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From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment: Discourse, Territory, and Settler Colonialism in Siberia, 1670-1740

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FROM ORTHODOXY TO ENLIGHTENMENT: DISCOURSE, TERRITORY, AND
SETTLER COLONIALISM IN SIBERIA, 1670–1740

by

Jonathan Adsit

A Thesis Submitted in
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ABSTRACT

FROM ORTHODOXY TO ENLIGHTENMENT: DISCOURSE, TERRITORY, AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN SIBERIA, 1670–1740

by

Jonathan Adsit

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022
Under the Supervision of Professor Anne Bonds, PhD

Though many scholars argue that settler colonialism did not firmly come into practice until the late 18th century in Russia, through an analysis of both 17th century historical chronicle narratives and 18th century explorer accounts, I argue that settler colonial discourses and knowledges are already present, laying the groundwork for later settler practices. In the 17th century, chronicle narratives portrayed Siberian territory as a darkened wasteland turned radiant paradise by the presence of Russian Christians and the expulsion of indigenous non-Christians. In the 18th century, discourse changed to produce the increasing view of Siberia as an object of knowledge, great potential, and riches to be extracted and utilized for the state as naturalists and explorers began to describe Siberia in their accounts. Maps, too, produce this shift in knowledge as Russian maps change from traditional and river-oriented in the late 1600s to mathematical and ‘rational’ western mapping by the 1730s. In addition, recent scholarship on settler colonialism has provided greater nuance and context to settler colonies and their character, supporting the conclusion that some aspects of Russian colonialism from 1670-1740 were indeed settler colonial in nature, though unlike more intense western versions. Through discourse analysis of historic chronicles of the late 17th century and traveler accounts of the early 18th century, I argue that settler colonial discourses were present in narratives about Siberian territory since the 17th century and are governed by the epistemes that allowed these discourses to flourish.

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SDG

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1703, upon the banks of the Neva River—which connects the Baltic Sea to Lake Ladoga in what is now Russia—lay a swamp. In less than 10 years, it would become the capital of the Russian empire—St. Petersburg. The construction of and the ensuing tumultuous history of St. Petersburg is an eloquent metaphor for an enlightened Russian state, increasingly striving toward modernity, if though an at times gilded one. This modernization and modification of the natural environment was mirrored in the previous century throughout much of Siberia as Russian merchants constructed trading outposts and sought furs in the newly conquered realm (Miles, 2018). Modernization and enlightenment provided new ways of knowing about territory and increasingly viewed Siberia as an unused space that was the site of much extractive potential, both economically and politically. As such, discourse about Siberia evolved in step with this new knowledge. In about a century and a half, Muscovy went from a relatively ethnically homogenous principality and the last bastion of ‘true Orthodox Christianity’ on earth to a multiethnic empire in which Orthodox Christians feared becoming a minority (Kivelson, 2006; Sunderland, 2007).

For many years, Eastern Europe in general and Muscovy in particular had served western Europe¹ as a point of comparison, a barbarous image that helped define the civility and progress of the west (Dirks, 1992; Jeyifo, 1990; Said, 1978; Serequeberhan, 2006). Russia was viewed as despotic, eternally backward, and ‘Asiatic.’² However, after the beginning of the 18th century, the Romanov dynasty would seek closer ties with Europe, emulating and seeking to become

¹ As Haraway (1989) writes “Avoidance of the convention of capitalizing ‘the west’ and ‘western’ is to disrupt the ideological stance that the West is One, even while sometimes indulging in that fiction in order to characterize lines of force in powerful story fields” (p. 116).

² The Asiatic stereotype is one that emphasized supposed Asian exociticism, barbarity, large populations, to portray Asian peoples as a threat to western civilization, and it was particularly utilized by nativist groups during attempted Asian immigration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century. It has become an othering discourse and portrays Asian peoples as hostile toward western civilization, sneaky, and corrupting.

more enlightened and powerful like their peers (Miles, 2018). This ‘becoming imperial’ is one facet of early modern Russia that this project seeks to address: how did a modest Eastern European principality that was viewed as lagging and backward rationalize and politically organize the territorial conquest of Siberia effectively to become the largest empire in the world for hundreds of years? What discursive patterns accompanied the integration of these territories? My analysis of these texts is grounded in the following research questions:

1. What were the prevailing discourses surrounding the Russian empire’s expansion into Siberia in the 17th Century? How are they similar or different from 18th century Petrine discourses about Siberian territory in the Russian empire?³
2. How do maps of the time act as discourse and produce these differences in knowledge of these territories?
3. How does analysis of the rationalities and logics of the Russian empire’s territorial expansion challenge and contribute to theories of settler colonialism?

