



Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Workshop, 10-12 March 2021

Anthropology of Siberia in the 19th and 20th centuries: Re-assessing the contribution of a 'marginal' field

Organisers: D. Funk, J.O. Habeck, V. Vaté

Nearly twenty years have passed since anthropologists from different countries gathered together at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, to discuss an intriguing question: "Who owns Siberian ethnography?" (Gray, Vakhtin, and Schweitzer 2003). With a few notable exceptions, access to Siberia had been restricted to Russian ethnographers since the 1930s. Then, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these restrictions were lifted. Consequently, in the 1990s and the 2000s, as Russian researchers continued their work, there was an unprecedented boom internationally of ethnographic research in Siberia, supported by the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, the Siberian Studies Centre of the Max Planck Institute, the Department of Anthropology of Aberdeen University, the Centre d'Études Mongoles et Sibériennes in Paris, and the Hungarian Academy of Science, among others.

More recently, new difficulties have arisen, restricting access to the field and to funding – difficulties which may have discouraged some ethnographers from attempting to do fieldwork in Siberia. At the same time, however, references to Siberia have increased in the anthropological literature, thus contributing to the rediscovery of the field in a wider sense. Some theoretical developments in our discipline have been strongly influenced by empirical data from Siberia (evolutionary thought being a prominent example but not the only one). Looking at the range of "specifically Siberian" topics that have influenced general anthropology in different periods, we find that some themes continuously have attracted attention, e.g., shamanism and human-environment or human-animal interaction. Other research topics have appeared on the screen in recent years: e.g., ontology, extractive industries, and climate change. But these newer themes may reflect shifts and modifications of earlier ones.

This workshop is devoted to the history of anthropological engagement with Siberia, with particular focus on the 19th and 20th centuries (scientific developments in 18th century have previously been given considerable attention by historians and anthropologists). Often seen as a "province" of ethnographic research, this vast region has a complex and contested history in anthropological discourse. Several centuries of ethnographic fieldwork in Siberia have seen significant shifts of research interests and theoretical ambitions. These need to be understood in terms of the Russian colonization of Siberia, relations among traders, settlers, administrators, and indigenous peoples, changing political and institutional conditions of ethnographic research, and broader developments in anthropological science, both in Russia and internationally. The workshop will also ask about conspicuous absences in the ethnographic study of Siberia: why is it that certain themes, topics, and tropes have been emphasized, while others have been neglected? Workshop participants are called on to examine these diverse aspects of the history of the anthropology of Siberia.

Contributions may address one or any combination of the following issues:

- Actors, motivations, theories, themes, topics and tropes of Siberianist ethnography
- Contributions of Siberianist anthropology to the theoretical advancement of general anthropology
- Recent trends in the reception of pre-Soviet and Soviet ethnographies
- Transnational moments in the anthropology of Siberia

- The preconditions of and the changing scope for cooperation of Russian, external, and indigenous researchers
- Anthropology and the colonial encounter in Siberia
- Administration, ethnography and categories of indigeneity
- Regional and ethnic specificities of Siberian ethnography
- Political contexts, institutional opportunities and constraints of research funding, access to the “field” and research logistics in Siberia
- Siberianist contributions to the history of domestication or the study of human-animal relations
- Why some themes, topics, and tropes are neglected in Siberianist anthropology

The conference will lead to the publication of an edited volume in the book series *Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia*. To date, no edited volume has been devoted to such a comprehensive approach to the history of the anthropology of Siberia. The workshop and the resulting publication will represent a novel attempt to put in perspective various conditions, traditions and innovations in the anthropological study of Siberia and to locate Siberian research within its broader historical and disciplinary context.

The conference will be held in English; no translation will be provided. Workshop participants will be invited by the organisers.

Convenors:

D. Funk, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAS

J.O. Habeck, University of Hamburg,

V. Vaté, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris