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Title: Circumnavigation Empire Modernity Race The Impact of Round the World Voyages on Russia's Imperial Consciousness

Author (s): Ilya Venkovetsky

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Ilya VINKOVETSKY

**CIRCUMNAVIGATION, EMPIRE, MODERNITY, RACE:
THE IMPACT OF ROUND-THE-WORLD VOYAGES ON
RUSSIA'S IMPERIAL CONSCIOUSNESS***

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house...”
(Genesis 12:1)

Advances in communications, connections – examples include the introduction of the telegraph, the telephone, the airplane, and the internet – can radically change the way bureaucracies see and run societies. My hypothesis is that the initiation of voyages from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean via the Southern Hemisphere had far-reaching implications for the mental and cultural geography of the Russian Empire as it was seen from official St. Petersburg. Previous studies have blurred the line between those voyagers, colonists, and observers who came to Russian America (present-day Alaska) and the Russian Far East via Siberia and those who got there by sailing around the world. The present article aspires to demonstrate the relevance of the differences between the two groups. The implications of these differ-

* I am indebted to Diane Clemens, Sergei Kan, Kerwin Klein, Michael Khodarkovsky, Arthur Mason, Sonja Lührmann, Jan Plamper, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Yuri Slezkine, Dov Yaroshevski, Reggie Zelnik, and Andrei Znamenski for constructive criticism and suggestions.

ences will shed light on broader discussions of modernization, colonialism and the multiethnic empire.

Beginning in 1803-1806, Russians¹ traveled from St. Petersburg to the Pacific coast of the Russian Empire by two different routes – a marine round-the-world route around the southern tips of Africa and South America was added to the land route across the territory of Eurasia. With the introduction of Russia's round-the-world voyages came a shift, largely overlooked in historical literature, in the way that the Russians understood and operated their Empire.² Twenty-five such circumnavigation voyages were initiated while Alexander I was emperor (1801-1825).³ Given their relative regularity, these voyages became a more or less stable feature of Russian imperial order.⁴ Instantaneously, the ports of Russian America and Eurasia's Pacific Coast, which had been previously thought of as part of the Russian Empire's remotest frontier, came to be re-conceptualized in the eyes of the country's thinkers and bureaucrats as places with better access to St. Petersburg than the continental towns of Siberia and much of the rest of interior Russia. "In normal everyday life it is safe to say that Sitka [Novo-

¹ "Russians" as used here refers to all subjects of the multiethnic Russian Empire (*rossiane* rather than *russkie*); as will be elaborated further down in this article, many of the people participating in the round-the-world voyages did not identify themselves as ethnic Russians.

² Some of the reasons for this oversight are examined in my dissertation: Ilya Vinkovetsky. *Native Americans and the Russian Empire* / PhD dissertation. UC Berkeley, 2001. Soviet scholars emphasized almost exclusively the strictly scientific contributions of the voyages. Western scholarship either followed suit or neglected Russia's round-the-world voyages altogether.

³ About sixty-five Russian voyages took place between the Baltic and the Northern Pacific Rim up to 1867: James R. Gibson. *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America*. New York, 1976. Pp. 78-81.

⁴ The vistas opened up for Russian imperialism by the opening of a trans-oceanic route between the two ends of the Russian Empire have remained largely unexamined in scholarship. In contrast, much has been written on the practical impact of changing sea routes on the operation of the British Empire. See: Daniel R. Headrick. *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, 1981. Especially pp. 129-213 (Part Three: "The Communications Revolution").

It should also be said that the network of contacts that the Russian navy established in various ports as its ships sailed around the world added up to a kind of marine "road of empire," analogous to the more extensive "roads of empire" that served the British navy. I am grateful to Dov Yaroshevski for leading me toward this insight. Osterhammel refers to a similar phenomenon when he speaks about the construction of "naval networks" (Jürgen Osterhammel. *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* / Trans. by Shelley L. Frisch. Princeton, 1997. Pp. 9-10.

Arkhangel'sk] seems nearer to Peterburg than the great majority of our provincial cities," wrote an observer who visited the administrative capital of Russian America in the early 1840s.⁵ As the sense of mental distance between these sites and the Empire's capital in Europe diminished, Russia's imperial and commercial elites began to project bolder plans for colonial expansion around the Pacific Rim. Within a few years, the Russians fortified their position in the Tlingit Indian territory of southeast Alaska, established the Ross settlement as a prelude to greater designs on Spanish California, and even made a bungled attempt to expand to the Hawaiian Islands.⁶ Such expansionary moves would have been inconceivable without the circumnavigation voyages that preceded them. The round-the-world voyages left an imprint on Russian imperial imagination and consciousness that would influence future projects for decades to come and reshape the way that the Russians perceived their multiethnic empire and its diverse inhabitants.

Early circumnavigation voyages were explicitly meant to expand Russia's imperial and commercial influence. Specifically, the Russians, and especially the Russian-American Company,⁷ hoped to gain direct access for Russian ships to Chinese and Japanese ports. The Russian Empire's prestige as well as commercial advantage was put on the line. The Russian Imperial Navy assigned its best officers to command the ships;⁸ the Imperial Academy of Sciences sent some of its brightest scholars; the Academy of Arts assigned artists to document the ships' passage.⁹ Emperor Alexander I,

⁵ Lieutenant Zagoskin's *Travels in Russian America, 1842-1844: The First Ethnographic and Geographic Investigations in the Yukon and Kuskokwim Valleys of Alaska* / Ed. by Henry N. Michael; trans. by Penelope Rainey. Toronto, 1967. P. 71.