It is this period, the 17th and 18th centuries, that this project seeks to analyze and understand: the becoming-empire of Russia and the different logics that sustained territorial control in Siberia. Scholars of Russian history have identified the immense influence of Orthodoxy on not just quotidian life (Kivelson and Green, 2003) but also the conquest of Siberia. Following the infamous Great Schism and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Orthodox Christians in Russia thought of themselves as the last true heirs to Christendom in an era of darkness before Christ’s return. As Kivelson and Suny write,

“Scribes and scholars assembled vast compilations of religious and historical writings, amassing thousands of manuscript pages . . . Much of this cultural production was

³ Petrine refers to the reign of Peter the Great, from 1696 when he became sole ruler to his death in 1725.

designed to convey the essentials of a newly evolving political-theological theory about the role of the tsar in an eschatological narrative of Russia's role in divine history. The tsar was envisioned as divinely selected emissary, entrusted with the weighty responsibility of ruling with sternness and mercy and leading his Orthodox Christian people to salvation at the End Times.” (p. 47)

To Russians at the time, Siberia was primarily seen and depicted as a ‘sacred space’ and even a ‘New Eden’ for the flourishing of Orthodox Christians and the holy Russian empire to fill with God’s glory (Kivelson, 2006). However, Siberia was not uninhabited, nor was it always part of Russia. There were hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples and citizens of the remnants of Mongol khanates living in Siberia. East of the Ural Mountains was one such khanate until 1581, the Khanate of Sibir, a remnant of the Mongol conquests.⁴ Much of its population was made up of indigenous Siberians who paid tribute to the Turko-Mongol elite—often called Siberian Tatars—who resided in larger cities while the indigenous Siberians resided in the forests where they gathered tribute for the elite.⁵ A major function of the conquest of Siberia was to displace the Turko-Mongol elite such that Russia could replace them and rule over the indigenous peoples, gathering tribute instead for them (Armstrong, 1975), however, this will be further discussed in Chapter 3. After the initial conquest of Siberia and throughout much of the 17th century, churches were constructed, settlements begun—and most importantly—maps and knowledge began to be produced about this new territory. Despite this glorifying narrative, organized population resettlement to Siberia was limited—this indicates a point of contradiction that leaves readers suspicious. If Siberia was to be a land filled with Christians, then why was so

⁴ Centered around what is now Tobolsk in Russia, the Khanate of Sibir was the most geographically northern Islamic kingdom in history. Tatars tended to be of the Muslim faith, while indigenous peoples followed their own customs.

⁵ The Tatars were a Turkic people, many of which descended from the Mongols and their conquests throughout Asia. In a sense, they could be considered the original colonizers of North Asia, but they also significantly mixed and interacted with indigenous peoples in Siberia. This question of Tatar indigeneity lies outside the scope of the project, but for those who wish to pursue this line of inquiry further, it may prove a useful addition and consideration to the field of Russian settler colonialism. If one considers the Tatars indigenous, one could make the argument that Russian policy in Siberia was an example of indigenous extermination.

