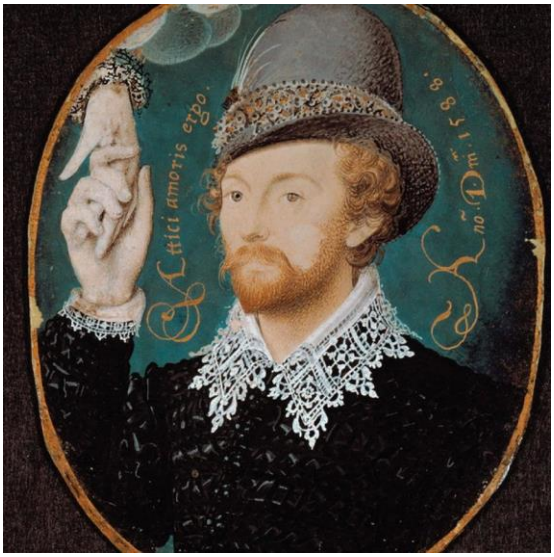
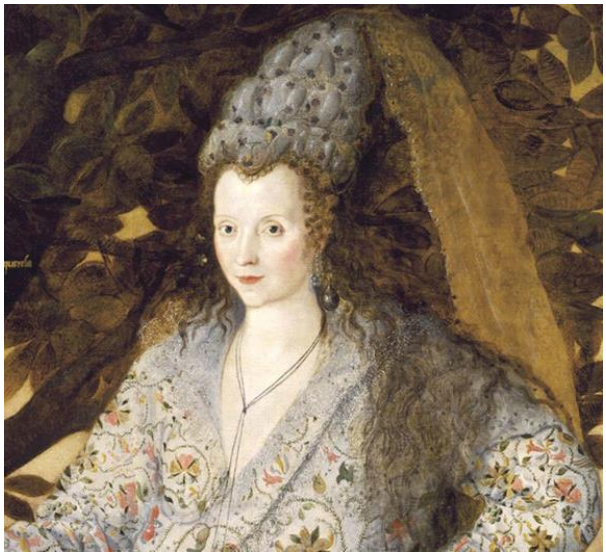
Jenkinson's Map and Jenkinson's Wench: the mystery of Aru Sultan

By Nick Fielding



Anthony Jenkinson



Aru Sultan

Anthony Jenkinson (1529-1611) was a remarkable and well-travelled Elizabethan merchant adventurer and diplomat, the first Englishman to sail on the Caspian and to reach the fabled city of Bokhara. He is equally famous for the wonderful map he created based on his Central Asian journeys. The map is the subject of its own unusual history, more of which below. Less well known, but now the subject of a lively debate, is the identity of a young Central Asian woman whom Jenkinson brought back to England in 1560. Who was she? A slave girl or a princess of the Royal blood who was a ground-breaking woman diplomat and who created a fashion sensation in Elizabeth's court?

Jenkinson himself was widely travelled, even before he set off for Central Asia in 1557. Brought up in a wealthy family in Leicestershire, by the age of 17 was already travelling extensively as a merchant. On his first journey he passed through Flanders, Germany, across the Alps into Italy and then back to England through France. He later travelled through Spain and Portugal and sailed "though the Levant seas every way and have been in all the chief islands within the same sea, as Rhodes, Malta, Cyprus, Candie (Crete) and divers others."

He had also visited many Greek cities, much of Turkey, Syria and other parts of Asia Minor: "I have passed over the mountains of Libanus to Damasco, and travelled through Samaria, Galile,

Philistine or Palestine, unto Jerusalem, and so through all the Holy Land. I have been in divers place of Affrica, as Algiers, Cola, Bona, Tripolis the gollet within the gulfe of Tunis."[i]

He had also sailed northwards from England, within the "Mare Glaciale, where we had continuall day and no sight of the Sunne ten weekes together and that navigation was in Norway, Lapland, Samogitia and other very strange places." All this before he set off on the first of three journeys into Central Asia.

For that first Central Asian journey Jenkinson, now aged 30, was both an official ambassador for Queen Elizabeth and a "Captain-General" of the Muscovy Company, a group of merchants who were interested in diverting the Silk Road trade away from the Mediterranean, where it was controlled by Venetian and Genoan merchants, northwards from Persia across the Caspian Sea and then up the Volga to Moscow. From here they aimed to transport goods to the White Sea on the northern Russian coast where English ships could transport them to England.

It was a brilliant idea and could have worked, were it not for the opening up of sea routes from Europe to the east, which shortened the time goods took to arrive and avoided the dangers of banditry and extreme weather that made the Silk Road so dangerous.

