

**BARON HERBERSTEIN ON THE CERKNICA
KARST LAKE - A PHANTOM BOOK OF THE
16TH CENTURY?**

BARON HERBERSTEIN O CERKNIŠKEM JEZERU
- NEOBSTOJEČA KNJIGA IZ 16. STOL.?

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Abstract

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Shaw, Trevor R.: Baron Herberstein on the Cerknica Karst Lake - a Phantom Book of the 16th Century?

De admirandis rebus naturae by Sigmund von Herberstein, cited as a published source in Valvasor (1689), can nowhere be traced. An apparent reference to it by Wernher (1551) proves to refer only to a verbal report. It is concluded that Valvasor, or his collaborator Francisci, was confused by the inclusion of Wernher's De admirandis Hungariae aquis as an appendix in Herberstein's Rerum Moscoviticarum commentarij without any prominent statement of its authorship.

Key words: karstology, history of karstology, Cerknško jezero, Herberstein S., Valvasor J. W., G. Wernher

Izvleček

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Shaw, Trevor R.: Baron Herberstein o Cerknškem jezeru - neobstoječa knjiga iz 16. stol.

Dela "De admirandis rebus naturae" Sigismunda von Herbersteina, ki ga navaja Valvasor (1689) med svojimi tiskanimi viri, ni mogoče zaslediti. Wernherjeva (1551) navedba se nanaša najbrž le na ustno poročilo. Avtor meni, da je Valvasorja, ali njegovega sodelavca Franciscija, zavedlo dejstvo, da je Herbersteinovemu delu "Rerum Moscoviticarum comentarij" priključeno kot dodatek Wernherjevo delo "De admirandis Hungariae aquis" brez opazne navedbe avtorja.

Ključne besede: krasoslovje, zgodovina krasoslovja, Cerknško jezero, Herberstein S., Valvasor J. W., G. Wernher

THE BOOK CITED

When Georg Wernher (1551) described the intermittent karst lake of Cerknjško jezero in Slovenia, he acknowledged Sigmund von Herberstein as the source of his information. Nearly 140 years later Valvasor's *Die Ehre dess Herzogthums Crain* (1689) lists among the sources used *De admirandis rebus naturae* by Herberstein. So it has always been assumed that such a book must exist. What is this publication? What does it say? And where is it to be found?

In the first volume of Valvasor's *Die Ehre...* is a 12-page "Verzeichniss aller derer Scribenten...", acknowledging publications used in the preparation of the book. The list was probably prepared by Valvasor's collaborator and editor, Erasmus Francisci (Baraga 1990), but this does not diminish its authority. The entry reads "Sigmund Freyherr von Herberstein de *Admirandis Rebus Naturae*" (Fig. 1).

As is common throughout the list, the date and place of publication are not given. In his text it is described as a little book ("Buchlein") and also as being "in Quarto", i.e. with its sheets folded into four leaves and so of smaller height than the folio volumes of *Die Ehre ...* Thus the book being described had evidently been examined.

Georg Wernher's *De admirandis Hungariae aquis hypomnemation* (1551) includes a four-page description of Cerknjško jezero, and states that "Sigismund in Herberstein" provided the information. A modern English translation of this description, made by the late G. F. Pullen, a professional Latin scholar and translator and published as an appendix by Shaw (1979), renders this acknowledgement as "... I will describe it from what you yourself have written".

Both Wernher's book and Valvasor's refer in some detail to the caves, sinks and underground streams associated with the lake and both provide maps of it. It was tantalizing to wonder what of this information was derived from Herberstein and whether he had recorded any other facts about these karst phenomena.