⁶ For recent treatments of the Russian penetration of Tlingit territory, see: Sergei Kan. *Memory Eternal and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries*. Seattle, 1999 and Andrei Grinev. *Bitvy za Sitku i padenie Iakutata* // N. N. Bolkhovitinov (ed.). *Istoriia Russkoi Ameriki*. Moscow, 1999. Vol. 2. Pp. 53-83. On Russians in California, see: A. A. Istomin. *Osnovanie kreposti Ross v Kalifornii v 1812 g. i otnosheniia s Ispaniei* // *Istoriia Russkoi Ameriki*. Vol. 2, Pp. 190-274. On the Hawaiian Islands see: N. N. Bolkhovitinov. *Russkie na Gavaiakh (1804-1825)* // *Istoriia Russkoi Ameriki*. Vol. 2. Pp. 275-302, and Richard A. Pierce. *Russia's Hawaiian Adventure, 1815-1817*. Berkeley, 1965.

⁷ A joint-stock company founded in 1799, the Russian-American Company went on to run Russian America (and its fur trade) until the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867.

⁸ The list of names of junior and senior naval officers who participated in the early circumnavigation voyages includes many men who went on to hold leading positions in the coming decades.

⁹ The remarkable artists enlisted for the round-the-world voyages included Louis Choris

along with various ministers and other notables, visited the ships as they departed from and arrived at the port of Kronshtadt.¹⁰ It was especially the first of the voyages that stirred the imperial imagination of Russia's educated public of the time.¹¹

The round-the-world voyages were by far the most extensive voyages undertaken by the Russian navy up to that point. Until the first round-the-world voyage (by the *Neva* and the *Nadezhda*, 1803-1806), no Russian ship had crossed the equator. As the participants in the round-the-world voyages visited British, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies, and encountered various indigenous populations around the globe, they made extensive observations on the relationships between the colonizers and the colonized to which they were not exposed on Russia's own vast territory. When, in the course of their voyages around the world, they encountered the Russian Empire's own subject peoples on the Pacific coast, these circumnavigators did not see them through the same eyes as did their predecessors who had come across Siberia. The circumnavigators readily compared the Itelmens, Yakuts, Chukchis, Tlingits, and Aleuts to Polynesians, South American Indians, and other peoples around the globe. The circumnavigators also aspired to apply within the Russian Empire some of the colonialist techniques that they saw in other European colonies. These observations by influential people had resonance; they were published in leading journals, reviewed by officials of different ministries, and permeated the discourse of official St. Petersburg. In this way, the circumnavigation voyages altered the frame of reference of Russians in St. Petersburg for viewing the Empire's multiethnic population. The implications of this alteration extended far beyond the northern Pacific Rim.

Just as the round-the-world voyages created a new communications and provisionment route between the two ends of the Empire, one that was far

and Mikhail Tikhanov, among others. See: Louis Choris. *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde, avec des portraits de sauvages d'Amerique, d'Asie, d'Afrique, et des iles du Grand ocean; des paysages, des vues maritimes, et plusieurs objets d'histoire naturelle; accompagne de descriptions par m. le baron Cuvier, et m. A. de Chamisso, et d'observations sur les cranes humains, par m. le docteur Gall.* Paris, 1822; Diliara Safaraliev. M. T. Tikhanov (1789-1862), *Artist-Traveler // Barbara Sweetland Smith and Redmond J. Barnett (eds.). Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier.* Tacoma, Wash., 1990. Pp. 33-39.

¹⁰ The pageantry surrounding these voyages is a subject onto itself. It is a pity that Richard Wortman does not discuss Emperor Alexander I's visits aboard the vessels in his *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy.* Vol. 1. Princeton, 1995.

¹¹ On imperial imagination, see: Mark Bassin. *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865.* New York, 1999.

more efficient than the previous continental route across the Eurasian landmass, they also tipped the scales toward more west European-oriented and modernized models for Russian elites to perceive and act upon the Empire's various peoples. It is not surprising participants in round-the-world voyages went on to play leading roles in shaping Russia's imperial discourse. A hint of their influence is presented in Nathaniel Knight's 1994 dissertation, which examines the formation of the Russian Geographical Society and its Ethnographic Division in the 1840s¹²; what stands out is that the Society's most influential founding members (Ferdinand Petrovich Vrangeli, Fedor Petrovich Litke) were important circumnavigators. Their views on ethnography were shaped by far-flung travels and exposure to various (non-Eurasian) peoples that they encountered on their travels around the globe.¹³ The Ethnographic Division was at the center of the impassioned debates about the meaning of nationality and ethnography.¹⁴ It is fair to say that these debates impacted Russian imperial thinking far and wide for decades to come, affecting Russian approach to places from Siberia to the Caucasus to Central Asia to Manchuria.

Times were different before the round-the-world voyages were introduced, when Russian colonizers came to North America only through Asia, or, to be more precise, by way of Siberia, Kamchatka and the long Aleutian Island chain. To get from the Russian forests of eastern Europe to the shores of North America, they had to cross no less than eleven time zones through rivers, swamps, plains, forests, mountains, and travel over the sea. The land crossing from metropolitan Russia to its isolated outpost on Asia's Pacific coast, a small port town called Okhotsk (later replaced by an almost equally unsuitable port of Aian), required extensive river and portage travel as well traversing as a challenging mountain overpass. To appreciate fully the difficulty of this geographical obstacle course, we must recall that to get to the Pacific Ocean these Russians had to cross the steep mountains east of the Lena River basin because the Amur River valley was closed to Russia until

¹² Nathaniel Knight. *Constructing the Science of Nationality: Ethnography in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia / PhD dissertation.* Columbia University, 1994; incidentally, Knight reports that the charter of the Royal Geographical Society in London was used by Litke as a model for the charter of the Russian Geographical Society.

