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5 UNDER THE SHADOW OF A COLONIAL EMPIRE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S OPPRESSION THROUGH THE LENSES OF EARLY SCIENTIFIC EXPLORERS IN THE SIBERIAN NORTHEAST

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Introduction

Too often anthropologists who have had to work under repressive regimes or in the service of colonialism ventures have been uncritically condemned.[1] However, each case should be investigated and assessed more closely and individually, based on in-depth studies of their works against the political background of the given time.

Scholars have particular family, educational and professional backgrounds that usually shape their character and personality in specific ways. They also have their own scientific interests that have differed from those of encroaching colonizers. This is certainly the case for several scholars in the service of the Russian empire during the colonial period. How did they deal with the contradictions and conflicts of interest, when they had to travel in joint enterprises with disrespectful conquerors and fraudulent tradesmen? Scholars depended on these persons to gain access to those remote parts of the world, when invited to accompany expeditions. The presence of scientists even provided the colonizing agencies a justification that these imperial conquests for new territories were also to the benefit of science. How did these scholars cope with the dilemma with which they were faced: to take a clear stance based on their often-humanitarian ideas and apparent empathy, or to bow to the general aims of the expedition leaders? To what degree did compromises with the colonial authorities affect their encounters with Indigenous residents and their scientific research agenda – and what decisions did these scholars take when faced with moral quandaries? Were their occasional protests truly morally founded or to some extent opportunistic – to avoid risking relations to Indigenous communities, from whom they were eager to collect information? This retrospective view of how researchers dealt in the past with such consciously or unconsciously felt moral dilemmas might help us understand similar contemporary situations.

Vladimir I. Vernadsky (1988) in his lectures delivered at the University of Saint Petersburg (1912–1913) recalled the predominant role of foreigners in the history of

1 See, for example, the discussion about Gustav Nachtigal, who worked in the German colonial administration in East Africa, in Kasten (2022b: 224).

science in Russia until 1737, and that these scientists came primarily from the Germanic-Baltic cultural sphere. This paper draws on examples of several scholars with roots in Germany or the Baltic territories, who worked in Siberia among Indigenous peoples prior to the Revolution: Georg Wilhelm Steller, Carl Heinrich Merck, Georg Heinrich Freiherr von Langsdorff, Adelbert von Chamisso, Johann K. E. Kegel, Friedrich Heinrich Freiherr von Kittlitz, Georg Adolph Erman, Woldemar Friedrich Carl von Ditmar, and Gerhard Baron von Maydell. These scholars accompanied expeditions to the north-eastern regions of Siberia (Kamchatka and Chukotka); from them we have the most thorough descriptions about how the conquerors encountered the Indigenous peoples living there (Itelmen, Koryak and Chukchi).

German-Baltic ethnography in northeastern Siberia during the Russian empire

First, special mention should be made of Gerhard Friedrich Müller (later also Fëdor Ivanovich Miller), who had previously conducted ethnographic research in the more western parts of Siberia and whose work most likely had a significant influence on the approach of the scientists listed above – including, above all, the most considerate way of engaging with the Indigenous populations according to his "instructions" (Müller 2018: 337ff.).[2]

These scholars shared similar motivations and educational backgrounds, intellectual curiosity and the courage to set out into unknown and dangerous places. Yet some behaved quite differently from others during their expeditions in situations of conflict or under pressure from authorities. This may have been due to a number of basic character traits. Thus, Adelbert von Chamisso[3] emphasized with admiration the wider horizon of experience gained on these journeys, "of which nothing is dreamt by one who [has] got no further in life than, say, from the lower benches of the school to the cathedra" (in Federhofer 2012: 108).[4] Chamisso later persisted in critical self-reflection in his research, when he apparently became aware of the impossibility of objective observation, paraphrasing it metaphorically: "Everywhere is for one […] the old Europe, from which he strives in vain to escape" (in Federhofer 2013: 177).

The decision of to expose themselves to unusual dangers and risks on their journeys was probably also taken because access to academic careers was limited at the

2 Boris Chichlo (2003: 263) emphasizes how remarkably Müller's observations already distinguished themselves from the still existing dichotomies such as savagery/civilization, superstition/religion, etc., prevalent in the French Enlightenment at that time, as with Voltaire.

3 Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838), originally from France and also well-known as a writer, spent his later youth in Berlin and its environs before participating as a naturalist in the second Russian circumnavigation of the world under the leadership of Otto von Kotzebue in the years 1815–1818. Twice, in the summers of 1816 and 1817, he spent time during this voyage in the Aleutian Islands.

4 Translations from German sources in this chapter have been made by E. Kasten.

time. Only spectacular new results could draw attention to the young scientists who did not want to resign themselves to an often hopeless employment situation. But even for those who felt completely committed to their curiosity for new findings, special academic requirements alone were usually not sufficient for their ambitious approach to obtain one of the few sought-after places in the research teams on the expedition ships. This usually required special letters of recommendation from influential people, which in turn could usually only be obtained through their own family networks (Strecker 2013: 151; Tammiksaar 2013: 177; Federhofer 2013: 124).

Most of these young researchers had a broad educational background that went beyond individual disciplines, as was common among scholars at the time. They had come into contact with ethical-humanist ideas through their intercourse in the scholarly and literary circles of the European metropolises during the Enlightenment.[5]

It is striking how courageously some of them resisted the scientific mainstream viewpoints then or the "instructions" (Vermeulen 2013: 48, 51f.) they had received along the way. Some set their own priorities against the guidelines of scientific authorities (Ordubadi 2013: 270; Federhofer 2013: 136f.; Vermeulen 2015). The naturalist and ethnographer Georg Wilhelm Steller[6] repeatedly revealed that he thought poorly of the research methods of J. G. Gmelin, and he mocked the comfortable style in which established scientists like Gmelin used to travel at that time. Thus, when trying to keep him away from Kamchatka he impressively pictured to him the hardships of traveling there on dog sleds. He wrote, "[…] one was seated so precariously as on a 'violin bridge' and that one had to be afraid of an accident anytime (cf. Stejneger 1936: 231)."