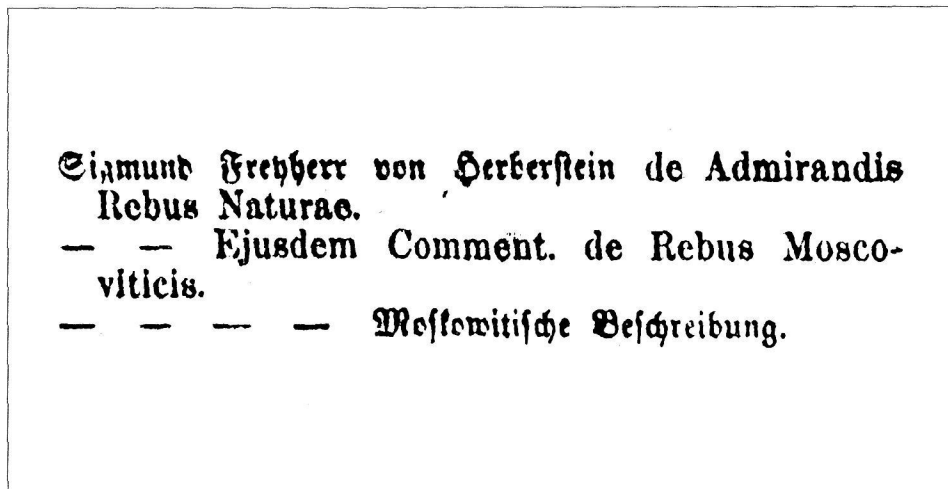
An intensive search was started for a copy of the original publication. Bearing in mind Wernher's reference in 1551, and Herberstein's birth in 1486, it seemed likely that the book must have appeared between about 1510, when Herberstein was 24 years old, and 1551. Furthermore Herberstein's other books were published from 1549 onwards, suggesting a date later rather than earlier in this period.

THE BOOK NOT FOUND

The existence of Herberstein's *De admirandis rebus naturae* as a printed book became less and less likely as the search continued. Enquiries showed that no copies exist in the national libraries of Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Great Britain, Hungary or Slovenia, nor in the Bodleian Library or the college libraries in Oxford, the library of the Royal Society, the Danish Royal Library, the Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek in Kiel, the libraries of the Evangelisches Predigerseminar in Wittenberg or the Erdgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zürich, nor in Valvasor's own library (now in Zagreb). Neither this title or any similar one is recorded in the National Union Catalogue (covering libraries in USA) or in the bibliographies of Moller (1774), Ebert (1821) or Stillwell (1970). It is of particular significance that it is not included in the comprehensive Herberstein bibliography of Krones (1871). Moreover Pochlin (1803), although he does list it, gives Valvasor's reference as the sole authority.

It was not uncommon in the 16th century for a short piece of writing on one subject to be published as part of a larger book or as an appendix to a book on a quite unrelated subject. But searching showed that this was not so in this case; *De admirandis rebus naturae* was not contained in any of Herberstein's other books.

Thus its non-existence as a printed book seems almost conclusive. There still remains the possibility of its existing, or having existed once, in manuscript only. This can never be disproved, but the European libraries listed above, which are among the most likely to hold such material, all report that they are not aware of such a manuscript. Extensive searches of catalogues of manuscripts have similarly failed to reveal its presence.



*Fig. 1 - The reference to Herberstein's work, in Valvasor's book (1689, 1: (xliv))
Sl. 1: Navedba Herbersteinovega dela v Valvasorjevi knjigi (1689, 1: XLIV).*

HERBERSTEIN THE MAN

Baron Sigmund (or Sigismund) von Herberstein (Fig. 2) was born in the castle at Vipava (Slovenia) on 23 August 1486 and died in Wien on 28 March 1566 (Eyriès 1817; Major 1851; Bergstaesser 1969; Sitar 1987). Although of German family he spoke Slovene. He studied law, became a soldier and fought against the Turks, and then from 1516 undertook diplomatic missions from the German court to Russia, Poland, Denmark, Turkey and elsewhere in Europe. The resulting travels provided materials for books, which seem to have