¹³ See also Nathaniel Knight. *Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855 // Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire.* Ed. by Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998. Pp. 108-41.

¹⁴ Yuri Slezkine. *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North.* Ithaca, 1994. P. 75.

c 1850s. Experienced Yakut (Native Siberian) guides and porters assisted e Russians in crossing these mountains, between Yakutsk and Okhotsk.

Indeed, the Russian crossings of Siberia were greatly assisted by the indigenous Siberians who lived along the way. The diversity among indigenous Siberian cultures is impressive, but what is particularly salient is that some of these cultures, particularly in eastern Siberia, bore striking similarities to the indigenous cultures that the Russians would find on the North American side of the Pacific. Drawing on their Siberian frame of reference when they encountered American Natives, Russians venturing to the Aleutian Islands and on to the North American continent saw commonalities between the indigenous populations of Siberia and North America.¹⁵ From earliest contact on, these Russian observers identified the people of the Aleutian Islands as *Asians rather than Americans*, and perceived the Aleutian Islands (like the Kuriles) as a kind of a cut-off extension of the Siberian Kamchatka peninsula.¹⁶ In a very real sense, in the eighteenth century, for the *sibiriaki* (the Russians of Siberia) the line between the so-called Old World and New World remained blurred and fuzzy.

Depending on the region and the circumstances, the Russians who settled in Siberia lived side by side with many of the Siberian Natives, and Russian men routinely cohabited with and sometimes married indigenous Siberian women. Thus, many Siberian Russians had close relatives in the Siberian Native population. The point to be made here is that, unlike, say, the British in India, the Russians in Siberia, known as *sibiriaki*, and especially those of peasant, common tradesman and cossack background who lived in frontier settings, readily adopted indigenous ways. In some cases, entire settlements of Russians in Siberia became "nativized," adopting indigenous languages and forgetting their own native tongue.¹⁷ The bulk of the Russians who ended up on the Northern Pacific Rim and in Alaska in the eighteenth cen-

⁵ It should be noted that the one thing that Siberian background did not prepare them well for was open-ocean travel. Nonetheless, the Russians who ventured to the Aleutian Islands and Alaska from the Siberian coast had to build vessels right on the coast; the iron nails were carried from as far away as Irkutsk. There was a maverick quality to their island-hopping mode of ocean travel; in that regard, at least, Russian penetration of the Aleutian Islands and North America was anything but a mere extension of the old Siberian frontier.

⁶ I. Veniaminov. *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskago otdela*. 3 vols. St. Petersburg, 1840. Vol. 1, pp. 109-13.

⁷ Willard Sunderland. *Russians into Yakuts? 'Going Native' and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s-1914* // *Slavic Review*. 1996. Vol. 55. No. 4. Pp. 806-25.

tury, although they continued to speak the Russian language and practice Orthodox (sometimes Old Believer) Christianity, resembled the Siberian Natives in their manners and dress to the point that outsiders sometimes had trouble distinguishing the Russians from the Natives. These *sibiriaki* were probably the group of Russians who were *most* isolated from West European influence. Their cultural background and frame of reference – incorporating contemporary Native Siberian influence and vestiges of Mongol and Tatar order – can be described as primarily Eurasian rather than European.

In contrast to the travelers who came overland, the voyagers who came to the Russian Pacific Rim by the high seas from the Russian Empire's "window to Europe" (St. Petersburg) bypassed the legacy of the centuries of Siberian experience. Instead, they traveled from European Russia by way of various European ports, and then invariably made stops in European-run colonies around the world. Space on the circumnavigating ships was limited, and the ambitions of the voyages were lofty. Russia's most able and best connected officers and scientists competed to be selected for these prestigious assignments. Consequently, a good number of the people aboard were highly trained and educated in the most advanced European traditions of the day.

These were people who considered themselves to be engaged in active dialogue with general European culture.¹⁸ The very training of Russia's naval profession, which the future naval officers received as cadets in Kronshtadt, was borrowed wholesale from established European models. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the most promising naval students from Russia were sent at state expense to train in the British navy. The Russian navy actively recruited European specialists, especially the British, to serve on its ships and as teachers in Kronshtadt.¹⁹ The naval officers sailing on the circumnavigation voyages, selected from among the best the Empire had to offer, were joined aboard their ships by some of Russia's most promising scientists. Both the scientists and the officers (and the line between them was often blurred) were well-versed in the sizable European – and particularly French, English, and German – travel literature of the day, and aspired to contribute to it.²⁰ They read avidly the accounts of the most

¹⁸ See F. P. Litke, *Dnevnik, vedennyi vo vremia krugosvetnogo plavaniia na shliupe 'Kamchatka'* // L. A. Shur (ed.). *K beregam Novogo Sveta: Iz neopublikovannykh zapiskov russkikh putshestvennikov nachala XIX veka*. Moscow, 1989. P. 89.

¹⁹ For a contemporary British perspective on Russian naval service see *A Voyage to St. Petersburg in 1814, with remarks on the Imperial Russian Navy*, by a surgeon in the British Navy. London, 1822.