Jenkinson's journey may also have been motivated by the impending excommunication of Queen Elizabeth by Pope Pius V, which would occur in 1570. English merchants trading with Catholic Europe faced the likelihood of an immediate embargo and thus English merchants, , were anxious to find new markets for their goods, particularly those producing woollen cloth. The prospect of new markets in the east must have been very appealing to merchants facing being shut out of their traditional markets.

Jenkinson set sail from Greenwich for Moscow on 12 May 1557 in a flotilla of four ships. Also in his party was the first Russian Ambassador to England, Osep Napea, who was returning home.[ii] Jenkinson aimed to obtain a safe-conduct from the Russian Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible") to allow him to reach the Caspian Sea and possibly journey on to Persia and China. His Muscovy Company colleagues had already established themselves in Moscow and had done much of the groundwork to obtain trading privileges for English merchants. The ships arrived in northern Russia on 12 July and anchored close to the entrance to the White Sea, where the passengers disembarked and made for Moscow more than 500 miles to the south.

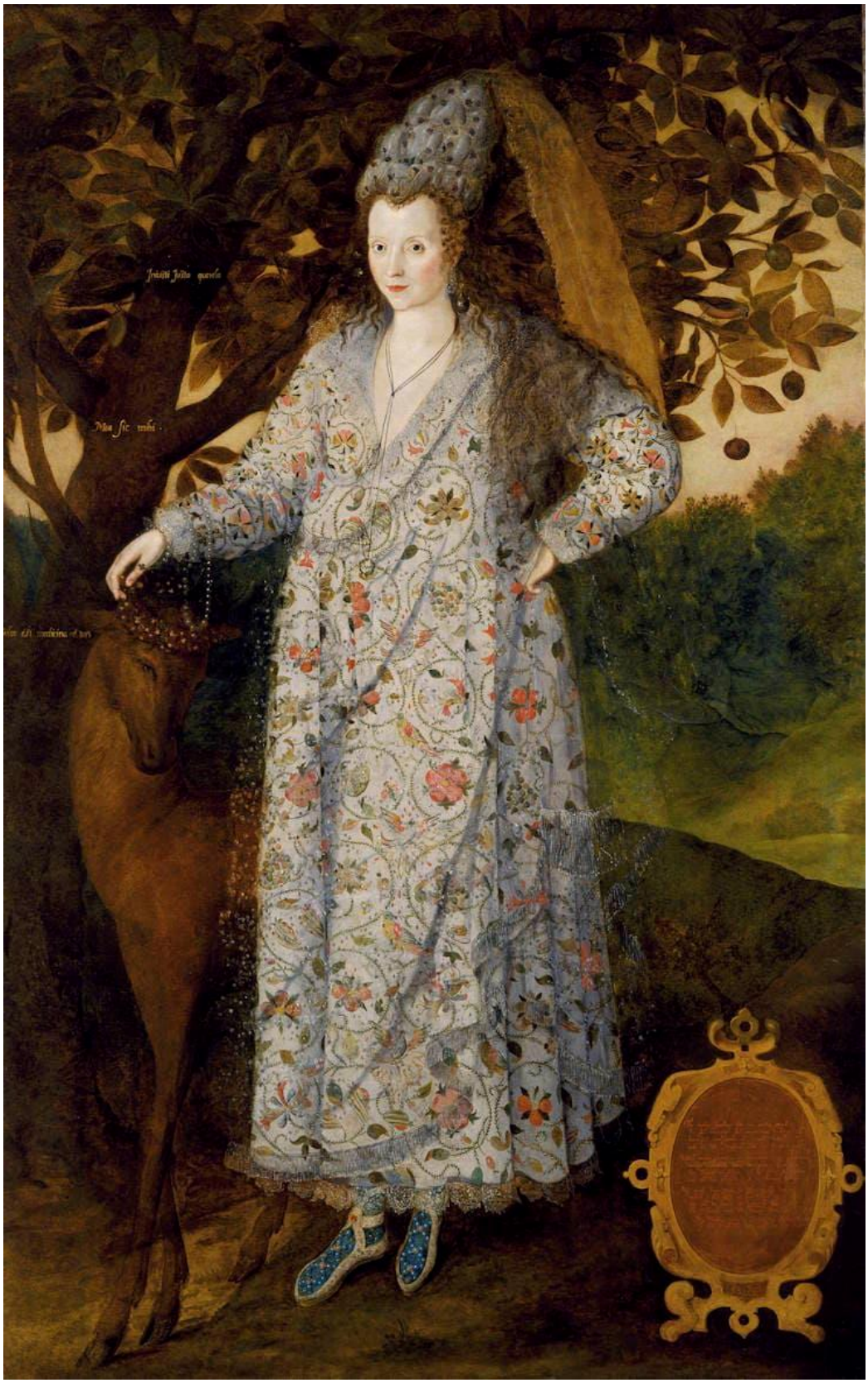
It would be another year before Jenkinson started out from Moscow towards Cathay. Whilst there he met with the formidable Tsar Ivan IV, who, according to some sources, was intent on marrying Queen Elizabeth and who may have used Jenkinson to convey secret messages to her. He also provided Jenkinson with the letters of recommendation that were invaluable to the Englishman's mission.

