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8 GERMAN SIBERIAN RESEARCH UNDER STALINISM: HANS FINDEISEN AND WOLFGANG STEINITZ

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Introduction

This article considers two important German Siberianists, Hans Findeisen (1903–1968) and Wolfgang Steinitz (1905–1967), with disparate academic biographies that intersected several times. These scholars both experienced challenges in pursuing fieldwork in the Soviet Union, including political circumstances that endangered their colleagues and themselves. Their stories are particularly relevant today, when access to research sites, scholarly discussions, and field resources in Russia are once again suddenly and radically restricted to Westerners. Looking at the ethical, methodological, and even existential dilemmas that these researchers faced in relation to their colleagues, friends, Indigenous hosts, and state bureaucrats may offer insight into a field once again affected by violent conflicts and reinforced borders.

Findeisen and Stenitz were both born in Prussia on 28 February, two years apart (Findeisen in Berlin, Steinitz in Breslau). They met while working at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin between 1924 and 1926, and again in Sápmi, among the Sámi in Vuotso, Finland in summer 1929. Then they parted ways, mainly because of their divergent political allegiances, but also due to geography and differing academic status. By 1929, Findeisen had already received his Ph.D. and completed his crucial fieldwork in Siberia (Maghlakelidze 1996), while Steinitz hoped to finish his dissertation by the end of that year (Leo 2005). Steinitz would not be able to conduct his major fieldwork in Siberia until six years later and under very different circumstances.

Since their youth, both researchers had been motivated by the urge to document the ways of life and folklore of people who seemed to be falling victim to advancing urbanization and industrialization, and whose testimonies therefore needed to be collected while still possible. At the end of their lives, they found themselves on different sides of the border of a divided Germany, Steinitz a recognized university professor in socialist East Germany, Findeisen a private scholar largely denied access to established academic circles in West Germany. The two were among the last foreigners to conduct ethnological fieldwork in Siberia before the fall of the Iron Curtain. Striking is how many of the people with whom they became acquainted along the way suffered and perished at the hands of the Stalinist terror machine.

Two German Siberianists

Hans Findeisen was born into a petit bourgeois family, learned Russian at school, and developed an interest in folklore. In 1922 he began studying ethnology and had an internship at the Berlin Museum of Ethnology (Maghlakelidse 1996).

Wolfgang Steinitz came from an educated, secular, middle-class Jewish family. His father, a lawyer in Breslau, demanded that his son study law, which Wolfgang quickly abandoned in favor of ethnology and linguistics. In a letter to his father in May 1923, the 18-year-old emphasized that studying "ethnology and linguistics of the primitives" had been his "most ardent wish" for "at least 6 years" and explicitly referred to Adolf Bastian's salvage anthropology: "We must now save and collect what we can" (Leo 2005: 38; Steinitz 1980: XI).

Findeisen and Steinitz became members of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory [1] in the same year ("Sitzung vom 17. Februar 1923;" "Sitzung vom 17. November 1923"). Probably at the July 1924 meeting of the Society, but certainly the same year at the Museum of Ethnology,[2] they met the pivotal figures of Siberian ethnology, Waldemar Bogoras and Leo Sternberg.[3]

This visit was connected with another event that was to become important for German research in Siberia. In 1925, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, a German delegation led by the president of the Emergency Association of German Science,[4] Friedrich Schmidt-Ott, was invited to Moscow and Leningrad. A key figure in relations between the Soviet Academy and Germany was the Academy's secretary, Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg, who visited Berlin the following year. He negotiated with Steinitz's mentor in Finno-Ugric languages, Prof. Ernst Lewy, about a linguistic field trip to the Finno-Ugric people of the Volga and Ob River regions, for which Steinitz would have served as an assistant (Leo 2005). Oldenburg also wanted to meet the young student.[5] The result was an invitation for Steinitz to travel to Leningrad. In the autumn of 1926, after ethnographic studies in Finland, Steinitz traveled to Leningrad to visit the Academy of Material Culture. The

1 Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte.

2 In summer 1924 Steinitz was probably already employed as a volunteer at the museum, as can be seen from a letter to his father from May 1924, in which he enthusiastically reported on a meeting with Prof. Max Schmidt and his application for a traineeship at the Europe-North Asia department, then occupied by Findeisen (Leo 2005: 44).

3 Findeisen's card to Bogoras in Leningrad from Berlin on 8 November 1924 referred to Bogoras' visit to the Berlin Museum on 7 October. Archive MAE RAN f. 40, op. 1, d. 334, l.1.

4 Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft – the predecessor of today's German Science Foundation.

5 Lewy wrote to Steinitz on 22 June 1926: "that Mr. v. Oldenburg is here, that he [Prof. Gragger from the Hungarian Institute of the University] has spoken to him about you, and that Mr. v. Oldenburg is expecting you on Thursday morning, 10 a.m., Charlottenburg, […] W. 71, Pt. right at Michelson. This means on Thursday, 24 June 1926." See Winkler (2000) for the circumstances of this meeting, the postcard to Lewy and excerpts from the meeting's minutes.

almost three months he spent there were certainly the reason for his continued focus on Siberia (Leo 2005). He attended lectures by Bogoras and Sternberg, by Bogoras' student Yan Petrovich Koshkin (Alkor), who later became his superior at the Institute of the Peoples of the North, and by Dmitrii Vladimirovich Bubrikh, head of the Department of Finno-Ugric Studies at Leningrad State University (Winkler 2000).