²⁰ For a discussion of the importance of the travel book as a genre in early nineteenth-

famous discoverers, available to them in original languages or in popular Russian translations.²¹ We can also surmise that, as children, they often read the stories of adventure and discovery of popular German writer Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818), available in Russian versions since the 1780s. The scientists who traveled aboard circumnavigating ships on various assignments from St. Petersburg's Imperial Academy of Sciences sought to build on the achievements of their fellow European colleagues. Aspiring to fame and professing devotion to the advancement of universal science and culture, the participants of the Russian round-the-world voyages modeled their travel journals on the journals of previous European voyagers.²² This was the pattern from the beginning; Ivan Kruzenshtern (1770-1846), the commander of the first Russian circumnavigation, modeled his journal on James Cook's, and looked on the famous Englishman as a role model to follow in dealing with South Pacific islanders.²³

As they read the accounts of past voyages and encounters with indigenous peoples throughout the globe, Russian circumnavigators inevitably absorbed the images embodied in that literature. Setting the pattern for future Russian voyages, Kruzenshtern's ship *Nadezhda* had "a selective but large library" of travel accounts. The scientists and the officers aboard spent many hours debating and verifying ethnographic observations of previous (non-Russian) voyagers.²⁴ Along with their superiors in St. Petersburg, these circumnavigators were gripped by the images presented in the works of Rousseau, Voltaire, and other eminent European writers.²⁵ During their years of apprenticeship abroad, the Russian sailors who had served in the British navy sailed on lengthy voyages on British ships and absorbed some of the

century Europe, see Victoria Joan Moessner. Translator's Introduction // Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff. *Remarks and Observations on a Voyage around the World from 1803 to 1807* / Ed. by Richard A. Pierce. 2 vols. Kingston, Ontario, 1993. Vol. 1. Pp. xi-xxx.

²¹ Glynn Barratt. *Russia and the South Pacific*. 3 vols. Vancouver, 1988. Vol. 1. Pp. 20-24.

²² Their desire for fame and glory is beyond dispute; for example, see F. P. Litke. *Dnevnik, vedennyi vo vremia krugosvetnogo plavaniia na shliiupe 'Kamchatka'*. P. 89; see also G. I. Davydov. *Two Voyages to Russian America* / Ed. by Richard A. Pierce, trans. by Colin Bearne. Kingston, Ontario, 1977. Pp. 22-23.

²³ Glynn Barratt. *Russia in Pacific Waters, 1715-1825: A Survey of the Origins of Russia's Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific*. Vancouver, 1981. P. 119.

²⁴ Langsdorff. *Remarks and Observations on a Voyage around the World*. Vol. 1. Pp. 4, 17.

²⁵ See Iu. M. Lotman. *Russo i russkaia kul'tura XVIII veka* // M. P. Alekseev (ed.). *Epokha Prosveshcheniia: Iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh sviazei russkoi literatury*. Leningrad, 1967. Pp. 208-81.

attitudes that the British held toward their subject peoples. As they sailed the world's oceans to and from the Russian Far East and Russian America, the Russian circumnavigators often encountered peoples whom they considered "exotic" and whose cultures differed greatly from those found either in northern North America or Eurasia.²⁶ (That is, those cultures that were encountered by the Russians who traveled to Alaska and the Russian Far East via Siberia.) Their encounters with "exotic" far-away peoples, in the course of which Russia's circumnavigators were able to compare the published accounts of previous travelers of various European ethnicities and allegiances to their own observations, gave them a frame of reference that the Siberian Russians of the Far East and Russian America – in their majority semi-literate and illiterate fur hunters – could not and did not have.

Given their background, it is hardly surprising that the Russians who came to the Pacific Rim from Europe via the south seas were far more conscious than the *sibiriaki* of social and ethnic identities and distinctions. The circumnavigators perceived a wide cultural chasm between themselves and both the *sibiriaki*, about whom they had mostly negative things to say, and the Natives, whom they saw as children in need of guidance. The image of the Natives that these circumnavigators presented in their writings could have different sides – but it invariably bore the mark of condescending paternalism. The Native could be a Noble Savage (emphasis on *Noble*), an underdeveloped human being, or both. Either way, the Native required being taken care of in a modern society. Given this outlook, the gruff Russian *sibiriak* commoner had to be watched carefully lest he abuse the simple Native; the merchant could not be entrusted with such oversight because he is prone to value profit over honor.²⁷ Only an enlightened naval officer – a member of the nobility social estate (*soslovie*) – could be entrusted by the

²⁶ A particularly illustrative example of an "exotic" Native who fascinated the circumnavigators is provided by the Pacific Islander named Kadu, who befriended the captain of a Russian ship and spent some time sailing on his ship around the Pacific: Otto von Kotzebue. *A Voyage of Discovery into the South Sea and Beering's Straits, for the Purpose of Exploring a North-East Passage, Undertaken in the Years 1815-1818, at the Expense of His Highness the Chancellor of the Empire, Count Romanzoff, in the Ship Rurik, Under the Command of the Lieutenant in the Russian Imperial Navy, Otto von Kotzebue*. 3 vols. London, 1821. Vol. 2. Pp. 121-31, 142, 143, 151-55, 161-63, 166, 173, 176, 211, 213. See also Adelbert von Chamisso. *A Voyage Around the World with the Romanzov Expedition in the Years 1815-1818 in the Brig Rurik, Captain Otto von Kotzebue* / Trans. and ed. by Henry Kratz. Honolulu, 1986.

²⁷ On the naval officers' views of the Siberian *promyshlenniki* (fur hunters), see Iu. Davydov. *Golovnin*. Moscow, 1968. P. 89; and G. I. Davydov. *Two Voyages...* Pp. 88-91.

enlightened Russian Crown to make responsible decisions on its behalf. Such was the rationale behind the push of the navy for influence in Russia's overseas colony (Russian America); the modernized nobleman had a duty to look after the naïve Noble Savage and to temper the impulses of the *sibiriak*.