At this point Jenkinson's party consisted of himself, Richard and Robert Johnson and a Tartar interpreter. They departed Moscow on 23 April 1558, travelling by river past Riazan, Kassimov, Murom and Nijni Novgorod, before joining the mighty Volga and heading southwards towards

Astrakhan. They reached Kazan on 29 May, which having been destroyed by the Russians, was then in the midst of reconstruction. Here they stayed for two weeks.

These were unsettled times. Only a year before, Ivan the Terrible's troops had broken the final grip of the Golden Horde on Russia, inflicting a fatal blow to the Kazan Khanate, destroying many of the principal towns and leaving tens of thousands of dead in cities like Astrakhan, located at the mouth of the Volga, where it flows into the Caspian.

South of Kazan the land was inhabited by Nogai Tartars, who had recently made peace with Russia.[iii] But on 14 July, when Jenkinson arrived in Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga, the city was in a terrible state due to both famine and plague. Many of the Nogais were being offered as slaves. As Jenkinson notes, "At my being there I could have bought many goodly Tartars children…to say, a boy or wench for a loafe of bread worth sixe pence in England." Nonetheless, as he makes clear in the next sentence, he did not: "we had more neede of victualles at that time than of any such merchandise."[iv]



Marcus Gheeraerts' portrait, now thought to be Aru Sultan

However, it is possible that it was in Astrakhan that Jenkinson first met Aru Sultan (sometimes referred to as Aura Soltana), a young Central Asian woman. We don't know the precise circumstances under which he met her – and we will come back to that point – but it is very likely that before setting off across the Caspian towards Bokhara he sent her back north to be placed into the care of Henry Lane, master of the Muscovy Company, then resident in Vologda, 300 miles to the north of Moscow on the route towards the White Sea.

We know this because in a letter written to Lane from Moscow on 18 September 1559 after returning from Central Asia, Jenkinson gives "most heartie thanks" to his boss "for my wench Aura Soltana."[v]

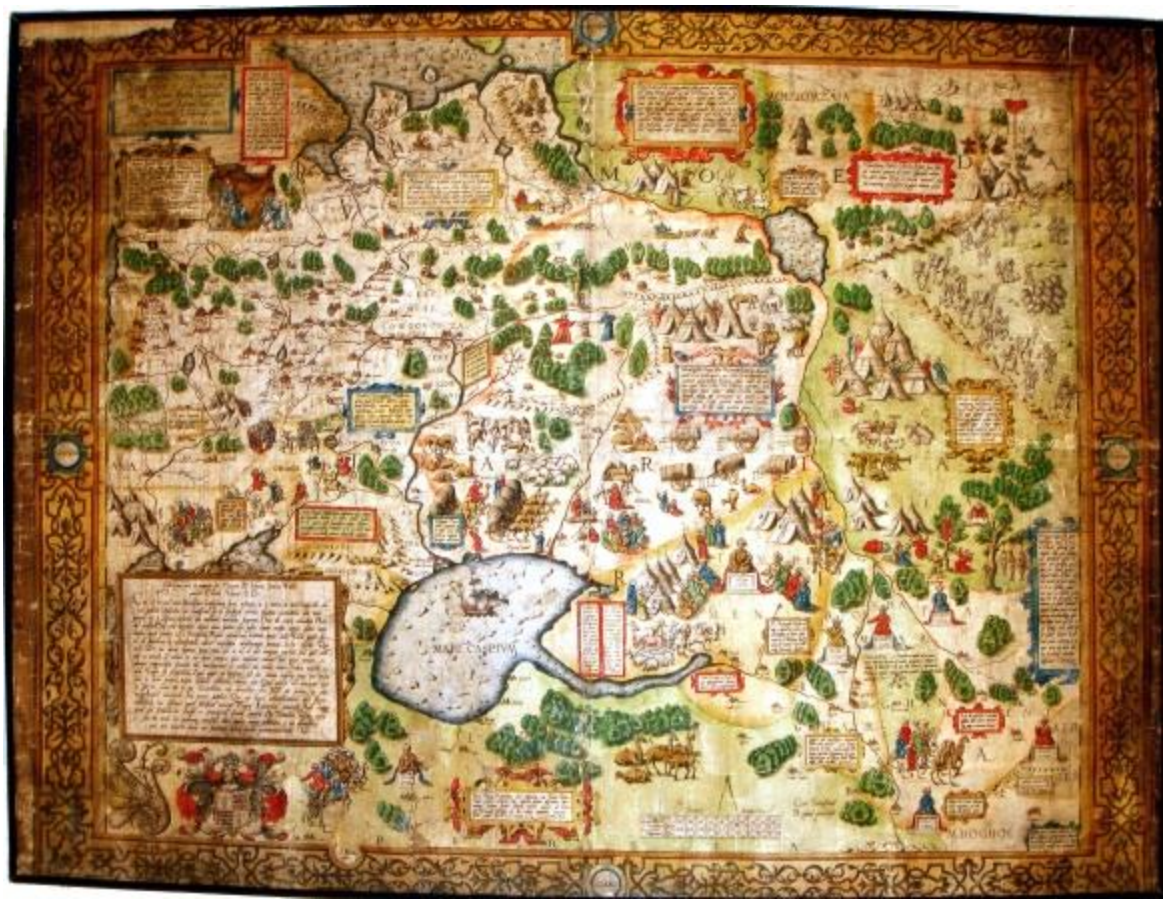
From Astrakhan onwards, Jenkinson was outside the territories of the Russian Tsar. He and his colleagues, together with a group of Tartar and Persian merchants, sailed from the city on 6 August, in a ship they had bought and equipped and filled with their trade goods. He mapped the coast as he went and after some rough weather, on 3 September they reached the port of Mangishlak on the east coast. Here they had trouble with local Turcoman tribesmen, but by the 14th they had put together a caravan of a thousand camels to convey their goods to Bokhara.