Findeisen's fieldwork in Siberia, 1927–1928

While Steinitz traveled to the USSR, Findeisen completed his dissertation on the fisheries of Paleo-Asian peoples in 1926. There he explicitly thanked Prof. Max Schmidt, whom he considered his most important teacher (H. Findeisen 1929a). This long-standing friendship and admiration for Schmidt, who emigrated to South America in 1929, would later prove to be his ruin. In a review of a grant application, Walter Krickeberg[6] accused Findeisen of "sympathies with Bolshevism" and "political unreliability" and accused him of being "ideologically close" to Schmidt, who had an "anti-national attitude" (Díaz de Arce 2005: 191). Other ethnologists, such as Otto Kümmel, Konrad Theodor Preuß, and Hermann Baumann, hindered Findeisen's academic career with similarly negative assessments (Díaz de Arce 2005; Habeck and Dudeck 2018; Maghlakelidse 1996).

In April 1927, Findeisen submitted a formal application to the general director of the museum, in which he stated that he would:

> […] undertake a research trip to Central Siberia under the protection of the Russian [sic] Academy of Sciences in Leningrad together with a young Yenisei-Ostyak [Ket – *ed.*] ethnographer, [… to] study the Yenisei fishing people (in 1920/21, 1049 souls strong), which belongs to the 'Paleo-Siberian' group of peoples and is on the verge of extinction, and to gain insight into the culture of the Yenisei Tungusic [Evenki – *ed.*] people.[7]

The accompanying letter reads: "Dr. phil. Hans Findeisen, invited by Prof. Sternberg of the Ethnographic Museum of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad for an ethnographic research trip."[8] Findeisen left for Leningrad on 27 May 1927. Unfortunately, little is known about the planning phase of the expedition, so the concrete influence of Sternberg or Bogoras on it remains uncertain.[9]

Another person who may have been important for Findeisen's interest in Siberia, was Bruno Fridrikhovich Adler from Voronezh, who had received his doctorate under Friedrich Ratzel in Leipzig at the turn of the century, then made a career in

6 Krickeberg had been curator of the American collection at the Völkerkundemuseum Berlin since 1924 and became director in 1945, despite his Nazi past (Díaz de Arce 2005)

7 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0627 No. 446; file no. 552/27; p. 1.

8 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0627 No. 446; file no. 552/27; p. 4.

9 Bogoras kept track of Findeisen's publications (see e.g. the citical review of Bogoras 1936).

Russia. On 21 February 1927, before Findeisen's Siberian expedition, Adler apparently wrote to his friend in response to Findeisen's plans: "It would be good if you would take up the subject of the extinction of the polar peoples. Here 'culture bases' are planned, where the helpless polar inhabitants are to find help and salvation. Something like [American – *ed.*] Indian reservations" (Toma 2004: 141). Thirty-five such culture bases would be created, according to Adler, whose skepticism can be read between the lines.

Adler's association with Findeisen proved tragic. At the First All-Russian Museum Congress in Moscow, 1-5 December 1930, Adler was harshly criticized by another leading Soviet ethnographer, Nikolai Mikhailovich Matorin,[10] for an article published in Germany that year with Findeisen's help (Adler 1930). A review by Mikhail Grigor'evich Khudiakov (1935)[11] accused both Findeisen and Adler not only of unscientific work, but also of anti-Soviet propaganda. Khudiakov accused Adler of providing Findeisen with information to write his polemical article on the Society for Tatar Studies in Kazan (H. Findeisen 1933); Adler was arrested in December 1933 and exiled to Salekhard in Western Siberia for five years. Before his release, he was sentenced again in 1938, this time to seven years in a camp. The ruling was then commuted to a death sentence; Alder was executed on 18 March 1942 (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

Findeisen had no idea of these impending events in May 1927, when he headed to Krasnoiarsk via Leningrad, then onward to Ket settlements on the Podkamennaia Tunguska River for more than half a year of fieldwork. On his trip from Leningrad to Krasnoiarsk, Findeisen met a young Russian woman, Anastasiia Stepanovna Mikhailova (later Nata Findeisen), who had recently worked as a typist and sales clerk in Leningrad, but had quit her job to relocate to Tobolsk where an aunt lived. Findeisen persuaded her to work for him as a secretary on the expedition. The two fell in love and married in January 1928 in Krasnoiarsk. They returned to Berlin in June 1928 (Maghlakelidze 1996).

Details about Nata Findeisen's fate were publicly unknown until recently, except for a few details from ethnographic publications (N. Findeisen 1929a; 1929b; 1930; 1935; H. Findeisen and N. Findeisen 1930). In 2020, I was able to inspect her NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) files.[12] They revealed that she divorced her husband in 1931, after their joint research trips. She lived in Germany until the end of World War II, when she returned to the USSR with a group of former forced

10 Matorin himself fell victim to Stalin's purges and was executed 11 October 1936 (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

11 Khudiakov became victim of repression himself and was executed 19 December 1936 (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

12 Criminal investigation case against Findeisen (Mikhailova) Anastasia Stepanovna, born in 1904. Kirovskoe oblastnoe gosudarstvennoe biudzhetnoe uchrezhdenie. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kirovskoi oblasti (KOGBU TSGAKO) F. P-6799. Op. 10. D. SU-12217. T. 1. 1–8, 14–29, 60-62, 66–69, 93.

laborers. She was eventually exiled to the city of Kirov, where she was reported by local residents for her negative comments about living conditions in the Soviet Union compared to Germany.[13]

After her arrest in Kirov, the persecutors obtained the files of an earlier interrogation of Alexander Mikhailovich Mervart, employee at the Leningrad Academy of Sciences. On the basis of these files, they accused Nata and Hans Findeisen of espionage and planning an "insurrection against the Soviet state." Nata Findeisen admitted her anti-Soviet statements, but strongly denied being involved in any espionage activities. Nevertheless, in 1946 she was sentenced to seven years in labour camp for anti-Soviet agitation and espionage.[14] Her sentence would theoretically have ended in 1952, when she would have been 48 years old. She was rehabilitated in 1991. We do not know whether she survived her imprisonment and, if so, where and how her life ended.