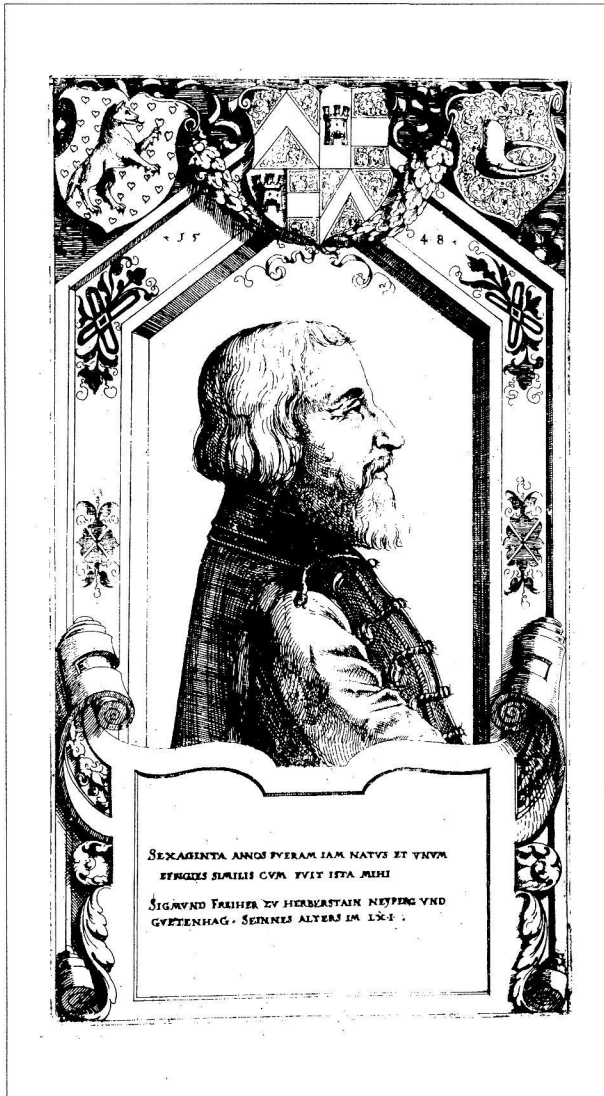


Fig. 2 - Sigmund von Herberstein, aged 61, in 1548. An engraving by Augustin Hirschvogel (reproduced by permission of the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, München)

Sl. 2: Sigmund von Herberstein 1548, star 61 let, po gravuri Augustina Hirschvogla (objavljeno z dovoljenjem Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, München).

been renowned for their accuracy. One on Russia, which he visited in 1517 and 1526, is the best known, running into at least 19 editions in four languages.

Herberstein's birthplace, Vipava, is only 32 km from the Cerknica lake but, as his work as a diplomat took him to other countries, his native land seems not to feature in his books.

WHAT WERNHER REALLY SAID

Wernher dedicated his book *De admirandis Hungariae aquis hypomnemata* to Herberstein, and it has a foreword in the form of a letter from Herberstein to him encouraging him to publish and referring to his own experiences of springs but without mentioning Cerknica. In introducing his remarks on the Cerknica lake (Fig. 3) and writing as if addressing Herberstein, Wernher's actual words were "...de tuo sermone describam...". "Sermo" normally refers to speech, so his phrase is best translated as "I will describe from what you yourself have said" or "... told me". Thus Pullen's version, "I will describe it from what you yourself have written", hitherto the accepted English translation, is imprecise and misleading.

There is thus no reason, from what Wernher wrote, to expect to find a published description by Herberstein of the Cerknica lake. But we are left with the fact that Valvasor (1689), or his co-author Francisci, refers definitely to *De admirandis rebus naturae* as one of his sources. From this alone one might suspect that Herberstein did indeed write about the lake, possibly published after Wernher had used his verbal information in his own book, or perhaps left only as an unpublished manuscript. Or could the Valvasor reference have been an error?

WHAT VALVASOR REALLY SAW

The important question remains: what was it that Valvasor or Francisci was citing as *De admirandis rebus naturae*? There is no evidence of a completely spurious work being named

Sed quid obstat, quo minus loci faciem, vt eam
ab alijs delineatā accepisti, de tuo sermone descri-
bam. Claudi aiebas eum circumquaq; montibus,
ē quibus riuī quidam ignobiles suo quīq; alueolo
procurāt, ab orientali quidem plaga tres, ab au-
strali quatuor: singulos quo longius sūt, hoc mi-
nus scitare quis, terra nimirum ipsas combibēte,
donec postremo absorbeantur scrobibus faxeis,
ita natis, vt humano opere excite videri possint.
Hīc a quis ita redundātibus, vt recipi non possint,
fieri

Fig. 3 - Wernher's acknowledgement, on lines 2 and 3, of Herberstein as the source of his information (Wernher 1551, f. 17b)

Sl. 3: Wernherjeva navedba, v 2. in 3. vrstici, Herbersteina kot vir informacij (Wernher 1551, f. 17 b).

elsewhere among the sources listed; nor would it have served any purpose. Errors in transcription were not rare at that time, but unless some other publication was known to Valvasor and his colleague that could have been erroneously recorded under that title, one is left to conclude that a manuscript account of the lake by Herberstein did once (and perhaps still does) exist. It is relevant, though, that none of the other authorities listed in the "Verzeichniss aller derer Scribenten" of *Die Ehre...* appear to have been unpublished.