Soon after he met the Mangishlak governor, Timur Sultan, brother of the reigning Khan of Khiva. After a further 20 days he met the Khan himself, Hadjim Khan, in the town of Vezir (now Shehr Vezir), then the capital of the province of Kwarezm. From here he slowly made his way to Urgench and then on to Bokhara, arriving on 23 December, where he stayed until 8th March the following year. Then, unable to travel on to China due to worries about warfare and anarchy along the route, he decided to return to Moscow.

By 28 May 1559 Jenkinson was back in Astrakhan and on 2 September, after an absence of a year and five months, he reached Moscow, having brought with him 25 Russian slaves whose freedom he had purchased and various representatives of the khanates in Central Asia. He was granted a further interview with the Tsar, to whom he presented a yak's tail and a Tartar drum. He left there on 17 February 1560 and was back in London by June the same year.

Soon after arriving back in London Jenkinson started work on his map, together with mapmaker Nicholas Reynolds and editor Clement Adams. According to the Antwerp mapmaker Abraham Ortelius it was first published in London in 1562. By this time Jenkinson had already set out on the second of his Central Asian journeys, leaving London for Persia on 14 May 1561.

Very few copies of Jenkinson's original map were printed and until very recently it was only known from Ortelius' simplified version, also published in 1562, in Antwerp. Even so, it is a ground-breaking map and the first to mention the Kazakhs by name. Their territory, to the east of the Caspian, is referred to as 'Kassackia'.