On his fieldtrip to the Podkamennaia Tunguska, Findeisen also met several other people for whom their association would prove fatal. In Krasnoiarsk, Findeisen stayed with the head of the local museum's zoological department, Evgeny Osipovich Yakovlev. Yakovlev was accused of espionage in 1931, but was released six months later. In 1936, his wife was sentenced to three years in prison. Yakovlev was arrested again in August 1938, accused of collaborating with the alleged "German spy" Findeisen, and sentenced to 12 years in prison. He died in prison in January 1943, at the age of 49 (Gavrilov and Shergalin 2021).

Findeisen had no idea of the tragic consequences of his contacts with Soviet colleagues when he returned to Berlin in 1928, bringing with him a rich collection of objects, photographs and wax cylinders with sound recordings of the Ket people for various museums in Germany. Nata Findeisen who accompanied him, became an equal co-author of the ethnographic exhibitions in the atrium of the Ethnological Museum, based on the collections of their joint research trips.[15] After the expedition, he continued for some years to send scientific literature with handwritten dedications to the museum in Krasnoiarsk. A letter from 1956 was found in the archives of the museum, with which he enclosed the publications of his institute and asked, probably in vain, to resume contact (Detlova 2016).

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13 Protocol of interrogation with profile data from 21 September 1945. KOGBU TSGAKO F. P-6799. Op. 10. D. SU-12217. T. 1. L. 14–14 ob., 15

14 Extract from Protocol No. 24 of the Special Council under the Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR dated 2 July 1946 on imprisonment in a correctional labor camp. KOGBU TSGAKO" F. P-6799. Op. 10. D. SU-12217. T. 1. L 69.

15 There were three exhibitions: 1929 "North Siberian Hunters and Fishermen" (1929), "Crimean Tatars and Kola-Lapps" and "Art and Culture of North Asia" (both 1930).

Findeisen and Steinitz in Finnish Lapland

In 1929, Hans and Nata Findeisen traveled to Finnish Lapland to study the Sámi of the Petsamo region. They met Steinitz, in Vuotso. Findeisen reported on their collaboration in a letter to the Berlin Museum dated 16 July 1929:

> Yesterday evening, on the sixth day of my journey, I arrived in Vuotso, 221 km north of Rovaniemi, where I happened to meet Mr. Steinitz. […] We are here in the area of the southern reindeer Lapps, where the old Lappish costume is still in full use. As soon as we arrived, we visited a Lapp homestead, with whose inhabitants Mr. Steinitz had already made his acquaintance. The international language here is still Finnish, so Mr. Steinitz's good knowledge of this language is very useful to me. […] Tomorrow I am going to Petsamo, where I have a recommendation that Mr. Steinitz was able to obtain in Rovaniemi, so that the local authorities will not put any difficulties in our way.[16]

By this time, Steinitz had given up his trainee position at the museum and had become an assistant at the Hungarian Institute at the University of Berlin under Ernst Lewy (Leo 2005). He also began an active political life that led him from the *Wandervögel* movement and membership in the Social Democratic Party to openly communist views. His future wife Inge, whom he met in Breslau in winter 1926 after his return from the USSR, played an important role in this (Leo 2005). In 1927 he also joined the Communist Party and took on a position in the Communist youth organization.

It is not known when Steinitz was recruited for Soviet foreign espionage by the head of the Berlin spy network Konstantin Bassow (Konstantin Mikhailovich Basov or Jan Janovich Abeltyn, alias "Richard") (Leo 2005). Bassow's wife, Trude Braun, a lifelong friend of Steinitz, must have told him, after her release from Soviet labor camps in 1956, about the horrors of Stalinist repression, including her husband's arrest in December 1937 and execution in 1938 (Buck 2015; Leo 2005). In 1929, Steinitz was sent to Finland by Soviet intelligence. His cover was folkloristic and ethnological activity, as well as his marriage in April 1930. He (alias "Paul") was to collect military information, together with a partner named Emil Franz (alias "Friedrich"), who worked with Steinitz's wife Inge under the guise of a German newspaper publisher. (Leo 2005; Alekseev et al. 2019)

Findeisen's trip to Crimea (1929) and its aftermath

Meanwhile Hans Findeisen interrupted his trip to Lapland with Nata Findeisen in August 1929, in response to a telegram on 24 July 1929 from his superior at the

16 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0626; 449; 798/29; pp. 9–12); Findeisen also mentions Wolfgang Steinitz's help on the journey in Sápmi in his journal *Der Weltkreis* (H. Findeisen 1929b).

museum, Konrad Theodor Preuss, informing him that the Emergency Association of German Science would like to send him on a research trip to the Crimea and the Caucasus, to accompany Prof. Joseph Sauer.[17] The Findeisens had purchased an extensive ethnographic collection of nearly 200 Sami objects for the Berlin Museum and believed they had already achieved the goals of the trip. Findeisen made his travel to the Crimea conditional on not only acting as a translator, but also conducting ethnographic research among Crimean Tatars.[18]

Exactly how the journey from Lapland to the Crimea took place remains a mystery. Curiously, the museum files do not contain any reports by Findeisen about the first month of the journey, including about meetings at the excavations at the Eski-Kermen, which would prove tragic for his Russian colleagues. Findeisen's reports begin with a letter dated 7 October from Tbilisi, when he had been on the road for almost a month.[19]

This visit also resulted from the aforementioned links between the Emergency Association of German Science and the Leningrad Academy of Sciences. The hypothesis of the discovery of the capital Doros of Crimean Goths at the Eski-Kermen fortress near Bakhchisarai gave birth to the idea of joint German-Soviet excavations (Lobkov 2019; Krasnodembskaia et al. 2018). Prof. Sergei Fiodorovich Platonov, secretary of the Humanitarian Class of the Academy and a member of its Presidium, led the planning from the Soviet side, inviting the German-speaking indologist Alexander Mikhailovich Mervart and Nikolai Lvovich Ernst, archaeologist and deputy director of the museum in Simferopol, to assist as translators (Krasnodembskaia et al. 2018). On the German side, Schmidt-Ott had appointed the Freiburg art historian Joseph Sauer and Hans Findeisen. Unfortunately, Platonov was recalled to Leningrad shortly before the Germans arrived. This was the beginning of arrests of Leningrad Academy of Sciences members – the infamous Academy Case – in which this German-Soviet cooperation was to play an inglorious role (Nepomniashchii 2017).

