

Title: Khlebnikov's Unpublished Notes on Pharmacology

Author(s): By Kirill Khlebnikov

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Khlebnikov's Unpublished Notes on Pharmacology

Introduction

The Russian expansion into North America, which began in 1741 with the discovery of Alaska by navigators Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikov, was challenging for a number of reasons, especially by the lack of adequate healthcare services at the time. Numerous communicable diseases such as measles, smallpox, and a plethora of sexually transmitted diseases, substantially decreased the life expectancy of early settlers. Native American cultures, which were shielded from European diseases for thousands of years, were unable to cure strange maladies using traditional herbal medicine.

The understanding of medicinal best practices among settlers in Russian America was practically non-existent. For over two decades all those in service to the Russian American Company used the services of ship doctors who came from the Russian Empire to the North American shores about once a year.

The colony of Fort Ross, built on the ancient site of Kashia Pomo settlement in California was no exception. Yet, despite the lack of standardized healthcare service, settlers of Fort Ross, in comparison to other RAC outposts, thrived in the medical field and in 1837 successfully defeated a major smallpox outbreak by providing preventative vaccination against highly contagious and fatal variola virus to all members of the community, including the Kashia Pomo.

Exploring the history of healthcare services at Fort Ross and in Russian America, researcher Igor Polishchuk and Volgda historian Dr. Yuliya Egorova stumbled upon unpublished "Notes on Pharmacology" by Kirill Khlebnikov, a loyal Company employee and author of numerous works on Russian conquest of the new world. These notes, dated 1820, when Khlebnikov was most active in California, resemble a systematic study of medicine and medical practices that Khlebnnikov thought should be used to improve the lives of the settlers. The handwritten notes rediscovered in the State Archive of Perm Kray, Russia show that the explorer was seeking to obtain all possible medicinal knowledge from a variety of sources to address the medical concerns of Russian America. So far, Egorova and Polishchuk have managed to decipher some of the text.

We invite all those interested in healthcare of Russian America to review the scans of the archival documents presented to a wider public for the first time in this paper.

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