All in all, the Russian naval officers who arrived on the round-the-world voyages expressed benevolent intentions toward the indigenous peoples of Kamchatka and Russian America. They voiced sympathy for the Natives, provided that the Natives knew and kept their place. They expressed respect for the various so-called "natural" adaptations and skills of the indigenous population – such as Aleut expertise in sea otter hunting and Tlingit skill and bravery in warfare. But the point is that they also saw the Natives as a special, distinct "exotic" category of people to be carefully and responsibly integrated into the Russian sphere of influence – and in the process to be studied, pacified, Christianized and, to the extent possible, civilized.²⁸ To be sure, these Russian naval officers did not create an elaborate racialist ideology of the likes of some other European colonizers.²⁹ Yet these naval officers from European Russia were sensitive to racial distinctions in ways that the *sibiriaki* were not.

Consider the attitudes of the two groups to miscegenation. The *sibiriaki* of both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries readily co-habited with Native women, married them and had children with them. These unions suited the Russian-American Company, which encouraged them, because they improved its chances of retaining the Russian workforce in America; after living with Native women for a period of years, Russian men working in Alaska often did not want to leave their wives and children to go back to Eurasia.³⁰ There is no evidence that the older Siberian fur hunters thought in racial terms at all.³¹ Their relationships with the Native women of North America continued a centuries-old pattern of ethnic intermixing throughout Eurasia. Often themselves children of liaisons between Siberian Native mothers and Russian fathers, they saw nothing out of the ordinary in taking American Native women as concubines and wives. Adapting to local conditions and freely borrowing from the Native way of life, these men were not particularly concerned with the mission to civilize the Natives. While the

²⁸ On the naval officers' sense of duty to civilize see V. A. Bil'basov's introduction to *Arkhiv grafov Mordvinovykh*. St. Petersburg, 1902. Vol. 5. P. ix.

²⁹ Bassin. *Imperial Visions...* P. 53.

³⁰ Richard A. Pierce. *Russian and Soviet Eskimo and Indian Policies // Handbook of North American Indians*. Washington, 1988. Vol. 4. P. 122.

³¹ On the attitude of Russians in Siberia to race, see John J. Stephan. *The Russian Far East: A History*. Stanford, California, 1994. P. 25.

sibiriaki had their half-Native children baptized as Orthodox Christians, they just as often consulted Siberian and North American shamans about their health. Unselfconscious cultural syncretism characterized their way of life and attitude to the Other.

It was only after the initiation of the circumnavigation voyages that the children produced by the unions between Russians and North American Natives came to be labeled as a separate group; this new social category came to be known as *kreoly* (Creoles). A leading participant of the first round-the-world voyage, Nikolai Rezanov (1764-1807), Emperor Alexander I's emissary to Japan and the highest ranking official ever to visit Russian America, is the first on record (in 1805) to use the term *kreol*, albeit informally.³² The second charter of the Russian-American Company, enacted in 1821 but negotiated throughout the second half of the 1810s, made the Creoles into a de facto separate social estate and formalized their status as members of a distinct group of people who were neither fully Russian nor fully Native.³³ The creation of the Creole category was a local colonial adaptation; it had no precedent elsewhere in the Russian Empire. In Siberia legitimate children of mixed Russian and indigenous parentage were classified as Russians, provided their mothers (the Siberian indigenous population in these marital unions was almost invariably represented by the female) converted to Orthodoxy and the children were baptized.³⁴ The exact rationale behind the formal introduction of the Creole category in Russian America (and there only) remains a mystery, but it is easy to see that it served a myriad of colonial interests: among them was keeping Russian workers from leaving the colony and producing a naturally growing colonial population with loyalties to the Russian colonizers and kin connections to the indigenous people.³⁵

Why was the word *kreol*, a fresh introduction into the Russian language, chosen to describe and label this group? The origin of this choice is not documented, although the word itself almost certainly entered the colonial

³² *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii* (in Moscow). Fond 341. Opis' 888. Delo 277. Ll. 1-3.

³³ In terms of social standing, rights and obligations, the estate (*soslovie*) in the Russian Empire that most closely resembled the Creole estate in Russian America was the *meshchanstvo*. Broadly defined, the *meshchanstvo* estate consisted of relatively poor town dwellers who did not qualify for membership in other estates.

³⁴ Sergei A. Kostlivtsov. *Otchet po obozreniiu Rossiisko-Amerikanskikh kolonii, proizvedennomu po raspriazheniiu Gospodina Ministra Finansov*. St. Petersburg, 1861. Pp. 22-23.

³⁵ Russian-American Company rules prohibited the removal of Creole children from Russian America to Eurasia by the fathers.

Russian vocabulary from the Spanish [*criollo*] or, less plausibly, the Portuguese. Prior to 1805, Russian ships did not travel from Alaska to Spanish or Portuguese colonies. The two ships of the first circumnavigation voyage stopped in the Canary Islands and Brazil en route to the Pacific; Rezanov also made an eventful side trip to California. Contacts between California and Russian America began in 1805 – after the first round-the-world voyage reached America – and increased after 1812, when the Russians established Fort Ross in northern California. The ships involved in later circumnavigation voyages also made frequent stops in various ports of Portuguese and Spanish America (as well as the Philippines, Africa, Australia and elsewhere). Russian scholars and naval officers who went ashore routinely engaged in all kinds of observations and ethnographic descriptions. They sought out the company and writings of other Europeans to compare notes with them.³⁶ They encountered the term “Creole” over and over. The term had different meanings in different settings; in the Russian American context it acquired a meaning that was close but not identical to the meaning it had in the practice of Spanish California. What is salient is that the adoption of the term *kreol* in nineteenth-century Russian America, and the invention of the social category for which it stood, signaled a more self-conscious awareness on the part of the Russians of the difference between themselves and the Natives.