little Christian settlement allowed? And further, why were indigenous peoples rarely converted to Christianity?⁶ In discourse, and perhaps discourse only, Siberia was a land radiated by God's glory. The answers to these preceding questions lie in the fact that this mythical discourse of a Siberian Orthodox Christendom was just that.⁷ As Foucault (1966) writes in *The Order of Things*, "The heritage of Antiquity, like nature itself, is a vast space requiring interpretation; in both cases there are signs to be discovered and then, little by little, made to speak" (p. 34). In this manner, those who produced knowledge about Siberia—priests, merchants, hunters—in their writings helped to produce *reality* in Siberia by relating what Siberia was 'objectively' like to the Russian state, the state then enacting policies that were to affect and change Siberia based on those discourses. In the deployment of a discourse on Siberia informed by an Orthodox Christian logic, categories and classifications aligned with a religious worldview were commonplace and regarded as truth. In addition, the discourse of Siberia as a land of God's glory is strange in that indigenous peoples were in actuality rarely converted at this time. Conversion to Christianity meant citizenship and one could no longer work in the exploitative fur tribute system if one was a Christian. Thus, conversion to Christianity at this time was a gate to respectability and upward mobility, but it was an exclusive status—one that if the Russian state granted to indigenous peoples, it would undermine the fur tribute system significantly as those who were Christians were reserved for better treatment. Thus, the discourse of Christianization is one that existed largely in theory and as a rationalization; it did not reflect the spatial reality of indigenous religious practice in Siberia as largely non-Christian.

⁶ In the earlier texts analyzed, indigenous peoples and Siberian Tatars are very often referred to as 'pagans.' Any use of that word in this project is referring back to its use in these texts rather than reflective of the author's voice. In many contexts it is used pejoratively and alongside descriptions of supposed indigenous foolishness, simplicity, or lack of morality. Other times, however, it is used as a simple descriptor.

⁷ In Russian, *khristianskii mir*.

However, around the turn of the 18th century and as Peter the Great ascended the throne, discourse on Siberia began to change; what was regarded as true knowledge of Siberian territory began to change into something more enlightened, rational, and exploratory (Sunderland, 2007). With Peter's establishment of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1724, naturalists and explorers were imported into Russia from western Europe, both to teach at the university and to journey through Siberian territory, documenting and classifying what would become useful information for the tsar, creating a new and separate regime of knowledge that would become regarded as truth (Miles, 2018). Because of this greater knowledge, the state would govern Siberia in an increasingly calculated and strategic manner, all for the purpose of benefiting and maximizing the potential of the Russian state and its acquisition of resources and populations, a concerted biopolitics not previously present in the territory (Remnev, 2007; Sunderland, 2007; Werth, 2007). This project seeks to bring these discourses to light by analyzing key texts on Siberian territory produced in the time period 1670 to 1740, such that these evolutions in discourse can be shown.

Settler Colonialism in Early Modern Russia

Scholars (Cavanagh, 2020; Choi, 2020, Crow, 2020; Howe, 2020; Veracini, 2014; Veracini, 2020; Wolfe, 2006) have argued that a few main characteristics define settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination. Settler colonialism is a topic that spans multiple fields, including geography, history, sociology, and indigenous studies. Geographers like Hugill (2017), Dorries et al (2019), and McClintock (2018) have investigated how settler colonialism functions in an urban city and facilitates the production of settler spaces and settler colonial cities as distinct urban spaces. In the case of Russian colonialism, some aspects of traditional

approaches toward settler colonialism may not apply, however, one goal of this project is to draw attention to non-western instances of settler colonialism as well as the different conditions and characteristics produced by these situations. Authors agree that a focus on the theft of indigenous land is one of the primary characteristics of settler colonialism, whereas in classical colonialism, resource extraction and labor exploitation are the main characteristics. In addition to a focus on indigenous land, settler colonialism is defined by a number of other distinctive qualities including 1) settler permanence; 2) inwardly-oriented political economy; 3) discourses of indigenous land being empty; and 4) lack of decolonization. Firstly, settlers intend to stay on their newly acquired territory permanently (Veracini, 2014, p. 52-53). Often, state policy encourages this by granting indigenous land to settlers at a reduced or even free price, which facilitates trade, infrastructure, and the flow of goods. Settler colonies are not a mere base of operations to facilitate trade and transfer of goods to the exploitative colonial power above them. Rather, settler colonies are inwardly-focused and domestically-oriented in their political economy. They seek to enhance themselves and their own communities; this contrasts with classical colonies where they exist as outposts in a larger network of transferring wealth to the colonizing power.