But there is a possible, even probable, way in which Valvasor's list of sources could, with a little careless copying, have produced "De admirandis rebus naturae" from a well-known book which does exist.

Wernher's *De admirandis Hungariae aquis hypomnemation* (note the somewhat similar title) exists in several editions. As a separate publication it appeared in 1551 (Hungarian bibliographies show an edition of 1549, but no copy has been traced). This 1551 edition is of quarto size and contains only 20 leaves, so it is similar in appearance to the "Buchlein ... in Quarto" described in *Die Ehre ...* In addition, it was included (apparently without the map of the lake) as an appendix in several, but not all, editions of Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum commentarij*. In Latin it was published with the editions of 1556, 1557 and 1571, and a German translation formed part of the 1563 and 1567 editions of the German version, *Moscoviter wunderbare Historien*. It appeared also, with the map, in Broniowski's book of 1595.

In none of these editions was Wernher's name prominent on the title page and in the editions of 1556 and 1571 it did not appear there at all. Although his name was present in the title block of the poem, so was Herberstein's as the person to whom it was sent. It would be all too easy for a hurried editor or assistant to record the Wernher appendix under the principal name of the title page. Errors in transcribing the title in haste are also possible; such mistakes are not unknown in the 20th century. Confusion with Wernher's book is not precluded by the fact that Valvasor's list of sources includes also ""Georgius Wernerus de Admirandis Hungariae aquis"; indeed its likelihood is somewhat strengthened as even this otherwise accurate citation spells Wern(h)er's name differently from the way it is written in his book.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that Wernher (1551) did not in fact refer to Herberstein's having written on the Cerknica lake but only to information obtained from him verbally. Extensive searching has failed to find any evidence of *De admirandis rebus naturae* by Herberstein existing at all, either printed or in manuscript.

It is therefore concluded that this title, listed among Valvasor's sources as by Herberstein, is in fact an erroneous transcription of Wernher's *De admirandis Hungariae aquis hypomnemation* which was printed as an appendix in several editions of Herberstein's *Rerum Moscoviticarum commentarij*.

What did Herberstein's book contain is therefore a meaningless question. What it would have contained, had it been written, would have been similar to what Wernher wrote, for the

latter acknowledges that this is described "from what you [Herberstein] yourself have said." Wernher goes into sufficient detail to make it unlikely that he omitted any significant facts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Prof. Dr Dieter Lohmeier, Director of the Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek, who pointed out that Wernher's text did not in fact refer to a written description of the Cerknica lake by Herberstein; he also verified the holdings of the Danish Royal Library. W. Rudolf Reinbacher, of USA, took the Herberstein problem to heart and suggested contacts in several major libraries in Germany and Switzerland. Alan J. Clarke, Deputy Librarian of the Royal Society, and Erika Schulz of the library of the Evangelisches Predigerseminar in Wittenberg also made helpful suggestions. As always, the services of the British Library in London were indispensable. I thank also all those other libraries that reported their holding of Herberstein's Moscow book containing the Wernher text, and their non-holdings of his supposed *De admirandis rebus naturae*. The National Library of Hungary advised on the status of the commonly-cited 1549 edition of Wernher's book. The National and University Library of Slovenia told me of two important bibliographies.

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BARON HERBERSTEIN O CERKNIŠKEM JEZERU - NEOBSTOJEČA KNJIGA IZ 16. STOL.?

Povzetek

Ko je G. Wernher (1551) opisal Cerkniško jezero, je omenil S. von Herbersteina kot svojega informatorja. Skoraj 140 let kasneje Valvasor v svoji Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain (1689) navaja med objavljenimi viri Herbersteinovo delo De admirandis rebus naturae. Torej se je vedno domnevalo, da ta knjiga mora obstajati. To delo bi moralo biti tiskano med leti 1510 in 1551, raje bliže 1550. Avtor je iskal po številnih knjižnicah in zbirkah dokumentov, a knjige ni našel, niti ni to delo v obliki dodatka objavljeno v kaki drugi Herbersteinovi knjigi. Iz tega izhaja sklep, da ta knjiga ni bila tiskana. Avtor domneva, da je Valvasor napačno prepisal vir - Wernherjevo delo De admirandis Hungariae aquis hypomnemation - ki je tiskano v dodatku nekaterih izdaj Herbersteinovega dela Rerum Moscoviticarum comentarij brez posebne navedbe Wernherjevega imena kot avtorja.