Once the category was defined, it was commented upon. Russian elites passed various judgments on the Creoles as a group, both in a social and a racial sense. Although there were some exceptions,³⁷ on the whole, predictably from the point of view of the discourse on the mixing of the races then prevalent in European thought, the Russian circumnavigators saw the emergence of this group as regrettable, if perhaps unavoidable.³⁸ These Rus-

³⁶ The German-born naturalist Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff (Grigori Ivanovich Langsdorf), a participant in the first voyage who became Russia's consul in Brazil, routinely welcomed the Russian circumnavigators at his Brazilian estate, where they socialized with European scientists, local notables, and foreign dignitaries. When Ferdinand Petrovich Wrangel' (an officer in the Russian navy and former governor of Russian America who was also known by his Baltic German title and name Baron Ferdinand von Wrangell) went on an official negotiating mission to Mexico, he consulted German and English literary sources, and drew especially on the advice of German diplomats and other members of the “German colony” in Mexico (L. A. Shur (ed.). *K beregam Novogo Sveta*. P. 183).

³⁷ Fedor P. Litke. *A Voyage around the World 1826-1829* / Trans. by Renee Marshall. Kingston, Ontario, 1987. Pp. 74-75.

³⁸ The Canadian ethnohistorian Jennifer S. H. Brown notes a similar pattern of differentiation and stereotyping by the officials of Hudson's Bay Company of its *métis* (half-

sians roundly lamented the decline of the “pure” Native population. They saw the Natives as better hunters and in general as more suitable inhabitants of Russian America than the Creoles. These attitudes toward the Creoles persisted and even increased despite the fact that some of them achieved relatively high social status within Russian America and beyond. A few Creoles even became naval cadets, went to train in Kronshtadt, and came back to Russian America to serve on Russian-American Company ships. Be that as it may, *as a group* the Creoles, along with the Natives, were perceived by Europeanized Russians through a racialized prism. More and more stereotypes were attached to the Creoles as the century went on. In their urge to define and organize, the circumnavigators created the Creole group, only to lament its existence later.³⁹

It is of course true that European models of viewing the indigenous population had been important from before the time before the Russian incursion into Kamchatka, the Aleutian Islands, and Alaska. Throughout the eighteenth century, a number of scientists and naval officers sent across Siberia from St. Petersburg took part in several expeditions, government-sponsored and private, to Alaska from the Siberian coast.⁴⁰ Their voices were recorded and heard. But they were far outnumbered by the *sibiriaki*. For well over half a century, between the Bering-Chirikov voyages and the first round-the-world voyages, the few Europe-oriented Russians who made it to the Northern Pacific Rim were primarily observers; it was the Siberian merchants and fur hunters who were the actors. The tide turned in the nineteenth century.

In Russia's overseas North American “laboratory,” the *sibiriaki* declined in real numbers as well as influence. The opening of the trans-oceanic maritime route between St. Petersburg and the Russian Pacific Rim marked a shift in how Russia's colony in North America was populated. Their service with the Russian-American Company limited by imperial policy to a fixed number of years, a sizable proportion of Russian men – and there were virtually no Russian women – who were hired by the Russian-American Com-

white/half-Native American) workforce: Jennifer S. H. Brown. *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*. Vancouver, 1980. Pp. 206-07.

³⁹ See Pavel N. Golovin. *Civil and Savage Encounters: The Worldly Travel Letters of an Imperial Russian Navy Officer, 1860-1861* / Trans. by Basil Dmytryshyn and E. A. P. Crownhart-Vaughan. Portland, 1983. Pp. 115-17.

⁴⁰ Aside from Bering and Chirikov's expeditions (1725-1730; 1733-1741), the government sponsored two other large-scale voyages to the region: the first (1764-1769) was led by Petr Krenitsyn and Mikhail Levashev; the second (1785-1792) by Joseph Billings and Gavriil Sarychev.

pany to work in America circulated back to Eurasia within a period of several years. Because of this policy, the general inaccessibility of the region, and other factors, the Russian population of Alaska remained small; at no time prior to the sale of Alaska to the United States did it exceed seven hundred people. The opening of the circumnavigation route, coupled with reforms in the Russian-American Company's pay structure that prompted the *sibiriaki* to seek their fortunes in other areas, meant that more and more of the workforce from Eurasia would come to Alaska directly from European Russia. It should be added that the term "Russian population" in the records of the Russian-American Company was never limited to ethnic Russians; *rossiane* (inhabitants of Russia) rather than *russkie* (ethnic Russians) was the more accurate term used to apply to these people.⁴¹ The Russian Empire was multiethnic, and that diversity was reflected in the ethnic composition of the workforce recruited by the Russian-American Company. By the 1830s, the Finns, along with a lesser, but no less influential, number of Baltic Germans, would form a substantial minority in Russian America – up to a third of the "Russian" population according to one estimate – prompting the Russian-American Company to invest in the building of a Lutheran Church in Novo-Arkhangel'sk. These Finns, Baltic Germans and European ethnic Russians recruited on the shores of the Baltic were in effect gradually replacing the *sibiriaki*, many of whom were leaving Alaska to return to Siberia, and indigenous Siberian Natives, who had been involved particularly in the earlier voyages to the Aleutian Islands.⁴²

Just as the *sibiriaki* were being replaced on the ground in Alaska, merchants were losing influence in the headquarters of the Russian-American Company.⁴³ The moving of the Company's headquarters from Irkutsk to St. Petersburg in 1800 had more than symbolic significance. In 1802, prominent St. Petersburg nobles, including Emperor Alexander I and his immediate family, began to buy shares in the Russian-American Company, eroding merchant influence within it, and enhancing that of the nobility.⁴⁴ This was

⁴¹ Veniaminov. *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskago otdela*. Vol. I. P. vii.