Because indigenous land is the focus of these societies, efforts are focused on indigenous displacement and erasure. This can manifest in brutal acts of genocidal warfare but also is reproduced in discourse that downplays indigenous presence and humanity. Despite these concerted efforts, indigenous peoples persisted and survived against settler actors—settler projects ultimately failed (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Settler colonial discourse rationalizes indigenous displacement by making arguments about how indigenous peoples were ‘not really using the land’ or that the land was ‘empty’ and ‘waiting to be developed.’ Additionally, as Veracini

(2020) writes, “Settler colonialism is necessarily premised on the realisation that colonialism does not always arrive on boats and that settlers typically act on their own behalf, not as agents of distant metropolises” (p. 2). Settlers often develop a separate identity as settlers rather than actors acting on behalf of their mother country; a settler identity and settler nationalism can take root. In settler colonies like the United States, many indigenous groups were forced from lands they did not cede, and many were assimilated into American society and denied as the original inhabitants of the land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Lastly and as a result, a lack of decolonization is another major aspect of former settler colonies as indigenous peoples have been displaced or minimized; despite this, indigenous resistance has continued into the present as a result of the fact that the settler projects failed. As such, settler colonialism is an ongoing structure that, though it has undergone changes throughout its history, still denies indigenous people justice and recognition. Many settler colonial states remain colonized and settler dominance in politics, the economy, and culture signals the legacy of settler colonialism and its ongoing reproduction.

As this line of research is still in its infancy, questions of settler colonialism in Russia remain unsettled. Some scholars dismiss settler colonialism as not truly occurring in Russia until at least the late 18th century, well after the time and scope of this project (Morrison, 2020). This is due to one of the prevalent beliefs in the field of settler studies that settler colonialism strictly means indigenous land dispossession as several theorists have explicated (Choi, 2020; Veracini, 2014; Veracini, 2020; Wolfe, 2006). However, other scholars (Cavanagh, 2020; Howe, 2020) take a broader definition of settler colonialism to include those that did not necessarily always entail indigenous land dispossession and genocide but included a small, permanent settler population dependent on a larger system of indigenous labor. For instance, in his discussion of settler colonialism in South Africa, Edward Cavanagh (2020) forwards the notion that settler

colonialism is a multi-varied and complex phenomenon that does not always look the same across geographic contexts and under different states. Therefore, in his view, settler colonialism is defined by white settlement and an emerging settler polity that seeks to maximize its own interests regardless of or even in tandem with indigenous peoples and their labor or land (Cavanagh, 2020). Settler colonialism in Russia followed a similarly complex pattern in which indigenous labor was the main focus, but this system of indigenous labor was maintained and facilitated by smaller settlements of Russians in Siberia—thus combining aspects traditionally associated with settler colonialism and the classical form of colonialism. Furthermore, Russian settler colonialism during this time is complex because although indigenous peoples were protected by law in Russia—more characteristic of classical colonialism—conflicts of interest occurred between the state who sought to maximize profits from the indigenous fur trade and the merchants, settlers, and hunters on the frontier in Siberia who sought to maximize their own gains in the area, often through territory, settlement, and the displacement of indigenous peoples—characteristics of settler colonialism. Thus, both aspects of classical colonialism and settler colonialism were at work in the Russian empire, leading to something of a paradox. However, as Cavanagh argues for, settler colonialism can take on different forms in different spaces, especially non-western ones. Complex organizations of and interactions between regimes of land and labor color Russian colonialism before the late 1700s, so extra care and nuance is required.

In any labeling of settler colonialism, the verdict, as it were, depends on the definition one is using to judge. This more expansive definition of settler colonialism allows the label to be applied to Russia prior to the late 18th century. More strict definitions and ones that relate to politically-enforced genocide and concerted indigenous land dispossession as utilized in Anglo-