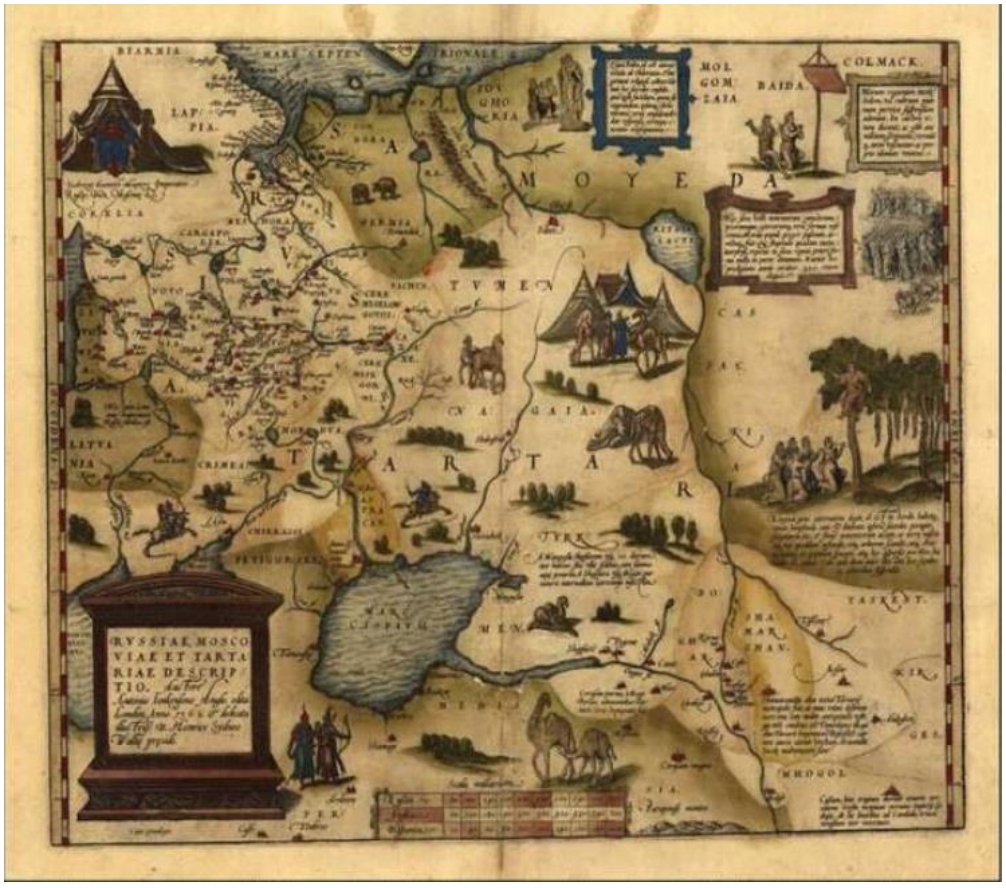
Jenkinson's original map

And what of the young "Tartar girl", Aru Sultan? Several writers have suggested that she was a Tartar slave girl bought by Jenkinson. Historian Jessica Brain, for example, argues that she was bought during his second journey to Central Asia.[vi] This is unlikely, but Brain is right to point out that Aru Sultan was one of the first recorded Muslim women to arrive in England. She says Aru Sultan was presented as a gift to Queen Elizabeth. Whether or not she was a former slave, which I find very unlikely, she quickly became a significant member of the Royal Court, receiving many luxurious gifts, particularly textiles, directly from the Queen.

Professor Jerry Brotton, in his book *The Sultan and the Queen*, about Queen Elizabeth I's relations with the Islamic world, also repeats the error that Jenkinson bought Aru Sultan in Astrakhan, even though Jenkinson's own writings make it clear that this was not the case. Brotton notes that after she became a lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth she became a kind of fashion adviser, introducing new designs for shoes and court dress.[vii]

By far the most detailed study of Aru Sultan is by a Kazakh historian, Mukhit-Ardager Sydyknazarov, who takes a very different line, arguing that Aru Sultan was the first diplomatic representative of the Kazakh state and the first representative of the Islamic and Turkic world to arrive at the Tudor court of Queen Elizabeth I.[viii] He says Aru Sultan was chosen because

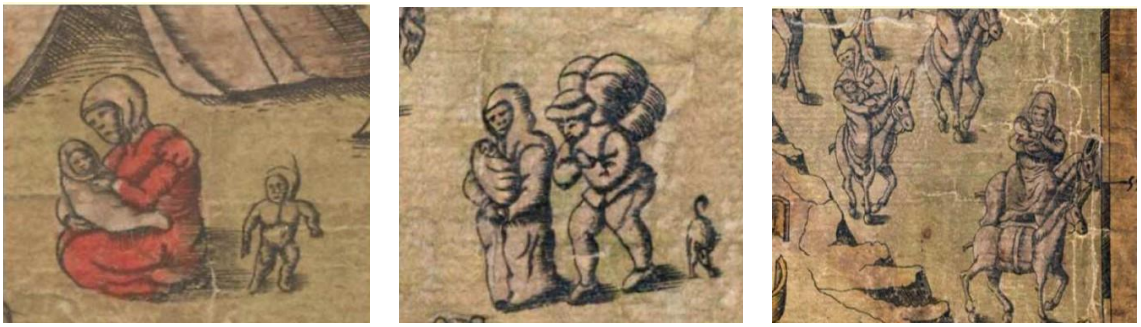
Khaknazar Khan, the leader of the khanate, knew there was also a woman on the throne of England. He believes it is very likely that Jenkinson met Khaknazar Khan and that the Khan decided to send a diplomatic mission to London, headed by Aru Sultan.



The Ortelius version of Jenkinson's map

Sydyknazarov goes on to argue that Jenkinson's map, so much more detailed than that produced by Ortelius, could not have been created without information from someone well informed about society and politics in Central Asia. The informant, he suggests, was Aru Sultan herself. He points out that her name is clearly Kazakh, 'Aru' meaning beauty or beautiful girl and 'Sultan' indicating her class origin from the Kazakh nobility. Sultan was a title usually given to the Chingizids – direct descendants of Genghis Khan - who acquired it by birthright. In the sixteenth century royal burial vault in Turkestan in southern Kazakhstan can be found many women with the title Sultan as part of their name.

Jenkinson's original map, says Sydyknazarov, includes 15 images of Kazakh women, a fact which is highly unusual in European cartography. "We assume that she helped Jenkinson to depict her mother with younger and older children, brothers and sisters, father, grandparents in various images on the map", he says. He adds that their absence in Ortelius' copy of the map is a result of Catholic intolerance in Antwerp.



Some of the portrayals of women in Jenkinson's original map

According to this theory, there is little chance that Jenkinson could have travelled to Bukhara without the good will and knowledge of Khaknazar Khan, who was titular ruler of most of the territory through which he passed. The absence of documentary proof for a meeting between the two men is not necessarily proof of absence of such documentation, and it is "only a matter of time", according to Sydnyknazarov before such documentation is found in an archive. He says that Jenkinson would not have broadcast his negotiations with the Kazakhs, as this may well have upset Ivan IV the Terrible. Jenkinson would have been aware that opening up trade routes to India, for example, would have required the permission of the Kazakhs. This indeed, is why Aru Sultan was sent to London, so that these trade negotiations could be continued.

Aru Sultan's pedigree is unknown at present. She does not appear in Khaknazar's family tree, although other siblings of the khan are mentioned, including his brothers Mamash, Khak-Nazar, and Abulkhair-Sultan and his sisters Mungatay Sultan, Din-Muhamed Sultan and Bozgyl Sultan.[ix]

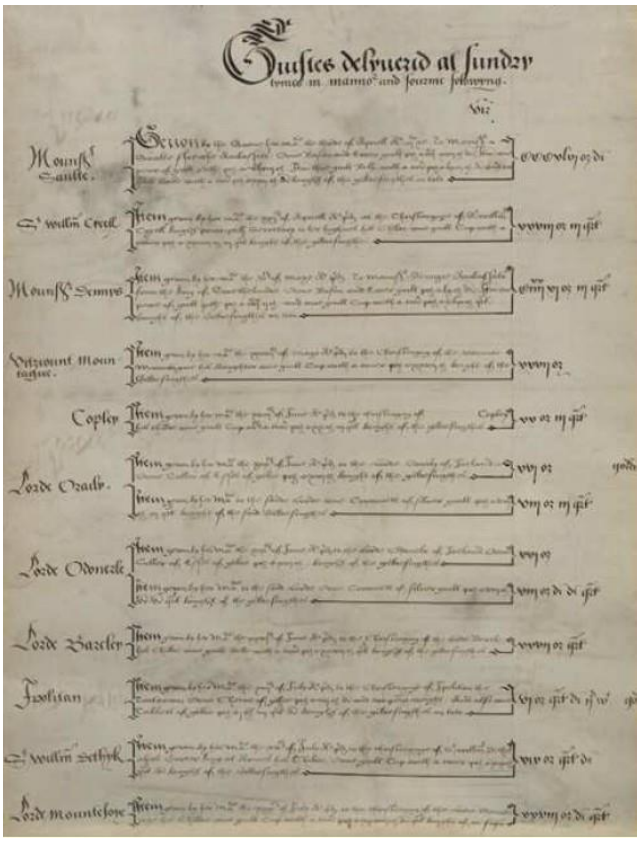
As for whether or not she was a slave, Sydnyknazarov argues that it would have been impossible for Jenkinson to take a young female Muslim slave across the lands of the Khanate and back to England. He would not have been allowed to do this. Nor would she have been allowed into the Royal court in England and adopted as a lady-in-waiting unless she herself had some noble status.

The first mention we get of Aru Sultan in London is in May 1560 when it is recorded that Elizabeth gave her some fine textiles, including two loose dresses of black taffeta, a French petticoat of russet satin and another French petticoat of black satin. These would have been clothes from the Queen's personal wardrobe. At around this time the young woman, thought to have been around 20 when she arrived, was given the added name of Ippolyta the Tartarian. She was usually referred to as Aru Sultana Hippolyta. In ancient Greek mythology Ippolyta was the Amazon (ie Central Asian) queen married by Theseus of Athens.