Chamisso challenged Pallas's previously authoritative taxonomic systems in a particularly clear and convincing way by explicitly calling for the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, which enabled him to correct some of Pallas's classifications of cetacean species (Federhofer 2012: 31).

Remarkable also is the empathy of many of these explorers in their encounters with the Indigenous people. For example, Steller consciously adopted the way of life and diet of the Itelmen people, as he was convinced that such a way was the most appropriate under the natural conditions there. He intuitively practiced a kind of participant observation well before this became a favoured ethnological method.

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5 An exception was apparently Friedrich Heinrich Freiherr Kittlitz, who first went directly from military service to the research team under Captain Litke during his circumnavigation of the world. Kittlitz had previously acquired comprehensive ornithological knowledge autodidactically.

6 Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709–1746) was born in Bad Windsheim (Franconia) and first studied theology in Wittenberg. Later, he was able to pursue his interest in the natural sciences with further studies in Halle, which he financed through his teaching at the orphanage there, which had been founded by the philanthropist August Hermann Francke (today: Franckesche Stiftungen). As a young scientist, he participated in the Great Northern Expedition (1733–1743) led by Vitus Bering.

Likewise, Kittlitz, a passionate hunter, respected certain rules of conduct of the Itelmen (Kamchadals) when fishing and hunting snow sheep (Kittlitz 2011 [1858]: 107, 122 [vol. 2: 310, 334].

Fig. 1 Fish barrier across the Kamchatka river near Mil'kovo.

Fig. 2 Snow sheep near Ganaly.

Chamisso was reluctant and critical of the handling of human skulls (Federhofer 2012: 110f.), in contrast to even such thoughtful scientists as Franz Boas, who justified the grave robbing he had instigated among First Nations on the American Northwest Coast as an alleged service to science (Kasten 1992: 90).

One has to recall that most of the researchers mentioned here had a "transnational" research background (Schweitzer 2013) characteristic of the time. Many of them were born in Baltic countries, where they received their basic education, which was then continued at German universities, especially in Berlin and Halle. They then entered the service of Russian imperial expeditions to the Far East of Siberia through scientific contacts in the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences. This means that most of them had "layered" (national) identities, incorporating shared values of the German enlightenment, which differed significantly from those of the Cossack and Russian conquerors.

Above all, their comprehensive education in pietist or Lutheran centers of knowledge, the universities of Prussia and Saxony, which was often the basis for their interest in and understanding of the people and their living conditions, distinguished them from the commanders of the expedition ships and the local Russian governors with their military and mercantile interests, which were directed toward the empire that was to be expanded eastward by force. Thus, conflicts of interest within the expedition teams as well as at the local level were foreseeable from the outset. The way in which these conflicts were resolved provides us with information about how those scientists dealt with the dilemma of professional ambitions and corresponding loyalties to their employers, and the perceived injustice to the local population. The situation in Russia at that time was not always as repressive as it was during parts of the Soviet era and is today: scientists during the colonial period had the opportunity to take a stand in situations of injustice. Doing so may have become much more difficult later – and today – under increasing political pressure.

Georg Wilhelm Steller

Georg Wilhelm Steller[7] was one of the first and most prominent eyewitnesses to give a blunt picture of the colonial conquest of the Far Eastern parts of the country in the early eighteenth century, with which, according to Steller, Russia took as much "damage to its own nation as to the Itelmen" (Steller 2013 [1774]: 148 [324]. In his work "Beschreibung von dem Lande Kamtschatka" (Steller 2013 [1774], he discusses in detail the "occupation of the land of Kamchatka," but also the warlike conflicts of the Indigenous population among themselves before the arrival of the Cossacks (ibid. 141–151 [221–238]).

7 More on Steller's life and work is available in Kasten (2020).

What initially began as peaceful barter soon degenerated into the violent collecting of tribute (*yasak*) and alleged debts, as well as – in Steller's words – the enslavement of parts of the Itelmen population. This repeatedly led to rebellions against the conquerors, which were decided with great cruelty and bloodshed, as a rule in favor of the latter: "The Cossacks killed everything in sight and within 40 years had reduced the number of their inhabitants to the 12th or 15th part" (Steller 2013 [1774]: 144 [227].

Right after his arrival in Bol'sheretsk on the west coast of Kamchatka in September 1740, Steller directly witnessed the brutal ways in which the Russian administration treated the Indigenous population. To bring all equipment for the expedition ships overland from Bol'sheretsk to Peter and Paul harbor (because of the failed southern circumnavigation of the peninsula), a large number of local dog teams and their Indigenous mushers had to be recruited from around several hundred kilometers, even as far north as Tigil'. This recruitment could be executed only forcibly, as local dog team owners would not leave their families on their own for such a long period at a time, fearing they would "end up in slavery." Some Koryak vehemently refused this order, leading to the killing of seven Russians. After this, Bering ordered a punitive expedition by which almost all residents of the given settlements, including women and children, were killed. Those who survived were brought to trial to Avacha Bay, where many of them died from their tortures or committed suicide.

Steller, who stayed during this winter first in Bol'sheretsk and later in Avacha Bay, must have been fully aware of these incidents – but his note of protest to Bering comes off as relatively lenient, as he might have feared jeopardizing his participation in the voyage to America. Thus, he directed his complaint first toward the Cossacks, whom he accused of treating the Koryak cruelly and in an absolutely "unchristian manner." Bering realized, though, that he was the real target of such critique, as he was responsible for this command. This was enough to exclude Steller from all important consultations and decisions during the following voyage, though Bering could not dispense with him (cf. Frost 1994).

Shortly before Steller had ended his mission and departed from Kamchatka in 1745, he had entered into a fierce controversy with the new commander Khmetevski and had sent a note Saint Petersburg to protest about the latter's abuse of power. In return, Khmetevski accused Steller of possibly having incited the Indigenous population to rebellion – an insinuation that almost led to Steller being tried for high treason.[8] On his way back to Saint Petersburg, authorities in Irkutsk kept him for a long interrogation, and – probably by mistake – later ordered him to return there, after he had already crossed the Ural Mountains. Eventually, Steller was found dead on 12 November 1746, at the age of 37, in western Siberia near Tyumen.