Merwart was arrested at the beginning of the next year, in January 1930 (Krasnodembskaia et al. 2018). The interrogators in the "Academy Case" may have first learned about Hans Findeisen's visit from statements made by Merwart during his interrogation. Under torture he admitted to more and more of what they were trying to frame him for: a hair-raising story emerged about a monarchist organization planning an uprising with German help. The NKVD assigned Findeisen a crucial role as a German spy. Merwart mentioned that he met Sauer and Findeisen at Eski-Kermen, and that he had spent a day with Findeisen's wife in Bakhchisarai (Lepekhin 2015: 1131). He confessed:

> I also informed Platonov from Findeisen's words that in certain groups of the "*Stahlhelm*" (Steel Helmet), to which he said he belonged, there was increased

17 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0625; No. 450; file no. 883/29; p. 2.
18 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0627; No. 449; file no. 798/29; pp. 18–21.
19 Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: I/MV 0625; No. 450; file no. 999/29; pp. 10–11.

> propaganda for a monarchist coup d'état and for the promotion of such a coup d'état in Russia. He (Findeisen) told me that the number of people who are able and willing to support this movement already amounts to several tens of thousands, and that the supporters of the "*Stahlhelm*" form a hidden monarchist army. (Lepekhin 2015: 1369)

Mervart and his wife were sentenced to five years in the camp. He died on 23 May 1932, from the hardships of camp imprisonment (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

During Nata Findeisen's interrogation after the war in the Russian city of Kirov, where she was exiled, she was also confronted with Mervart's alleged statement that under the pretext of researching the Tatar villages and setting up an ethnographic collection she had actually wanted to sound out the anti-Soviet attitude of the Tatars.[20]

This brief visit to Eski-Kermen and its tragic consequences have so far been dealt with only in Russian articles (Nepomniashchii 2016; 2017; Lobkov 2019; Lobkov and Rudenko 2019; Abramova 2020; Akimchenkov 2015). I will briefly mention only those persecutions connected with Findeisen's visit.

Platonov had been arrested the day before Mervart's arrest, on 12 January 1930. After a year and a half in prison, he was exiled to Samara, where he died in 1933. Oldenburg was dismissed from his post, but the protective hand of senior party functionaries saved the elderly man from arrest and conviction (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003). Ernst was arrested in 1938 as a "German spy" and spent eight years in a camp, starting in 1940. He was arrested again in 1949, sentenced to five years, and pardoned in 1953. When he received the news that he would be allowed to return to Crimea in 1956, he suffered a stroke and died in Siberia (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003). Pavel Petrovich Babenchikov, archeologist and director of the museum in Sevastopol, Crimea, who met with the Germans, was arrested in July 1930, accused by Mervart of having made maps of Crimea for the German General Staff, and was sentenced to three years in prison (Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

Representatives of the Tatar *intelligentsia* with whom the Findeisens met also did not survive the Stalinist persecutions. The People's Commissar for Education in the Crimea, Mamut Nedim, and the charismatic founder and director of the Museum in the Palace of the Khan of Bakhchisarai, Usein Abdrefievich Bodaninskii, who assisted Nata Findeisen generously in the acquisition of a Crimean Tatar collection, were murdered on the same day, 17 April 1938, in Simferopol, along with other leading Crimean Tatar figures (Tietmeyer 2019).

Another acquaintance of Findeisen, the Siberian explorer, ethnologist, and archaeologist Berngard Eduardovich Petri, with whom he had corresponded and likely met on his way back to Leningrad, was arrested in May 1937, on charges of spying for a number of organizations, including German secret services and right-wing Trots-

20 Protocols of interrogation from 25 December 1945 and 9 January 1946. KOGBU TSGAKO F. P-6799. Op. 10. D. SU-12217. T. 1. L. 28, 29.

kyist, pan-Mongolian, fascist, etc. organizations. Even under torture Petri incriminated only his deceased teacher Vasilii Vasil'evich Radlov. Petri was executed on 25 November 1937 (Sirina 1999; Sirina and Geine 2018; Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003). Also accused of acquaintance with Findeisen was another Leningrad scholar, David Alekseevich Zolotarev, who worked at the Russian Museum and was first arrested in 1930. His complicity with "*Stahlhelm* member" Findeisen was mentioned during the interrogation of his second arrest, in 1933. He died in a Siberian prison camp in 1935 (Ashnin and Alpatov 1994; Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

Steinitz's second stay in the USSR, 1934–1937

After their seemingly harmonious meeting in Vuotso in 1929 Findeisen and Steinitz radically parted ways. Remarkably, as we will see later, the Stalinist persecution apparatus did not declare Steinitz a German spy, as happened to Findeisen. Following Soviet intelligence missions in Finland and Estonia, Steinitz returned to Berlin, where in 1932 he defended his dissertation (Leo 2005). Shortly thereafter, he lost his univeristy position as a result of the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service," which from April 1933 prohibited Jews from working at universities (Leo 2005). He was active in a communist underground group in Berlin-Dahlem, most of whose members were convicted in two treason trials in 1937 and 1938 (Leo 2005).

Steinitz, who left Germany with the permission of the Communist Party in the spring of 1934, arranged to have his dissertation printed in Finland and hoped to find work there in Finno-Ugric studies, offering expeditions to Siberia, but these plans failed (Leo 2005). He then traveled to Moscow and obtained a position at the Institute of the Peoples of the North with the help of communist acquaintances. Exactly how this happened and who supported him remains nebulous (Leo 2005). What is certain is that he continued to pursue his plans for a Siberian expedition. He spent another six months in Berlin before finally arriving in Leningrad in October 1934. There, Steinitz was given a free apartment and a monthly salary of 500 rubles. The contract of employment, signed on 13 October, the day of his arrival, and valid until 1 January 1936, did not stipulate any specific duties other than scientific research and the consultation with and supervision of scientific personnel.