⁴² Svetlana Grigor'evna Fedorova's *Russkoe naselenie Aliaski i Kalifornii*. Moscow, 1971. This is the most comprehensive study of the Russian population of Alaska. See also Svetlana G. Fedorova. *Ethnic Processes in Russian America*. Anchorage, 1975.

⁴³ On the inability of the merchant estate of the Russian Empire to defend its interests, see Alfred J. Rieber. *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia*. Chapel Hill, 1982. Pp. xxii, 23-24.

⁴⁴ Among those purchasing shares in the spring of 1802 were Emperor Alexander I, Dowager Empress Mariia Fedorovna, and statesmen N. P. Rumiantsev, N. S. Mordvinov, and I. A. Vedemeier (Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov. *The Beginnings of Russian-American*

the climate in which the Russian navy could stake its claim for increased influence in America. The status-conscious officers of the navy, who belonged to the nobility social estate, felt resentful that members of a less prestigious merchant estate were permitted to run Russia's sole overseas colony. As an *overseas* colony, and especially one that was initially "discovered" and claimed for Russia by officers of the navy, mainly by Vitus Bering and Aleksei Il'ich Chirikov in 1741, Alaska appeared to these men to be within the natural domain of their institution. The fact that the British (Cook, Vancouver) and the French (La Perouse) succeeded in sailing to the North Pacific from Europe long before the Russians could not but wound the Russian naval officers' institutional pride. Appealing to the need to uphold Russia's prestige, they were determined to make their mark in the Pacific. Their vigorous behind-the-scenes campaign in St. Petersburg produced results in the late 1810s, as they won a major concession that became part of the second charter granted to the Russian-American Company by the emperor.⁴⁵ From 1818 on, after the forced retirement of merchant-estate member Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov,⁴⁶ every single "chief manager" (*glavnyi pravitel'*, in effect governor)⁴⁷ of Russian America was to be an officer of Russia's Imperial Navy appointed directly from St. Petersburg. This meant that from that time until the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, the highest-ranking official in Alaska would always be a nobleman with Europeanized education and naval training.

However, Russian America did not prove to be the coveted prize that the Russian navy imagined it would be. Only a small share for the dashed hopes can be ascribed to the general conservatism of Nicholas I's government and

Relations, 1775-1815 / Trans. Elena Levin. Cambridge, Mass., 1975. P. 169).

⁴⁵ On the ambitions of the navy to gain influence in running Russia's American colony, see Vasilii M. Golovnin. *Materialy dlia istorii russkikh zaselenii po beregam Vostochnago okeana // Prilozhenie k Morskomu Sborniku*. St. Petersburg, 1861. No. 1; M. S. Al'perovich. *Rossia i Novyi Svet (posledniaia chast' XVIII veka)*. Moscow, 1993; and Glynn Barratt. *Russia in Pacific Waters, 1715-1825*. P. 186.

⁴⁶ Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov (1746-1819) was the first and longest-serving *glavnyi pravitel'* of the Russian-American Company (1799-1818). He was born in the town of Kargopol' in north European Russia, but had extensive experience in Siberia from 1780 on, prior to setting off for America from the Siberian port of Okhotsk in 1790. Between 1790 and 1799, he served as the chief manager of the Shelikhov-Golikov Company, which had been the main commercial predecessor of the Russian-American Company.

⁴⁷ The chief manager of the Russian-American Company was the highest-ranking official and de facto governor of Russian America. He was subservient to the Company's headquarters located in St. Petersburg. From its founding, the Russian-American Company was placed under the protection (*pokrovitel'stvo*) of the Emperor.

its marked lack of enthusiasm for expensive and potentially daring naval initiatives in the Pacific, and that only after 1825. The pressures from the United States, fortified by the adoption of the Monroe Doctrine, and the formidable and seemingly omnipresent British Empire formed a more important factor in the disappointment. But some of the responsibility rests squarely with the Russian navy itself. The St. Petersburg Admiralty had overreached and miscalculated. It would have had difficulties with fulfilling a mission that its more ambitious boosters had in mind for it on the Pacific even under the best circumstances – and circumstances were nowhere near optimal. The lengthy trans-oceanic voyages from St. Petersburg to Novo-Arkhangel'sk were risky and expensive; economically, it made more sense for the Russians in Alaska to buy provisions and supplies from British and American traders.⁴⁸ Episodes of political instability in Europe and beyond exposed Russian ships to potential detention and confiscation. The prohibition on trading with foreigners, advocated by naval interests and enforced in Russian American waters in the early 1820s, proved an unmitigated disaster for the colony, which was exposed to hunger, privation, and a growing threat from local Indians, who were incensed at the Russians for taking away their opportunity to trade with British and the American ships.⁴⁹ To make matters worse for the navy, the fur trade of Alaska was in general decline.

Even more to the point, for the navy, and for official St. Petersburg in general, the lure of Alaska in the first place was as a base for trading with other countries, especially China and Japan. The desire to increase and augment Russian trade with the Far East, and to take it out of the hands of foreign traders, motivated the vision of Captain Kruzenshtern when he drew up the project for Russia's first circumnavigation.⁵⁰ But the Chinese and the Japanese remained firmly opposed to opening up their ports to Russian ships.⁵¹ The Russian navy was hardly a match for the British navy with

⁴⁸ See Gibson. *Imperial Russia in Frontier America*. Pp. 153-73, 199-211.

⁴⁹ A. V. Grinev. *Indeitsy tinkity v period Russkoi Ameriki*. Novosibirsk, 1991. Pp. 143-144.

⁵⁰ A. J. Krusenstern. *Voyage round the world, in the years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806, by order of His Imperial Majesty Alexander the First, on board the ships Nadezhda and Neva, under the command of Captain A. J. von Krusenstern*. 2 vols. London, 1813. Vol. 1, pp. xx-xxix; V.M. Nasetskii. *Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenshtern*. Moscow, 1988. Pp. 17, 24.

⁵¹ The Russians of course also traded with the Chinese at the border post market in Kiakhta. But the restrictions imposed on that trade by Chinese officials irked the Russians and made them pine for an opening of Chinese ports to Russian ships. Access to Chinese

which the Admiralty's boosters were setting it up to compete. Geographically, Russia simply lacked the access to the open sea that a strong navy required. Kruzenshtern, for one, realized the Russian navy's shortcomings and proposed the creation of an ambitious merchant marine, but his project was not adopted.⁵² With feeble and isolated presence on the Pacific coast of Eurasia – the woefully inadequate ports of Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, closed for much of the year by ice floes – the Russian navy did not have the resources to enforce Russia's imperial will. All in all, the navy found its victory for control of Russian America a mixed blessing at best. The exaggerated early nineteenth-century visions of turning the Pacific Ocean into a Russian "lake" administered by Russia's navy proved a mirage.

Nevertheless, Russian America under naval rule represents an important conceptual step for Russian imperialism and colonialism. Russia's naval officers began to reshape Alaska in the image of a colony on the Western model (as opposed to viewing and treating it as just an extension of the Siberian frontier). This reshaping – or re-conceptualization of the image of Russian America – was initiated shortly before the first circumnavigation voyage left St. Petersburg (and in anticipation of that voyage and later ones to come), when in 1799 the Russian-American Company was formed to run the fur trade of Russian America and, it was hoped by Russian officials, conduct widespread maritime trade with China and Japan for the benefit of Russia. Tellingly, the charter of the Russian-American Company was modeled on the charters of Britain's East India Company and Hudson's Bay Company.⁵³ Even the name "Russian-American Company" (*Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia kompaniia*) betrayed the intent of the founders to emulate British example. Like Britain's far larger East India Company, Russian American Company was designed to play a "double role" as business enterprise and state organization.⁵⁴ Organized with economic efficiency in mind to exploit the resources and the population of an overseas colony, it was one of the most modern apparatuses in the Russian Empire.

In contrast to frontier Siberia, Russian state presence on the shores of North America after 1818 was not represented by the *voevody* and the *cosacks*, but by naval officers and professional sailors. It is undeniable that

⁵¹ ports was denied to Russian ships until after the Opium Wars; Russian-American Company ships could then become involved in the port trade on a limited basis.

⁵² Nasetskii. *Kruzenshtern*... Pp. 22-23.

⁵³ Fedorova. *Russkoe naselenie Aliaski i Kalifornii*... P. 123.

⁵⁴ On the East India Company's "double role" see: Jurgen Osterhammel. *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. P. 32.

conducting round-the-world voyages required an impressive degree of scientific and organizational expertise. Consequently, in contrast to the Siberian *voevody* of earlier centuries, the naval officers, who were to preside over Russian affairs in Alaska from 1818, represented elements of the most modernized (and modernizing) elite of the Russian Empire. In further contrast, all indications are that the naval officers who served as governors of Russian America could not be faulted for the kind of corruption that made the *voevody* infamous. Naval officers ardently sought to make life in the colony more orderly. (One of them even wanted to require all the residents of Novo-Arkhangel'sk to wear military uniforms.)⁵⁵ Their quest for order and precision led them to study the Natives in detail. They sought to treat the Natives – and the newly-defined Creoles – more carefully, humanely, and efficiently than did their merchant and fur trader predecessors, and in the process developed a more humanitarian – and a more paternalistic – regime.

The initiation of round-the-world voyages sped up the modernization of Russian American administration, and brought a more differentiated structure to the social relations to the colony. It was only after the round-the-world voyages, that Alaska became a true “laboratory” where Russian imperial planners could experiment with Western-style colonial approaches.⁵⁶ Russian America of the early nineteenth century stands as the one part of the Russian Empire where, because of the Russian-American Company's active imitation of colonial techniques employed in other European colonies, theoretical models based on common European colonial experience can yield unexpectedly insightful comparative results.⁵⁷ But the impact of Russia's round-the-world voyages was far broader. Wide exposure to European ideas about the Other and visits to European-run colonies in South America, Africa, Australia and elsewhere around the globe made a pronounced impres-

⁵⁵ V. M. Golovnin. *Around the World on the Kamchatka, 1817-1819* / Trans., with an Introduction and Notes, by Ella Lury Wiswell; foreword by John J. Stephan. Honolulu, 1979. Pp. 130-31.

⁵⁶ For use of the term “imperial laboratory” see S. Frederick Starr. *Tsarist Government: The Imperial Dimension* // Jeremy R. Azrael (ed.). *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*. Praeger, 1978. P. 30.

⁵⁷ On the general inapplicability of Western theoretical models to the Russian Empire proper, see Andreas Kappeler. *Rossia-mnogonatsional'naia imperiia: Vozniknovenie, istoriia, raspad*. Moscow, 1997. P. 12. For a recent valiant attempt to theorize on Russian America, see A. V. Grinev. *Tuzemtsy Aliaski, russkie promyshlenniki i Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia kompaniia: Sistema ekonomicheskikh otnoshenii* // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2000. No. 3. Pp. 74-88.

sion on Russian circumnavigators. As the Russian viewers of the Natives changed, so did the views. The implications of these changes for the evolution of the imperial consciousness of Russian elites give scholars many avenues for future exploration.