8 Steller had informed the Governing Senate in Saint Petersburg about the mistreatment of the Kamchadals. The opposing side accused Steller of having released already in the first half of 1743 "12 prisoners held in the chancery in Bol'sheretsk for essential offenses". All of them were "arch-conspirators against the Russians" (Ruf 2018).

The local authorities were aware that it was Steller's declared mission to inform the public in Saint Petersburg and in other metropolises of Europe about the cruel actions of the conquerors and the local rulers in the distant peripheries of the Russian empire – which makes the causes of his "natural" death seem all the more questionable. His companion Stepan Krashenninikov,[9] on the other hand, made a scientific career after his return to Saint Petersburg. In the course of later nationalist or patriotic trends in Russian and Soviet ethnography, Steller's work took a back seat to that of Krashenninikov (Kasten 2020: 214–217). Only during political self-government movements of the Itelmen during the 1990s (Kasten 2020: 213, 217) did his work appear in Russian. Through the participation of a delegation of Itelmen and the ensemble El'vel' in the exhibition "Die Große Nordische Expedition" (1996),[10] Steller's work also became known and popular in Kamchatka. It is fascinating to notice how the Itelmen since then have drawn on Steller's work to stress their ethnicity, using it for their own ends and, in this context, conventionalizing Steller as "their" historiographer.

More recently, Steller's work has been viewed differently in Kamchatka. The local historian Sergei Vakhrin stated in his correspondence with the German scholar Dr. Joachim Ruf dated 17 October 2023, that "the representative of the great German nation", Georg Wilhelm Steller, proposed "very radical methods regarding the Chukchi, which were similar to those of the German fascists to exterminate the Slavs".[11] Vachrin refers to "Proposals by G.W. Steller to the Senate of the Government in Saint Petersburg for the improvement of living conditions in Kamchatka" (Okhotina-Lind 2009), in which Steller commented on the warlike conflicts between sedentary Koryak and Chukchi and emotionally defended the Koryak, with whom he was closer, and proposed unusually harsh action against the Chukchi. But Vakhrin undoubtedly also knows about the brutal war of Russia against the resisting Chukchi, whom the leadership of the Empire ordered to completely exterminate, and to take their wives and children prisoner and distribute them to various Yakutian stockades (Zuev 1998). Vakhrin was known, prior to 2016, for his balanced views based on his website posts.[12] His patriotic turn after Putin's war of aggression can be seen as rep-

9 It is still not clear to what extent verbatim reproductions in his work are plagiarisms of Steller's notes or vice versa.

10 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-el-vel/en [accessed 2.01.2024]

11 According to Vakhrin, the Russians, on the other hand, would have preferred to leave Chukotka to the Chukchi, after the Anadyr fortress had been destroyed in 1771, to put an end to armed conflicts between the peoples there. But "of course, if we, the Russians, had acted according to your German 'recipes', we would have had no more headaches with the numerous peoples of Russia long ago – after we had wiped out the local population at the root, as you did with Slavic tribes in Germany." Vakhrin then makes a direct link from G.W. Steller to "your nation of people who gave their souls to Hitler and his satanic hordes and attacked our country […] and who now generously feed the Ukrainian Nazis, the heirs of Bandera and Hitler, with their weapons, tanks and rifles […]", and thus should not allow themselves any judgment.

12 http://www.kamchadaly.ru/index.php/kunena/guest/1217-steller-georg [accessed 2.01.2024]

resentative of changing positions of other Russian colleagues since then. But until recently, most prominent scholars could state in Russia that "Steller was one of the noblest personalities that the German land gave to the rising Russian national consciousness" (Vernadsky 1988: 188).

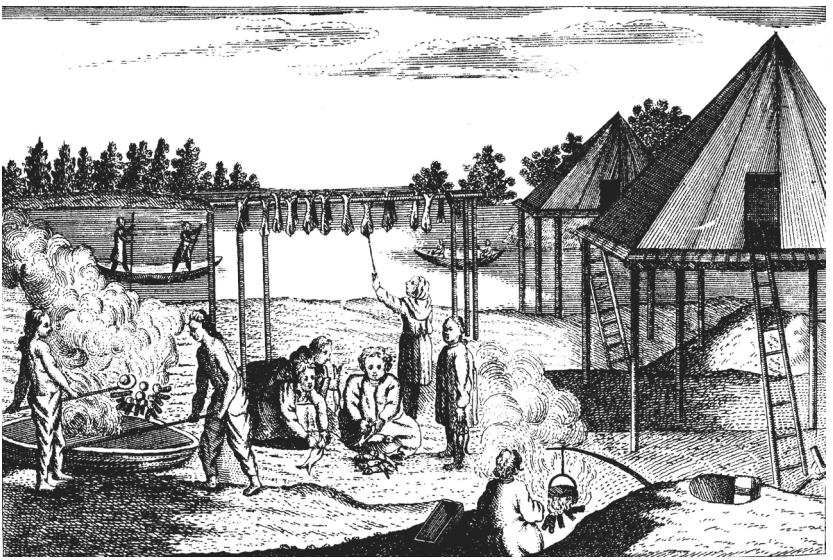

Fig. 3 "Kamchadal summer hut" (Itelmen *balagan*)

Steller gave an impressive example of tolerance towards other ways of life of the Indigenous people. Regarding the "promiscuity" of the Itelmen, which he particularly noticed and described in detail, he did not moralize, as one would have expected from someone who first studied theology, but attributed this to their diet (Steller 2013 [1774]: 186 [302]). Eventually he summarized "that one can see the simplicity of these peoples quite clearly, how every man, living in natural freedom, must be according to his temperament without his own cultivation of the mind and moral teachings [sic!]." Steller described the openly expressed transgender identities (ibid. 214 [350]), and the various homosexual practices without moral judgment (ibid. 178, 214 [289, 350]), whereas, according to Stephan Dudeck (2023: 45), currently in Russia "the public discourse is dominated by homophobia since the 'gay propaganda law' from 2013".