Steinitz began to study the Khanty language and met Khanty students, whom he trained linguistically, but for whom he was often more of a student than a teacher. This was especially true of Kirill Illarionovich Maremianin, born in 1918, who despite his young age, was well versed in Khanty oral traditions and regularly performed as a singer at ceremonies.

With regard to Steinitz's stay at the Institute of the Peoples of the North and his expedition to the Khanty lands of Western Siberia, I consider two predicaments. First, I discuss how Steinitz dealt with certain difficulties of a political nature during the

expedition which may have led him to abandon it halfway through. Second, I use the available files of the "Institute of the Peoples of the North Case" to show how Steinitz himself narrowly escaped Stalinist persecution by the NKVD.

The 1935 expedition to the Ob region was originally planned to last six months. Descriptions of the trip in Steinitz's own hand are preserved in his diary[21] and in letters to his wife. Inge typed the diary up immediately after Steinitz's return; it was later published in abridged form[22] (Steinitz 1980). In the following analysis, I rely on the handwritten original.[23] Steinitz's trip took place from the end of June until October 1935. His decision to return early might have been motivated by Inge being pregnant. He also reported hardships and physical exhaustion during the trip. However, these descriptions do not express the level of restlessness and frustration associated with the psychological stress caused by situations of political conflict.

Steinitz's fieldwork among the Khanty, 1935

Traveling via Leningrad, Moscow and Kazan to Omsk, on 23 July 1935 Steinitz boarded a steamer on the Irtysh to Samarovo. The ship continued down the Ob to the village of Sherkaly and the Khanty settlements of Lokhtotkurt and Ouskurt, the home of his main Khanty tutor Maremianin (Steinitz 1980; Dudeck 2008).

Remarkably, he mentioned the so-called "Kazym Uprising" several times in his diaries. On 3 August, he returned from the trip to Lokhtotkurt and reported on his work with Mitia (Dunaev). The typewritten diary crossed out a remark that was entered in the handwritten diary but was missing in the published version: "Mitia comes for ½ hour, tells of the Kazym uprising"[24] (Steinitz 1980: 402). This term referred to a brutal punitive action by Soviet forces against initially peaceful resistance by the Khanty, which turned into acts of violent resistance in response to military repression. Soviet authorities declared it an uprising against Soviet power. The Khanty were enraged by the introduction of taxes, forced labor, and levies in the early 1930s, combined with the beginning collectivization of private property. The transfer of children to boarding schools, sometimes under considerable pressure, must have looked like hostage-taking, forcing parents to submit to harsh administrative measures. Nevertheless, a large part of the population remained docile and either condemned the victims or resorted to long-established, though not very effective, forms of passive resistance (Moldanova 1993; Ernykhova 2003; 2017; Leete 2004, 2005, 2009; Samson Normand de Chambourg

21 Original in German; translation by Stephan Dudeck.

22 Unfortunately, without any indication of editorial principles.

23 Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Nachlass Wolfgang Steinitz (estate W. Steinitz), Nachtrag (addendum) 2020: 49, 50 and 51 (in the following: ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020)

24 Handwritten diary p. 10 (3 August 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 49, 50.

2008; Perevalova 2016; Toulouze et al. 2017). What is important in our context is that in the summer of 1935, the situation on the Kazym River, a right tributary of the Ob, had calmed down somewhat after a show trial in June 1934, in the local capital of Ostiako-Vogulsk (now Khanty-Mansiisk). Forty-nine people involved in the "Kazym anti-Soviet uprising" were sentenced to prison, 11 of whom were to be shot.

Earlier, Steinitz had noted a conversation in Omsk with a high official from Ostiako-Vogulsk, an "interesting, reasonable person; at Kazym in the spring again *sobytiia* (events) because of Numto; in August, big trial in Beresov,[25] head of NKVD Petrov can give permission to participate ('reasonable person')."[26] The inserted Russian word *sobytiia* is a euphemism for punitive action or resistance and one can detect a certain curiosity on the part of Steinitz in the remark about permission to participate.

In Lokhtotkurt in August Steinitz wrote:

> Students come, listen, I ask them for a word: "We're not interested in fairy tales." I say: "It is necessary to know the good old things too, the newspaper wrote about them recently." Then I hear that the students are agitating against me: I'm a shaman, they shouldn't tell me anything. Aristarch and Grig. Lonshakov even dictate me a "report" about it, which I should hand over to Glasunov, they should punish the students! (Steinitz 1980: 407).

In view of his interest in sacred storehouses and sacrificial sites, where he himself "sacrificed" money, and given his constant questions about rituals and the folklore associated with them, this suspicion does not seem far-fetched. From today's perspective, it seems naïve for Steinitz to have persuaded research partners to perform ritual folklore in semi-public settings at a time when religious practices were harshly persecuted. For example, he described how he made audio recordings of the sacred songs of a blind singer, Ivan Yarkin, invoking the gods and asking him about "shamanizing in the dark house" in the presence of the Belarusian village chief, Petrovets, who then left the house: "Petrovets is long gone, he's bored."[27]

Two days later Steinitz stopped in at the local administration of the regional center, the old Berezovo settlement: "Long 'interrogation'. Finally I said [to the head of the administration – *ed.*]: 'Does it seem strange to you that I was ordered here'? – 'Yes.'"[28] Administrators were obviously suspicious and not very interested in helping him. For the second time a "trial" is mentioned, obviously a show trial against "kulaks" and "shamans" in the course of the alleged uprisings of the Khanty and Mansi, of which Steinitz had already heard in Omsk:

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25 Steinitz writes the name of the town Berjosov – today's name is Berezovo.

26 Handwritten diary, p. 5 (21 July 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 50. This remark was omitted in the printed version of the diary; see Steinitz 1980: 412.

27 Handwirtten diary, p 28, (18 August 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 50.

28 Handwritten diary p. 31 (20 August 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 50. Steinitz 1980: 414.

> At ½ 6 rucksack taken from Tuzdom.[29] There Mitia and 3 Kazymers (all waiting for the trial), already drunk, sit down on the bench. Mitia sings, the Kazymers should also sing, long to and fro, a young man (Komsomolets)[30] sings a bear song,[31] but hardly opens his mouth! – Hard to understand. Must also drink vodka. Gone after ½ hour.[32]

The next day he turned to the local department of the NKVD[33] and received the answer: "Feel free to work here." From there he went again to the chairman of the administration: "I tell him openly that I need his help, not just 'toleration.'"[34] He was promised support.

In September, Steinitz again mentioned the "trial" that was to take place in the administrative center of Berezovo without any evaluation: "Yesterday the many Kazymers arrived from Berezovo, from the trial."[35] This was another show trial, comparable to the aforementioned in Ostiako-Vogulsk in 1934. In the spring of 1935, mass arrests of suspected Indigenous resisters took place, this time on the left bank of the Ob River at its tributary, Severnaia Sosva River. Among them were former students of the institute where Steinitz worked (Kodintsev 2022; Perevalova 2016). At the time when this trial was being held in Berezovo, Steinitz was in the village of Polnovat. Despite his apparent curiosity, he not only avoided giving any personal opinions, but said nothing about the content, scope, or outcome of this political trial, which ended with long sentences for alleged shamans, kulaks, and insurgents, who rarely survived prison or the gulag.

On 1 October, Steinitz had a short encounter that would give him a lot of headaches in the days to come and may have hastened his return to Leningrad. He flew by airplane a few hundred kilometers north to Obdorsk (now Salekhard) to make comparative studies of the northernmost subdialect of Khanty.

> At half past 12, I get the key to the room from my neighbor. He – "Mann" is his name, father German, mother Jewish, doesn't speak German, ordered here from Moscow – interviews me; he's a newspaper correspondent, I'm supposed to write an article; comparison between Germany and here. I say, "Not me, no time, not under my name, but I'll tell him on questions." Then write until one – basically phrases. Sleep at one.[36]

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29 Tuzdom is the abbreviation for "house of the natives," an institution to provide education and a place to stay for the Indigenous population coming to the administrative centre.

30 Member of the communist youth organisation.

31 Ritual song of the Khanty bear ceremony.

32 Handwritten diary, p. 32 (20 August 1935); this remark is missing from the published diary.

33 The NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) at that time combined both normal police duties and political repression.

34 Handwritten diary, p. 32 (21 August 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 50.

35 Typewritten diary, p. 37 (8 September 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 49; letter from 15 September to Inge Steinitz p. 4; missing in the published version.

36 Letter to Inge from 6–15. October with diary p. 7 (1 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add.

We learn from his 10 October diary entry that he received a disturbing message from Obdorsk, which prompted him to write a telegram to Mann, but after much thought he withdrew it.

> Then to the post office, now sorted: 3 letters from Inge (6–8 nos.), telegram from INS about Ostyaks. Read the letters. Bad, what about Obdorsk. Thinking; send urgent telegram to Mann, Obdorsk; but can only send tomorrow. […] – In the evening at home. Read letters, thought for hours about Obdorsk: decided to go to Shutkin. "*Rasstroen*" [upset]. Then continue writing letter to Inge and today's diary.[37]

The next day, he asked Berezovo's NKVD chief Shutkin for help: "½ 10 Shutkin, promise to telegraph. Go to the post office because of the box, no one accepts. Then to the telegraph, take back yesterday's telegram. Must go to radio station, will get it back. So that's done." [38]

In 2020 while in Salekhard, I was able to clarify the identity of "Mann" as Boris Grigor'evich Mann, born in Odesa, who moved to Obdorsk in 1934 and worked in the Nenets House. He founded and led a local brass band, and wrote regularly for the local newspaper *Red North*. My research also revealed that no articles about Steinitz or the situation in Germany appeared in *Red North* during the period in question. The content of the text that worried Steinitz remains unclear, but given the topic of their conversation, it was obviously political in nature.

In early October Steinitz was again confronted with accusations and rumors among the students in Berezovo, amongst whom he had recruited language masters. Were the accusations based on lack of understanding of Steinitz's work? Or were the students jealous of the money other students received for spending hours clarifying grammatical forms or reciting and translating folklore for Steinitz? The course instructor Raishev confronted him, and Steinitz reproduced the dialogue in his diary:

> "What are you asking the students?" "Language." "There is a rumor among the students that you also ask other questions about the Kazym events." "Not true, not a word." "Yes, it's just gossip, but it can make me very uncomfortable if it gets to the Party Committee. It's better if you finish your work." "You should find out who said it." "No, that will only make things worse." (Steinitz 1980: 427)

Steinitz's strategy with Raishev was to appeal to higher officials and again to NKVD chief Shutkin[39] (Steinitz 1980). Although the higher officials confirmed that

2020: 51; missing in the published version.

37 Letter to Inge from 6–15 October with diary p. 17 (10 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 51.

38 Letter to Inge from 6–15 October with diary p. 17 (11 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020: 51.

39 In the letter to Inge from 6-15 October he hints at a sympathy based on a certain professional similarity with Shutkin "just good that I had such support, especially morally, like my 'col-

Raishev was wrong, they were apparently unwilling to pressure him to bow to Steinitz and allow him to work with the students. Although Steinitz was willing to use all possible levers, including the threat of sanctions from above, he finally had to submit to the situation. He finished his work in Berezovo and left for Ostiako-Vogulsk on 12 October 1935.