The point to note here is that these first gifts were bestowed by Elizabeth on Aru Sultan only months after she would have arrived in England and before Jenkinson himself had returned. If she was a slave girl, how could she have risen so quickly to the point where the Queen was giving her valuable gifts?

A year after this first recorded gift, on 13 July 1561, Elizabeth performed what has been described as a symbolic baptism ceremony for Aru Sultan, through which she became her godmother. The gifts presented to the young woman included more than 6 ounces of gold jewellery: "*Item, given by her Majestie, the 13th of July, anno predicto, to the chrystenyng of Ipolitan the Tartarian, oone chaine of gold, per oz. 4 1/2 oz. and two peny weights; and also oone tablett of gold, per oz. 1 ¾ dim. oz. Bought of the Goldsmith. In toto, 6 ¼ dim.oz. 2 dwts. gold*."

Not long after, Elizabeth I refers to Aru Sultan as "our deare and welbeloved woman Ipolita the Tartarian." In 1562 she received a pewter doll from the Queen. Recent fashion historians, including Janet Arnold and Patricia Lennox, have noted the gifts of textiles to Aru Sultan and argued that she revolutionized fashion at the court of the Queen. Several pairs of leather shoes were made for her by the Queen's shoemaker Garret Johnson, including shoes with heels made of Spanish leather, leather pantobles and velvet shoes and pantobles. One fashion historian has suggested that the Queen copied this style from Aru Sultan. Until then, satin shoes had been the court fashion, whereas leather riding boots were common on the steppe. The large number of gifts from the Queen in 1564, including livery clothes, shows that Aru Sultan remained in the Queen's favour for some years.



Elizabethan court roll detailing gifts of textiles to Aru Sultan

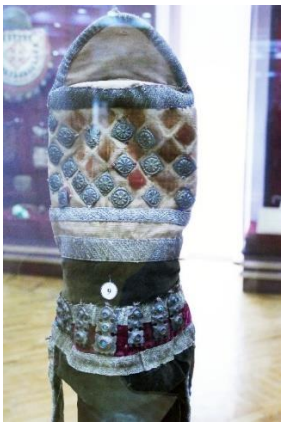
It is clear from the above that Aru Sultan was quickly adopted into the Elizabethan court, where she played an important role in fashion and became a favourite of the Queen. But mysteries remain. Did she ever return home? If she stayed in London, did she marry and have a family? Did she die in England and if so where is she buried? Answers to some of these questions may lie in as-yet-undiscovered Royal court documents.

There is one remaining mystery connected to Aru Sultan. An untitled picture, painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (c1561-1636) and now hanging in Hampton Court Palace, has been identified by several historians as Aru Sultan. The large portrait (216x135cm), once thought to be Queen Elizabeth herself, shows a woman wearing what is clearly a Central Asian costume. Indeed, the painting was also once known as 'Lady in Fancy Dress'. In her hands she holds both a small crucifix and a set of Islamic prayer beads.

The subject of the painting appears to be a woman in middle age, fair-skinned and perhaps somewhat melancholic. She stands beneath a tree and is holding the head of a deer with one hand. The gown (*chapan*) she is wearing is clearly not typically Elizabethan, with its low neckline and wrap-over fastening. More typical would have been a square-cut neck, with a high ruff. The patterns also suggest a Central Asian connection.

But most diagnostic of all is the hat the woman is wearing, which is very close in appearance to the tall *saukele* hats that were typical of Kazakhs and other Central Asians at the time. I found a very similar example in the National Museum in Almaty recently, identified as originating in Western Kazakhstan, close to the Caspian.

However, there are some problems with identifying this portrait as being of Aru Sultan. Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed that the artist, Gheeraerts, was born in 1561, the year after Aru Sultan arrived in London. Although undated, the picture is thought to have been painted around 1590, by which time she would have been around 50. However, no references to her have been found after 1576, which is when she is assumed to have died. Would Gheeraerts have painted her a dozen or years after she is assumed to have died? And if she survived until the 1690s why are there no records?



A Saukele similar to the one worn by Aru Sultan in her portrait

The painting also includes a number of inscriptions and a long poem in a cartouche, typical of paintings of Gheeraerts. One inscription states (in Latin) “A just complaint of injustice” and another by the stag’s head reads “Grief is medicine for grief”.

The sonnet in a cartouche, continuing the melancholic theme, reads:

The restless swallow fits my restless minde,
In still revivinge still renewinge wronges;
her Just complaintes of cruelty unkinde,
are all the Musique, that of my life prolongs.

With pensive thoughtes my weeping Stagg I crowne
whose Melancholy teares my cares Expresse;
her Teares in silence, and my sighes unknowne
are all the physicke that my harmes redresse.