Steller came to Kamchatka at a time when the Russian power structure there was in upheaval. In place of the previous governors and fur traders, who proceeded in the style of earlier plundering expeditions following the first land seizure by the Cossack leader Atlasov, a scientifically assisted, "more orderly" development of the country was now emerging. The resulting shift in authority led to tensions between expedition leaders and fur traders or Cossacks, who in Bering's eyes were just as untrust-

worthy as the Indigenous population (Steller 1741–42: 138). Decision-making powers between the expedition leadership and the scientific staff were also not clearly defined, although the latter could claim to be working independently on behalf of the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. Steller assumed an additional outsider position – also vis-à-vis Bering – by clearly distancing himself from the ruthless approaches to the Indigenous people (Kasten 2013: 30 f.).

Steller found himself confronted with a predicament, since he probably felt a double obligation, to his contracting authority, the leadership of the expedition, and to the Indigenous people whose concerns over the threatening new situations he shared, expressing sympathy with their views. Present-day anthropologists often confront similar situations, feeling torn between the wish to take sides and the duty to remain neutral. During intense collaboration over longer periods of time, it is natural that the researcher starts to identify with the concerns and interests of the group that they work with, and the original project assignment might take a backseat. Regarding Steller, Gerhard Friedrich Müller complained that with his expressed concern about a more humane treatment of the Indigenous people Steller needlessly got involved in issues in which he should not have meddled. How Steller himself tried to manage such situations of conflicting interest is illustrated by the example of his controversy with Khmetevski (see above).

Scrutinizing Steller's overall personality, one might question the true motives that made him an "advocate" for the Itelmen. Even today fieldworkers must undertake the invariably precarious tightrope walk between sincere empathy and at times opportunistic lobbying for a certain ethnic group. Was Steller really concerned with the well-being of the Indigenous population, or was his siding with them to serve his individual needs and aims? Let us recall his conflicts with the Russian authorities in this respect. Lacking other means of power, he adopted the position of a moralist, as it was seen in his controversy with Khmetevski. But then again, while Steller was dedicated to the humanistic tradition, and to the values of pietism, he did not act as a religious bigot or an idealistic utopian for justice at the "frontier" where shady fortune hunters had organized their life according to their own rules in the most remote parts of the Russian Empire. Ultimately, Steller might have been first of all the scientist to whom it became clear that his research interests and best access to ethnographic data were best served by distancing himself from the Russian authorities on Kamchatka – though only as long as this would not impede his scientific assignment in the expedition, as in the conflict with Bering mentioned above.

Other examples: Erman, Merck, Chamisso, Kegel, Ditmar, Maydell

Another German explorer, Georg Adolph Erman,[13] traveled to Indigenous communities in Kamchatka unaccompanied by Russians whenever possible (2024 [1848]: 144 [210]). He had found that the Indigenous people were more open in their conversations with him this way and did not fear that someone might overhear them and perhaps punish them. His work contains critical assessments of the policy toward the Itelmen at that time, especially on the part of Governor Golenishchev (2024 [1848]: 280 [409]).

Fig. 4 Chukchi and their dwellings

Carl Heinrich Merck[14] described how, unlike the Russian conquerors, scientists approached the Chukchi, who were known to be warlike, and received an unusually sympathetic reception from the local inhabitants. After the expedition had gone ashore, a group of Chukchi "had given them to understand by signs to remove every-

13 Georg Adolph Erman (1806–1877), a German traveler and physicist, was born in Berlin, where he also died in 1877. He studied natural sciences in Berlin, and after receiving his doctorate in physics, he was employed at the University of Königsberg in 1826. From 1828 to 1830, Erman made a world voyage through northern Asia, the Pacific, and the Atlantic. In August 1829, he sailed from Okhotsk to Kamchatka, where he undertook a month-long voyage from Tigil' to Petropavlovsk.

14 Carl Heinrich Merck (1761–1799) was born in Darmstadt and educated as a doctor in Germany. He was working at the hospital in Irkutsk in 1785, when the team for the Billings-Sarychev expedition to explore Eastern Siberia and Alaska from 1785 to 1795 gathered there, which he joined.

thing that resembled [a] rifle, since they themselves were unarmed" (Merck, in Pivovar 2013: 83). Afterwards, the Chukchi took the strangers to their settlement, where the latter, with the help of gifts, could win them over to cooperate – in other words, a mutually beneficial encounter and relationship.

It is striking how free of personal evaluations Merck's descriptions were, given that he was dealing with Indigenous healing methods and religious views that must have been at odds with his professional medical understanding and European ideas of civilization and enlightenment. For example, historian Erich Donnert describes Merck as "open-minded, understanding, and averse to any racial prejudice" (Donnert 2009: 70). Merck's attitudes were ahead of his time, when – as historian Helena Pivovar writes – "regents believed that Christianity would drive out the 'savage' in them through education and advance their Russification" (Pivovar 2013: 87).

Adelbert von Chamisso provides another example of the way scientists interacted with Indigenous community members, which fundamentally differed from the violent and extortionate behavior of Russian conquerors and merchants, since the information they hoped to gain could only be obtained through consensual cooperation. Chamisso succeeded in getting Aleut to describe whale species of the North Pacific to him not only orally, but also figuratively, in the form of small wooden models, which they made for him. Based on Indigenous knowledge thus documented in writing and visually, Chamisso published a Latin treatise on whales in the Bering Sea in 1824. Chamisso's work reads as an ethnographic document that testifies to his sensitive approach to foreign cultures.

Fig. 5 Wooden whale models carved by Aleuts.

Chamisso sharply criticized the methods of the Russian American Trading Company to "keep the natives under their yoke" with money advances, so that there is "no salvation from hell" for them (Chamisso 1836: 173). Previously, he reported on his stay on this "sad" island (Unalaschka). "After a glimpse of the misery of the downtrodden, impoverished Aleuts and of their own oppressors, the local Russians, I spent the days wandering in the heights" (ibid. 171) to botanize there. In this way, he also silently tried to escape the festivities and banquets, described by him as embarrassing, that the expedition leadership had organized, at which Indigenous inhabitants had to perform strange spectacles (ibid. 172).

Fig. 6 View of the port of Ounalaschka.

The records also show how conflicts of interest between the captains of the expedition ships and the scientists differed due to the respective personalities of the explorers. These conflicts were dealt with differently by Steller vis-à-vis Bering (see above) than by Chamisso: the latter wrote: "For my part, I heard Kotzebue's order in painful indignation and wrapped myself in my instructions: 'A passenger on board a ship of war, where one is not accustomed to have any, has no claims to make'" (Chamisso 1836: 319).

Johann K. E. Kegel[15] also showed special empathy towards the Indigenous people. After his arrival in Kamchatka, he immediately found himself in conflict with the local commanders, who saw their personal benefits from the fur trade challenged by new efforts to improve the living conditions of the Indigenous population and who tried to obstruct Kegel's work (Kasten 2011: 309). Thus, in addition to knowledgeable descrip-

15 Johann K. E. Kegel (1784–1883), a German agronomist born in Friesdorf, had been educated in Halberstadt, Germany and Copenhagen, Denmark. In 1840, he was sent to Kamchatka by the Russian government in Saint Petersburg to explore ways of introducing and further developing agriculture there. The original manuscript of his journals is kept in the archives of the Foundation for Siberian Cultures, which have been published there in 2011, edited by Dr. Werner F. Gülden, a direct descendant of J. K. E. Kegel.

tions of the Indigenous population's use of nature, his work also provides information about the political conditions characterized by the abuse of power and corruption, which, in his eyes, had particularly serious consequences for the Indigenous people.

Soon after his arrival in Peter and Paul Harbor, Kegel drew in his notes an unsparing picture of the political conditions and the corrupt administration on Kamchatka, which for him was largely responsible for the resulting undesirable economic and social developments that he was to experience and describe in detail over the course of the next few months. A first meeting with Strannolyubsky's[16] secretary alone gives a good insight into the apparently usual procedures of abuse of power and showed how the administration initially tried to coopt Kegel and prevent him from writing unpleasant reports. Thus, it was suggested to Kegel to forego the – from Strannolyubsky's point of view – unnecessary and exhausting journeys through Kamchatka in summer and rather to make himself comfortable. "You will return home rich from the trip. The chef gives you the best report on it [the results of your work], and you travel back to Petersburg satisfied" (Kegel 2012: 86). Once Kegel resisted such a fraudulent offer, he faced threats, blackmail, and slander. For example, Strannolyubsky wrote to the governor-general of East Siberia, Wilhelm Ruppert, that Kegel was "no more than a charlatan from whom no benefit whatsoever can be expected" (Sgibnev 2008: 95). Certainly, in such a situation it would have been easier and in many respects more lucrative for him to accept the administration's original offer and "arrange" himself with the circumstances – as others did later (see below).

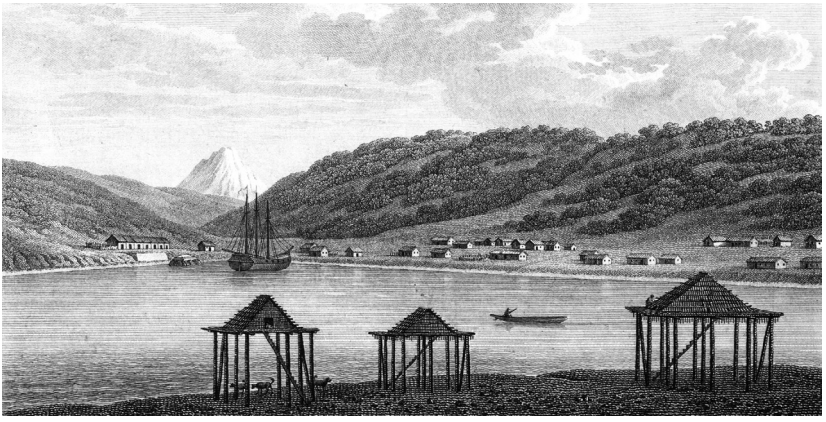

Fig. 7 View of Peter and Paul harbor.

16 Nikolai Vassilevich Strannolyubsky [Stranolyubsky] was commander of Kamchatka from 1840-1845 and held the military rank of "Captain 1st rank"; Kegel usually referred to him as "chef" in his writings.

Kegel cited countless examples of apparently widespread corruption, whereby state funds for construction and other public measures – including the establishment and maintenance of the crafts school – were embezzled and used to fill the governor's own pockets. Thus, for a hunter who regularly provided Strannolyubsky with "beautiful sables," Kegel was to issue a good report card for a supposedly well-managed model economy so that he would "receive four silver medals" (Kegel 2012: 241). For Kegel, the consequences of the fur trade were a neglect of traditional industries and cultivation, as well as various social problems such as rampant alcoholism, with alcohol often used as a trick of the trade (ibid. 129, 168, 175, 280).

For Kegel, the fur trade and the neighborhood of Russians were responsible for other social and health grievances, such as diseases that were repeatedly introduced, especially syphilis, which were usually inadequately treated and obviously resulted in a sharp decline in the Indigenous population (ibid. 274). His journals also repeatedly mention sexual abuse (ibid. 359, 398).

Finally, Kegel lamented the welfare of poor people: "Excessive luxury and debauchery of the rich are solely to blame for the ruin of the lower class, for bad example and corruption are infectious" (Kegel 2012: 49). Apparently, he came to such insights from the way he himself lived. Thus, he found little to like about Strannolyubsky's pompous festivities at Peter and Paul Harbor.

Carl von Ditmar,[17] another explorer who arrived on Kamchatka a few years after Kegel, was quite the opposite, repeatedly describing with enthusiasm and admiration the frequent balls in Peter and Paul Harbor that Vassilyi Stepanovich Savoiko hosted there (Ditmar 2011 [1890]: 102, 131, 261, 445 [165, 218, 457, 794]). Savoiko was an admiral in the Imperial Russian Navy and governor of Kamchatka from 1853–1856, with whom Ditmar was employed as an official for special assignments in the mining field. As the two traveled together frequently around the peninsula Ditmar directly witnessed – and favorably described – Savoiko's doings, in contradiction to the actual situation mentioned in his report (ibid. [1890]: 106f. [173]). Generally, Ditmar was largely apathetic to the plight of the Indigenous peoples, and supported Savoiko in his rejection of claims and lawsuits by locals and in the case of robbed Koryak (ibid. 118 [194]).

Thus, the strained relationship between Kegel and Ditmar was understandable. This also sheds light on the controversial question of why Kegel's work is not mentioned at all in the comprehensive work of Carl von Ditmar, who came to Kamchatka four years after Kegel had finished his work there, including in Ditmar's otherwise so detailed "Historical Notes" (Ditmar 2011). In his introduction to Kegel's travelogue, Werner Friedrich Gülden opines that Ditmar should have been aware of at least one report that Kegel is supposed to have sent him before his departure for Saint Peters-

17 Woldemar Friedrich Carl von Ditmar (1822–1892) was born in Livonia in the village of Fennern (now Vändra). Initially he studied economics, then he devoted himself to the study of mineralogy at the University of Dorpat and passed the final examinations in geology, mineralogy, and paleontology. In 1851–1854 he stayed in Kamchatka and made nine longer trips there.

burg and that Ditmar indeed used its material for his own publications (Gülden in Kegel 2012: 12). Liudmila Sadovnikova (2010: 46), on the other hand, suspects that among the Kamchatka governor's papers, which Ditmar had frequently visited later, there were no (more) documents by Kegel. Once aware of the special relationship between Kegel and the then commander of Kamchatka, Strannolyubsky, and his character and critical attitude towards Kegel's mission and its results (see above), it seems likely that the latter had let undoubtedly critical reports by Kegel disappear.

A more unsparing description of the living conditions of the Indigenous people was given by Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff.[18] He was shocked by the miserable conditions under which the Aleuts had to work for the Russian merchants:

> Many of these meager and sick people, who worked hard every day, and were unhappily indebted to the company, were not even given credit to be able to buy the necessary food; [one] did not even give them the required food for money, and often had them beaten to work when they lay exhausted on the sickbed (Langsdorff 1812, vol. 2: 82).

A kind of land militia ordered by Emperor Paul to promote agriculture and culture among the local people also proved to be rather detrimental in von Langsdorff's eyes:

> They [the soldiers] have nothing to do but stand sentinel and guard the magazines entrusted to them. Lazy, indolent, negligent, and wholly ignorant of agriculture, they have done far more harm than good in the few years, and fall to the greatest burden of the Kamchadals, suck the poor countryman dry, and lay the foundation of the physical and moral ruin of this nation, so that, if the broad government does not soon take other paths, the poor benign natives, whose numbers have melted down from about 10 000 to 3 000 souls, will gradually be completely worn out (Langsdorff, vol. 1, 1812: 178).

Gerhard Baron von Maydell[19] made similar comments. Although his task was to bring the northeastern parts of Siberia under Russia's complete control, he described with strong criticism the brutal encroachments of Cossack conquerors and strove to put an end to the ongoing warlike confrontations between Chukchi and Koryak (Maydell 1893 [1]: 77, 111, 276, 647). Maydell in his report explained with much com-

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18 Georg Heinrich Freiherr von Langsdorff (1774–1852) was born in Wöllstein. He studied medicine and natural sciences at the University of Göttingen. In January 1803 he was elected a correspondent member of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In 1803–1807 he took part as a naturalist in the round-the-world voyage of Krusenstern. In July 1804 he arrived in Kamchatka on the ship "Nadezhda".

19 Gerhard Baron von Maydell (1835–1894) was born in Dorpat (Tartu). After his early interest in the Amur region, he wanted to participate in an expedition of the Russian Geographical Society there, but fell ill on the way and, together with Julius Stubendorff, founded the Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society in Irkutsk. More on Maydell's life and work is found in Tammiksaar (2013).

passion and great frankness local conditions and how the people were treated: "Thus, they would be punished twice with yasak, i.e. robbed twice, because at that time enduring subjugation was equivalent to being robbed" (Maydell 1893 [1]: 482). He reported sympathetically that an administrator and Cossack officer was executed "for malfeasance and abuse of power" in the face of his particularly cruel behavior (Maydell 1893 [1]: 655). As the governor's representative, von Maydell presented the history of the conquest with remarkable bluntness (Maydell 1893 [2]: 443): "The great mass of the intruders, and even most of their leaders, are crude, rapacious adventurers, who are only interested in acquiring wealth (Maydell 1893 [2]: 480)." "Siberia was always only a source from which to obtain yasak in precious furs […] and represented a noticeable part of the tsar's income. […] How the people, especially the Indigenous population, fared there was not known, nor did they want to know" (Maydell 1893 [2]: 482).

Furthermore, Maydell had assigned himself protector of the Chukchi and wanted to prove that, contrary to the view of the time, they were not savage and warlike, but that this was rather true of the Koryak: It was "nevertheless the complete truth that the […] constantly attacking, plundering and even killing Russian officials and other Russian merchants, the Koryak and also the Yukaghir, are always able to portray the Chukchi, who do the occupation no harm, as the eternal troublemakers and to give them the reputation of the greatest savagery and cruelty in the eyes of the whole world" (Maydell 1893 [1]: 641). In his sympathy for the Chuckchi, Maydell obviously adopted common stereotypes of that time.

Like Waldemar Jochelson,[20] who traveled to the area a few years later, Maydell denounced the uncontrolled sale of alcohol (Maydell 1893 [1]: 172).

Waldemar Jochelson

In contrast to the scientists presented in the previous section, Waldemar Jochelson came from Lithuania, which at the time was part of the republic of Poland. Jochelson was brought up Jewish and completed his studies in Switzerland in the German university tradition shaped, among others, by the Humboldt brothers, after being involved in revolutionary movements in Russia and Western Europe. Thus, his background differed significantly from those of the scientists previously discussed here, who were primarily influenced by the German Enlightenment and by a different social environment. Nevertheless, Jochelson's approach resembled theirs in many

20 Waldemar Jochelson (1855–1937) was born in Vilnius, Lithuania, and first lived for some time in Germany. He studied in Switzerland and initially published in German journals. Because of his revolutionary activities, he was arrested upon entering Russia and spent several years in exile in the Kolyma region. From 1894–1897 he took part in the Sibiryakov expedition and then later in the Jesup North Pacific expedition led by Franz Boas.

ways, such as in the empathy he showed towards Indigenous peoples. Such comparisons can be revealing, justifying a brief look at his work here.[21]

In his later monographs, Jochelson critically addressed the history of the conquest. Thus, he reported on a "punitive Expedition, which was as aimless as its execution was cruel […] we shall see later on, after a detailed treatment of the tribute question, how this policy of military conquest, setting aside its inhuman cruelty, was senseless so far as it was an attempt to win for the state of new colony" (Jochelson 2016: 817 [790]). Later, Jochelson continued: "The other cause of the wars lay in the national pride of the Russian conquerors who insisted on breaking the stubborn resistance of alien peoples and on subjecting them to Russian rule. But here again experience had made it clear that the submission of these peoples was not worth the sacrifices which it costs" (ibid. 822f. [796]).

Jochelson's early writings, in which he summarized the results of his Sibiryakov expedition initially for German-language journals and conference reports, are particularly informative for our question here (Jochelson 2017; see Kasten and Sirina [2022] on the Sibiryak expedition). In his early writings, one is struck by the empathy for the locals that he clearly expressed there: he tried to put himself in their often-difficult living situation. In doing so, he followed his original revolutionary approach of working to improve the well-being of disadvantaged and oppressed people. Moreover, it was difficult for him to conceal his emotional involvement since he himself had lived for a long time during his exile under the most severe conditions with Indigenous people (ibid. 72 ff., 101, 112). With great sensitivity, Jochelson described how Indigenous people dealt with fellow tribesmen who were suffering from the epidemic of smallpox, and how they created special care arrangements for such lepers (ibid: 123f.).

Open criticism, on the other hand, Jochelson directed at the "fraudulent merchants" to whom the locals were subjected. He complained that the government did not care about the fate of these people, but instead "significantly, so much alcohol is brought into the Kolymsk region that half the income of this poor district goes for vodka" (Jochelson 1898: 274).

Jochelson's critical attitude must have been known to the Russian authorities: they watched his part of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition around 1900 with suspicion. In contrast to official support, they tried to hinder Jochelson's field research by secret decrees, which Jochelson anonymously wrote about in the journal *Osvobozhdenie*:

> The question now is, what was the meaning of the secret orders? Did the minister fear the spread of separatist ideas among the Chukchi? What is the logical connection between the 'former anti-government activities' of the travelers, for which they had once served a sentence, and 'assistance in their now assigned scientific work'? […] There is only one answer to all these questions: these phenomena arise

21 More on Jochelson's life and work is available in Kasten (2022a).

> from the regime in which the Police Department stands above all scientific and state institutions, and which has inoculated all the same mouths to speak completely opposite speeches. (Anon 1903: 256)

After another expedition to the Aleuts and Itelmen on Kamchatka, Jochelson returned to Saint Petersburg. In unsuccessful attempts to get a foothold at the newly founded Institute of Geography in Petrograd after the October Revolution, where Lev Shternberg and Waldemar Bogoras had gained positions, he temporarily made use of Bolshevik rhetoric, adding to his application that these peoples (Yukagir, Aleut, and Itelmen) had been disadvantaged during tsarist times and needed the support of the new socialist state.

Conclusion

Most of the researchers discussed in this chapter were natural scientists, and often particularly interested in people. Some additionally had received a theological education and had devoted themselves with curiosity to the world views and rituals of the peoples of Siberia and other areas, often interpreting these against the background of their own Christian ideas,[22] and later according to shifting political contexts of their time – just as ethnologists have continued to do to this day.

Boris Chichlo (2005) has demonstrated how the same events and facts can be interpreted differently and even contradictorily due to censorship even by the same author, using the example of two almost simultaneous publications by Andrei Zuev (1999, 2002). Zuev argued that "the course of subordination of the indigenous people of the extreme North-East of Siberia [by the Russians] cannot be called anything other than war", and that "there can be no way to talk about any peaceful, let alone voluntary incorporation of these peoples into Russian subjection" (2002: 178), that their resistance "was a reaction to the actions of the Russian 'conquistadors' who were unable or unwilling to build peaceful relations with the 'foreigners'" (ibid. 184). According to Zuev, the main initiator of forceful methods in the end was the state (ibid. 180), which he confirmed with a detailed chronicle of conquest campaigns from 1634 to 1726 (ibid., Appendix I: 185–273). Yet in a textbook that he ostensibly authored, he insisted: "The basic principles of governmental policy contributed to the relatively peaceful and easy incorporation of the indigenous Siberian peoples into the social and state structure of Russia" (1999: 126, 130). (For more contradictions in Zuev's publications, see the table in Chichlo [2005]).

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22 Steller sought to interpret the rituals of the Itelmen with pietistic respect, but ultimately from a Christian perspective. In contrast, Carl Heinrich Merck towards the end of the eighteenth century gave unusually value-free descriptions of the beliefs and religious practices of the Chukchi (Pivovar 2013: 85 f.), which still seem plausible to us today.

Many of the attitudes that the above researchers vividly described (see quote from Kegel, *this chapter p. 103)* live on to this day in Russia – often and not without pride, self-proclaimed as their proper "mentality" – which has made joint international projects and cooperation not always easy during the last 30 years, since the (re)opening of the Russian North to foreigner researchers. The second volume of this series "Journeys on Hold: Collaborative projects halted" will deal with this, among other things.

What is striking here is the emotional consternation of many of these researchers regarding the often-brutal treatment of the Indigenous people by the rulers and merchants. In many cases, the scientists intervened in political matters and, in the face of disregard for the rights of the Indigenous population, courageously took a stand for them, even if this exposed them to intrigues on the part of those in power and risked the continuation of their scientific work.

Likewise, many ethnographers of that time were not above making practical recommendations to the local people and helping them to implement them, to improve their living conditions – albeit, as imagined from the point of view of the foreigner. But these should not always be understood as a forced "civilizing" measure, because many researchers expressed empathy in this way, even if they could not always understand the advantages of locally adapted Indigenous ways of their economy due to their particular professional background – like the agronomist Kegel, for example.

Reflecting on the role of ethnographers that have been presented in this chapter, it does not seem appropriate to speak of "colonial" or "extractive ethnology" – as occasionally expressed now by activists. In these cases described, ethnographers did not cause any harm to Indigenous people, but to the contrary were eager to inform citizens in Europe about the brutal conduct of the conquerors and the unjust treatment of Indigenous people during the colonization at the fringes of the Russian empire.