The telegraphic style of Steinitz's diary rarely allows conclusions about his own attitudes, be they political, moral, or emotional. On the one hand, he describes how he leaves small gifts at sacrificial sites, whether motivated by pragmatic politeness or honest respect; on the other hand, he describes the victims of political repressions against alleged kulaks and shamans without the slightest sign of compassion: "14 arrested Nenets being transported south. Gun posts, next to them third-class passengers. The Nenets lie silent, interesting faces, young."[40] And: "Below, many prisoners from Ostyako-Vogulsk, playing harmonica, dancing a lot of men's dances; look a few times – Paasonen."[41] He seems to be interested only in the traditional men's ritual dances, which have parallels in the descriptions of the Finnish linguist Paasonen. Do these prisoners dance to cheer themselves up in their hopeless situation? One must be careful not to fill Steinitz's sketches and diary entries with too much of one's own interpretations.

Shortly before his departure, Steinitz happened to attend an important meeting in Ostiako-Vogulsk, which had to be held urgently because of a telegram from the Ministry of Education (Cyrillic words in the original are italicized here):

> Worked until ¾ 8, then left everything, went to the meeting in *Pedtekh*.[42] Run. Initially only with *Makushin* and *Zhivotikov*, now extended, as a telegram from *Narkompros: Obsuzhdaite perekhod na russkii alfavit* [Folk Commissariat of Education: Discuss transition to Russian alphabet (*transl. Dudeck*)]. – Meeting chaired by *Valeev* (Nenets): "Historical." *Pestov*, director *Pedtekh*, asks me to speak. About dialects' alphabet, etc. Hear that also *Lariak. Yazyk*[43] has been decided.[44]

Steinitz and the "INS Affair," 1937

Finally, I would like to discuss how the changes in orthography and the transition from Latin to Cyrillic script for the written languages of Siberian peoples affected Steinitz's fate. Rose-Luise Winkler found minutes of the above-mentioned meeting in Ostiako-Vogulsk (Winkler 2000). In these minutes, Steinitz is extensively quoted as advo-

league,' if I may say so." ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020:51.

40 Letter to Inge from 6–15 October p. 22 (15 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020:51.

41 Handwritten diary p. 29 (23 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020:51.

42 Pedagogicheski Tekhnikum, Teacher Training School.

43 The Vakh dialect of Khanty.

44 Handwritten diary pp. 27–28 (21 October 1935). ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020:51.

cating, first, for a standardized written language (the same for all dialects), and, second, for a switch to the Cyrillic alphabet. The issue of the alphabet was politicized, as visible cultural differences, even if only in orthography, could easily be interpreted as political dissidence under Stalinism. Since written languages for Indigenous peoples were obviously newly created cultural forms, their creators come to be easily blamed for alienating ethnic subjects from Soviet power. Specialists such as Steinitz, who followed the principle that the scripts to be created should correspond as closely as possible to the phonemic rules of the respective languages, were exposed to political accusations. The instruction for his dismissal from work in 1937 included such accusations:

> "1. The leading scientific employee of the Linguistics Section, Associate Researcher and Scientist V. K. Steinitz, is to be dismissed from the INS [Institute of the Peoples of the North] on October 2, 1937, because in his scientific-practical work on the written language of the Khanty and Mansi he has adopted false and politically harmful attitudes, which have resulted in the fact that the alphabet and orthography of the Mansi language developed by him have proved to be unsuitable and incomprehensible for the Mansi. The Mansi alphabet is even more difficult to understand than the Latinized alphabet and creates many difficulties in the transition to learning the Russian language, and has resulted in the withdrawal of Mansi textbooks based on this alphabet, leaving Mansi schools without textbooks."[45]

As early as August 1936, the party secretary of the INS, A. A. Alekseev, wrote a political denunciation to the party leadership of the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route, to which the INS was subordinate. It was aimed primarily at the director, Yan P. Koshkin (Alkor), but also at many of the scientific staff with whom Steinitz worked closely. The report ended:

> "Second addition: I consider it necessary to investigate in detail the question of the scientific employee Steinitz, a German citizen, who arouses suspicion, as well as the fact of a second counterrevolutionary incident in the printing house during the printing of a scientific work."[46]

This document is part of the interrogation files of the so-called INS Case, a persecution campaign of the NKVD that began with the arrest of the doctoral student and Indigenous Yukaghir writer Nikolai Ivanovich Spiridonov (Teki Odulok) eight months after the above mentioned denunciation on 30 April 1937. Many teachers and workers were arrested. Koshkin (Alkor) and Spiridonov (Teki Odulok) were shot, others were imprisoned for long periods (Liarskaia 2018; Vasil'kov and Sorokina 2003).

45 The author received a copy of the document from W. Steinitz's daughter Renate Steinitz, now located in the Steinitz estate at the Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. ABBAW NL Steinitz add. 2020.

46 Copies of archival and investigative case files, SPb NITS "Memorial," fond 017 (K-1), Opis' 1 Delo Kreinovich Yurii (Erukhim) Abramovich, dokument 026 list 5 https://arch2.iofe.center/case/135 [accessed 29.02.2024]

One of Steinitz's colleagues, Yuri Abramovich Kreinovich, wrote a revealing letter of complaint from exile in Siberia in 1955, vividly describing the torture and interrogation methods used in 1937 by his interrogator, Kubersky, to extract confessions. A short sentence referred to Steinitz: "Kubersky once suggested to me: 'Listen, Kreinovich, why don't you sign that Steinitz is a spy. Steinitz was a German linguist who worked at the Institute of the Peoples of the North.'"[47] Steinitz' name does not appear in other interrogations, but we do not know how complete the published files are.