My onely hope was in this goodly tree,
which I did plant in love bringe up in care:
but all in vanie [sic], for now to late I see
the shales be mine, the kernels others are.

My Musique may be plaints, my physique teares
If this be all the fruite my love tree beares.

The inscriptions and the sonnet suggest a very sad figure who has been cheated in some way, perhaps in love. They are hardly the thoughts, we would assume, of someone who was god-daughter to the Queen and a recipient of many Royal favours. Nor do they square with the idea that Aru Sultan, if it is she, was a high-flying and important diplomatic figure. We must therefore be cautious in determining the identity of the subject of this painting.

The final mystery surrounding Jenkinson and his journey to Central Asia is the fate of his original map. As previously mentioned, two versions of the map were produced in 1562, one in London by Jenkinson himself and Nicholas Reynolds and the other – a less detailed version lacking the vignettes of Kazakh life – by the mapmaker Abraham Ortelius in Antwerp, who included it in his famous atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. Another map by de Jode from the same period only portrays the upper left side of the original area.

Until 1987 it was thought that Jenkinson’s original map, of which around 25 copies were produced, had been lost forever. However, in that year a schoolteacher walked into the Wroclaw University Library in Poland and asked staff if they would be interested in a map that she had used as a teaching aid for many years. She said she had been given it by a pupil who had found it in a cellar after the war. When it was presented at the International Conference on the History of Cartography in Amsterdam in 1989 it caused a sensation. It was clearly a very early version of the original Jenkinson map.[x]

The map itself was more than twice the size of Ortelius' map. It was dedicated to Henry Sidney, the map's sponsor and was much more detailed than the European copies, including the names of lakes, rivers, mountains, as well as boundaries and cities. Various elements of the map have led some scholars to believe that this particular version was created in about 1567, rather than 1562 as previously believed. If this is the case, then it is possible that it contains some information obtained during Jenkinson's second journey to Central Asia.

In summary, it seems very unlikely that Aru Sultan was ever a slave or purchased for whatever reason by Anthony Jenkinson. Her rapid adoption by the Elizabethan court very soon after she arrived in England is not consistent with her being a slave girl. The close interest that Queen Elizabeth paid to her, donating valuable clothing and other gifts, including gold jewellery, becoming her godmother and allowing her to become a lady-in-waiting suggest that Aru Sultan had a pre-existing important status. Nor does it seem likely that Jenkinson would have been allowed by local khans in Central Asia to take a young Moslem woman back to England as a slave.

At the same time, it is hard to believe that Aru Sultan was a fully fledged diplomat leading a mission to England with the express intention of negotiating a trade treaty, as argued by some Kazakh historians. If this really was the case, why are there no records in England of the outcome of any such discussions?

For now, until more documentation becomes available, it makes sense to keep an open mind on both the status of Aru Sultan and the question of whether or not she contributed to Jenkinson's map. Whether or not she was a diplomat also remains to be proven. None of this detracts in any way from the achievements of Anthony Jenkinson, both as a traveller and as a mapmaker. His original map remains one of the greatest examples of British mapmaking ever produced.

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[i] *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation Made by Sea or Overland to the Remote & Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 Yeares*. Richard Hakluyt. New York. E. P. Dutton & Co.

[ii] This was Napea's second attempt to get home, having already been wrecked off the Scottish coast on his first attempt.

[iii] The Nogai Tartars took their name from Nogai, grandson of Teval, seventh son of Juchi, who founded the Golden Horde. Juchi was the eldest son of Genghis Khan. When Batu, another son of Genghis, died, Nogai took command of the Kipchak horde, but thereafter their power declined, although they were still raiding deep into Russia at the beginning of the 17th Century. At the time of Jenkinson's visit the bulk of the Nogai Tartars were assimilating into the rapidly growing Kazakh khanate.

[iv] *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia by Anthony Jenkinson and Other Englishmen*, E Delmar Morgan and C H Coote (ed), Burt Franklin, New York, p58.

[v] Ibid, p109. Hakluyt adds a note to say: "This was a young Tartar girle which he gave to the Queen afterwards."

[vi] See https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Aura-Soltana-Muslim-Slave-Elizabeth-I/

[vii] See https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/sultan-queen-elizabeth-england-islam-jerry-brotton

[viii] See https://www.academia.edu/109691622/Aru_Sultan_Diplomatic_Mission_Historical_and_Political_Excursion (in Russian).

[ix] Sultan was used as a title for both men and women.

[x] For a detailed account of the discovery and analysis of the map see https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/38314