. Here, they found a sea cove, not unlike a river, which they called the Salty River.

From this place, our men travelled northwards to explore the Tartary Coast even further, as was their task; although some of them felt that *Compagnies Land* and the Land of *Jesso* should be explored and investigated to a better extent.

In the following quotation from Witsen's book *Compagnies land (Urup)* is represented as an island near the west coast of America:

[155] Of the many drawings that I have in my possession showing the lines of the shores of the lands of *Jesso*, only three will be included here ... *Staeten Land* and the Bay of *Good Hope*, in addition to *Compagnies Land*, ... , the way it was presented to the Dutch.

A Channel between *Compagnies Land* and the American mainland, over half a degree wide, is included in a map of the Dutch East-Indian Company, which makes *Compagnies Land* an Island, about seven or eight miles long. At 42 degrees, one finds the south-sides of *Jesso* and of *Compagnies Land*, with the coast of *Amerika* behind it, at 46 and 47 degrees.

CONCLUSION

In the centuries following Nicolaas Witsen's publication of *North and East Tartary*, the territories he describes in several parts of the book have played an important role in the relationship between Japan and Russia. These territories were invaded by Japan from the South and by Russia from the North, and the border areas shifted several times from one of these states to the other and back. The well-known problem of the disputed Southern Kuril Islands (in Japan called "Northern Territories") is one of the consequences of this situation.

The quotations from Witsen's book presented here show that a great deal of information was available in the 17th century about the northern and eastern parts of Asia in these border areas and that most of this information was published for the first time in Witsen's book. These texts also contain important data on the life and traditions of the local population of the Ainu and the Nivkh: the first inhabitants of these regions.