However, the reports of these explorers, many of whom sought to shed light on the grievances regarding the Indigenous population in view of the colonization of these parts of the country, were hardly acknowledged in scientific circles nor among the general public in Europe at the time, while the expeditions were interpreted by the Russian government as a success for the further exploration and incorporation of these parts of the country into its empire. Thus, despite their consistently critical stance on the trips, the scientists traveling with the expeditions were ultimately instrumentalized for the state's goals, giving these territorial appropriations the look of a scientific benefit as well.

Interpretations of the events described here are made against the political and theoretical background of the respective time. Some in the West today may speak in sweeping terms of colonial ethnography, whereas in Russia, especially in recent years, the narrative of the peaceful "incorporation" of the territories of Indigenous peoples to the Russian Empire has been emphasized. This latter interpretation is now increas-

ingly celebrated in the given regions of Russia in numerous events.[23] Neither extreme reflect the facts, as demonstrated in this article. Striking also is the connection of the conquest of these territories with the victory of the Great Patriotic War, as expressed on the cover of a conference volume, published in 2010, while these previous "successful" military actions are applied now to the justification of the current war of aggression in the Ukraine (see footnote 11).

Fig. 8 Cover of the conference volume "Loyal to duty and fatherland"

23 See for example the conference in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on August 26–28, 2022: "Kamchatka – Russia – World," dedicated to the 325th anniversary of Kamchatka's incorporation (*vkhozhdeniia*) into the Russian state. See also Karaseva, *this volume p. 51*.

This chapter has discusssed how scholars in the past had to make compromises with expedition leaders who provided them with travel logistics to remote territories. At the same time, they had to distance themselves from local state authorities who had other interests than those of the scientists in their encounters with Indigenous people. Perhaps not always on moral or ethical grounds alone, but for pragmatic reasons of not risking relations and immediate access to their "subjects of research", they occasionally took the side of Indigenous people, a harbinger of what later became *advocacy anthropology* (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006). The completely opposing views of Steller and Maydell on the military conflicts between Koryak and Chukchi illustrate how assessments of situations can be biased by the assessor taking sides (see Steller, *this chapter p. 97*, and Maydell, *this chapter p. 106*, and even Vachrin, *this chapter p. 97,* footnote 11). The same can happen to today's anthropologists, when access to Indigenous communities is a fundamental requirement to conduct their studies. Recently increasingly empowered, Indigenous peoples themselves can control access to research sites, and may hestitate to give such if one does not share their interpretations of their ethnic history and recognize their current roles in nation states.

Emphazising former victim roles in current Western *Zeitgeist* debates on decolonization often blurs the historical facts. The same is true of Russia's justification of its aggressive war against Ukraine by recalling the memory of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War. In these debates it is not always easy to position oneself while being prepared to accept disadvantages when voicing controversial opinions. The moral dilemmas common in the West are less so in Russia, where such important debates are dismissed as "Western decadence". But if we take a critical look at some of our colleagues in Russia now who might align their work to current patriotism, we also have to question ourselves, in the West, if we always apply moral standards according to our given *Zeitgeist* out of conviction or for opportunistic reasons, i.e. for individual advantages in realizing our scientific goals, as it might have been the case also with earlier ethnographers in Siberia in the past, as shown in this chapter.

As has been shown, the ethnology of Siberia up to the beginning of the 20th century was evidently not a "child of colonialism," as is sometimes claimed for other parts of the world, but rather one of the German Enlightenment. As further contributions will show, a Russian ethnography independent of state directives could only begin to develop again during the Perestroika period. However, the events of recent years, especially after the war of aggression in Ukraine, show a trend in the opposite direction. Dmitriy Oparin, for example, emphasises that with regard to more recent ethnological approaches to decolonisation, "Russian ethnography and, more broadly, Russophone humanities have long been in need of a 'shake-up', self-critique and self-reflexivity" (Oparin 2024: 78). However, Russian historiography and ethnology in Russia are divided on this issue today, "thus, there is no unanimity in our academic community, and different scholars behave differently, which does inspire some hope" (Shnirelman 2024: 93).

The examples discussed here show that in repressive political systems and situations scholars always have the option to protest or distance themselves from the authorities or mainstream opinions. It is a matter of the character of the individual researcher as to what decisions they take, and to what extent they are prepared to face setbacks for taking these – regarding receiving institutional or financial support, access to the research site, or to later acknowledgement of the outcome of their works and academic careers. In the cases described above, some scholars took the risk, with the outcomes that their efforts were not fully recognized for a long time or that they were harassed by the authorities, even to the point of feeling the need to leave the country.

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Figures

1 Fish barrier across the Kamchatka river near Mil'kovo. 18 July 1828. Private collection Prof. Engländer. In: Friedrich Heinrich von Kittlitz (1858) [2011: 206].
2 Ganaly. Mountainous area near Ganaly with mountain plants, Kamchatka snow sheep, marmot and snow finch. 15 August 1828. Private collection Prof. Engländer. In: Friedrich Heinrich von Kittlitz (1858) [2011: 211].
3 Kamchadal summer hut (*balagan*). In: Georg Wilhelm Steller 1774 [2013: 216].
4 Tchouktchis et leurs habitations. In Louis Choris – *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde, avec des portraits de sauvages d'Amérique, d'Asie, d'Afrique, et des îles du Grand Océan.* Paris: Didot (1822). GöttingerDigitalisierungsZentrum (GDZ) der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek.
5 Six wooden whale models carved by Aleuts from Chamisso's Rurik expedition, today in the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, Historical Image and Document Collection. Size: 21 cm. Signatur: B XII 245 – B XII 250. (Photo: Carola Radke, MfN). In Marie-Theres Federhofer (2012: 82).
6 Vue du port d' Ounalaschka (Kapitanskaya haran). In Louis Choris – *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde, avec des portraits de sauvages d'Amérique, d'Asie, d'Afrique, et des îles du Grand Océan.* Paris: Didot 1822. Göttinger DigitalisierungsZentrum (GDZ) der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek.
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