At the end of 1937, the arrests of German emigrants and Soviet scholars were rampant, and one wonders why Steinitz was not arrested. Instead, he was dismissed from the INS. His attempt to legalize his status as a Communist emigrant failed, and after his residence permit expired, he had to leave the country 1937. He was allowed to take all of his working materials with him except for the sound recordings (Leo 2005; Swetosarowa 2006). We can only speculate on whether acquaintances from Soviet intelligence could have protected him or even sent him with new orders to his new destination in Sweden, as long as the relevant files in Russia remain inaccessible.

Aftermath

While Steinitz continued to work on his field materials in Sweden during the war, he also played an important role in the antifascist activities of the local emigrant community (Müssener and Scholz 2023). Findeisen, on the other hand, became a supporting member of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Nazi paramilitary organization) in 1933, joined the Nazi Party in 1939, and offered his collaboration to various Nazi organizations such as the "*Ahnenerbe*," "*Amt Rosenberg*," and "*Reichskommissariat zur Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*." He eventually obtained a position in Heinrich Himmler's Reichskommissariat and contributed to the Nazi genocidal occupation strategy for the occupied territories across Eastern Europe (*Generalplan Ost*). Nevertheless, his numerous attempts to establish himself in German academia and to obtain a *habilitation* failed. His inability to pursue a formal academic career after the war might have been caused not by his participation in various Nazi activities, but rather due to his failed attempts to successfully integrate into the established academic networks, as numerous other examples of the ethnologists with a Nazi past in the post-war Germany demonstrate (Habeck and Dudeck 2018; Mosen 1992; Simon 2010; Maghlakelidze 1996; Fischer 1990).

Unlike Findeisen, Steinitz made a spectacular career in the GDR after his war exile in Sweden, rising to become the vice-president of the Academy of Sciences in East Germany and even a member of the Central Committee of the ruling SED party. His

47 Copies of archival and investigative case files, SPb NITS "Memorial," fond 017 (K-1), Opis' 1 Delo Kreinovich Yurii (Erukhim) Abramovich, dokument 059 list 3. https://arch2.iofe.center/case/135 [accessed 29.02.2024]

pro-Soviet euphoria over the Red Army's victories over Germany during the Swedish exile, might have erased all doubts and memories regarding the disappearance of his many Soviet colleagues, friends, and comrades. His firm belief in the infallible correctness of the Soviet Party leadership, including the Stalinist repressions, and his conviction that the Soviet Union was the "most decent country in the world" (Leo 2005: 88) lasted until the exposure of the Stalinist personality cult at the 20th Party Congress in the Soviet Union in 1956 (Leo 2005).

Conclusion

This article, rather than focusing on the scientific merits of two German explorers of Siberia, has explored the relationships they formed in the Soviet Union and their mostly tragic consequences. Their biographies illustrate how, despite shared ideas and close collaboration, their later lives took almost opposite trajectories. In their formative years, both scholars were motivated by similar curiosity about "disappearing cultures" in Northern Eurasia and the resulting need for urgent "salvage anthropology," a concept dominant in Berlin scholarly circles. It was therefore logical that both Steinitz and Findeisen challenged the model of research from the "ivory tower" and attempted to bring their research into the public sphere through various means.

Their political engagement, however, led them in different directions. Findeisen's public criticism of Soviet policies on academic freedom and Indigenous peoples began in the early 1930s; it might have unintendetly contributed to the persecution of his Soviet colleagues, at least in the case of Bruno Adler.

Neither Findeisen nor Steinitz was able to discern the mechanism of Stalinists repressions and the factors that promoted and fed it. Steinitz was blinded by his loyalty to the Soviet Union and its support for his anti-fascist struggle, so that for a long time he considered Stalinist repressions to be legitimate (Leo 2005). Yet, one must be cautious in drawing conclusions that foreign contacts caused or even contributed to political repression. With today's knowledge, we can conclude that the Soviet machine of repression would have devoured its victims even without these contacts. The paranoia of Soviet officials to see enemies everywhere, their will to spread the terror, and their readiness to sacrifice everything and everyone along the way, was often enough based solely on the logic of personal competition for status, influence, and power.

Findeisen was declared a German spy and a member of the German far-right organisation "*Stahlhelm*" before he entered any right wing circles. Contacts with him were used to persecute Soviet scientists. Despite a denunciation and even an attempt by an NKVD interrogator to get Steinitz involved in the alleged anti-Soviet conspiracy at the INS, he and his family were not persecuted and could luckily leave the Soviet Union. Until the relevant archives, which could provide insight in his role for the Soviet intelligence are opened, we can only speculate if someone had protected him.

An examination of Steinitz's diary reveals a particular aspect of his ethnographic fieldwork and its symbolic proximity to espionage. Steinitz's research methods led him into a web of assumptions and suspicions between him and his interlocutors in Siberia, which brought his expedition to a premature end. After a wave of local political persecution, the area was mired in a climate of general suspicion that could put anyone in danger at any time. From today's standpoint, the naivety demonstrated by Steinitz's diary and the actions described therein were astonishing. He seemed completely unaware of the extent to which his attempts to penetrate the intimate spheres of local cultural life, with its religious traditions persecuted by the state, must have been considered problematic practices. Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge Steinitz's work as an early example of collaborative and engaged research methodologies.

My purpose was to provide insight into a tragic yet significant chapter in the history of Siberian anthropology, also in light of current challenges in research and the need to promote solidarity among researchers. Examining the cases of Steinitz and Findeisen can help to understand the consequences of collaborating across differences in citizenship and political views in times of increasing conflict. It also sheds light on the risks of conducting research in authoritarian contexts and the interconnection between political contexts and anthropological research. This study has hopefully also shown that the research has been worthwhile. Raising awareness of the risks should encourage researchers not to cut off contacts and abandon research networks in the face of political conflict, but to manage them in a way that avoids harm to those involved (cf. Liarskaia and Dudeck 2021). This is crucial for ensuring the resilience and sustainability of research networks, especially during challenging times and adverse circumstances.

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