American settler states may not apply to Russia during the early 18th century as some scholars are apt to point out. However, there is little scholarship on settler colonialism in early modern Russia; only in the late period is there significant emerging scholarship. Thus, another aim of this work is to contribute to an intersection of fields where there is already little overlap and current discussion of settler colonialism within the Russian setting. For the purposes of this work, settler colonialism in South Africa can be said to be similar to Russian colonialism in that it is complex and not one view seems to hold up very well. In both situations, settlers benefitted from violence against indigenous peoples, dispossession of their lands, and indigenous labor. However, that was not necessarily the goal of the state and the Siberian Office at the time (Morrison, 2020). Thus, seemingly contradictory aspects of the nature of settler colonialism must be teased out and discussed in an attempt to assess whether early modern Russia in the 17th and 18th centuries was, in fact, engaging in settler colonialism on its frontier—a time when other settler polities were consolidating and expanding in influence. To accomplish this, the deployment of settler colonial discourses in Russian historical documents will be assessed. Drawing upon the insights that Cavanagh and others have argued constitute settler colonies, I argue that a more nuanced approach must be taken in the consideration of the Russian empire as truly settler colonial before the late 18th century. I aim to contribute to emerging scholarship by developing further what non-western forms of settler colonialism looked like in practice and how interwoven, conflicting, and even hypocritical discourses on land and labor helped define Siberian territory, its uses and its limits, in the late 17th century and early 18th century.

Logics of Territory in Russia

Today and in the last decade, a series of connected events have brought to the light—perhaps now more than ever—the rationalizations of Russian territorial expansion and its different manifestations throughout Russian history. Though most notably in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the current concerns of Russian war with Ukraine, questions of Russian nationalism have, for at least two centuries, been bound up with its territory. (Kivelson and Suny, p. 123). In 2014, the annexation of Crimea was rationalized due to an ethnic Russian majority voting in a referendum to separate from Ukraine, shortly deciding to reintegrate with Russia (Charron, 2016). This was the justification very recently, and it is one that lasts into the present.

However, rationalization of territorial acquisition in Russia was not always an ethnic-nationalist one. Prior to the 18th century, Siberian territory acquisitions, including the vast majority of Russian lands today, were justified by a religious logic. Throughout this time, ethnicity and race were largely not part of the Russian understanding of their multicultural empire. Slezkine (1994) writes that “Legally, the only way to stop being a foreigner was to become a Christian. Once baptized, a iasak man acquired full rights of ‘citizenship’” (p. 43). Similarly, Siberia at large was seen as a space of God’s creation that needed to be liberated from its pagan inhabitants and conquered by a deserving Christian power (Kivelson, 2006). Early writers and knowledge producers in Siberia wrote of its beauty and holiness, but they also lamented that it remained mostly in the hands of those they labeled ‘undeserving pagans’ who did not know God nor what to do with the vast lands they inhabited. Later, as the 18th century continued, religious logics were exchanged for rational ones—though at the heart of each logic was the underlying reality of empire and the need to justify it. As I state in Chapter 4, in the 18th

century, new modes of knowledge production, mapping, and classifying the natural world, populations, peoples, and societies came to become regarded as the established truth about Siberian territory, its contents, and how it could be best utilized by the tsar for the purposes of strengthening the state and the economy (Sunderland, 2007, p. 36). Ultimately, what came to be seen as objective truths about Siberian territory were propagated by a number of what will be called ‘knowledge-producers’: explorers, merchants, Cossacks, priests, and others living on the frontier of Siberia. They have been translated into English from the Russian by Tatiana Minorsky and David Wileman in a volume edited by Terence Armstrong. The discourses they produced about Siberia came to be influential in how the state understood Siberian territory and how it would politically organize Siberia in order to maximize its utility to the increasingly cameralist, reform-minded, and enlightened Petrine tsardom.⁸

As in the contemporary moment and in Russia’s rationalization of territorial acquisition in the 18th century, the rationalizations and logics can be characterized as a discourse—an arrangement of words and explanations that, when analyzed, communicate particular themes, patterns, and ways of phrasing—all of which, as Foucault (1966) writes, “[are] rooted in a life, a society, and a language that have a history” (p. 372-373). Discourses were and are essential to the settler colonial project, and I argue that though settler colonialism was not in full swing in Siberia during the period this project covers, 1670-1740, settler colonial discourses and knowledge began to form that provided the basis for later settler colonial actions in Siberia. It is the aim of this project to uncover the transition in knowledge about Siberian territory as knowledge being a product of discourse, both in terms of written accounts and visual

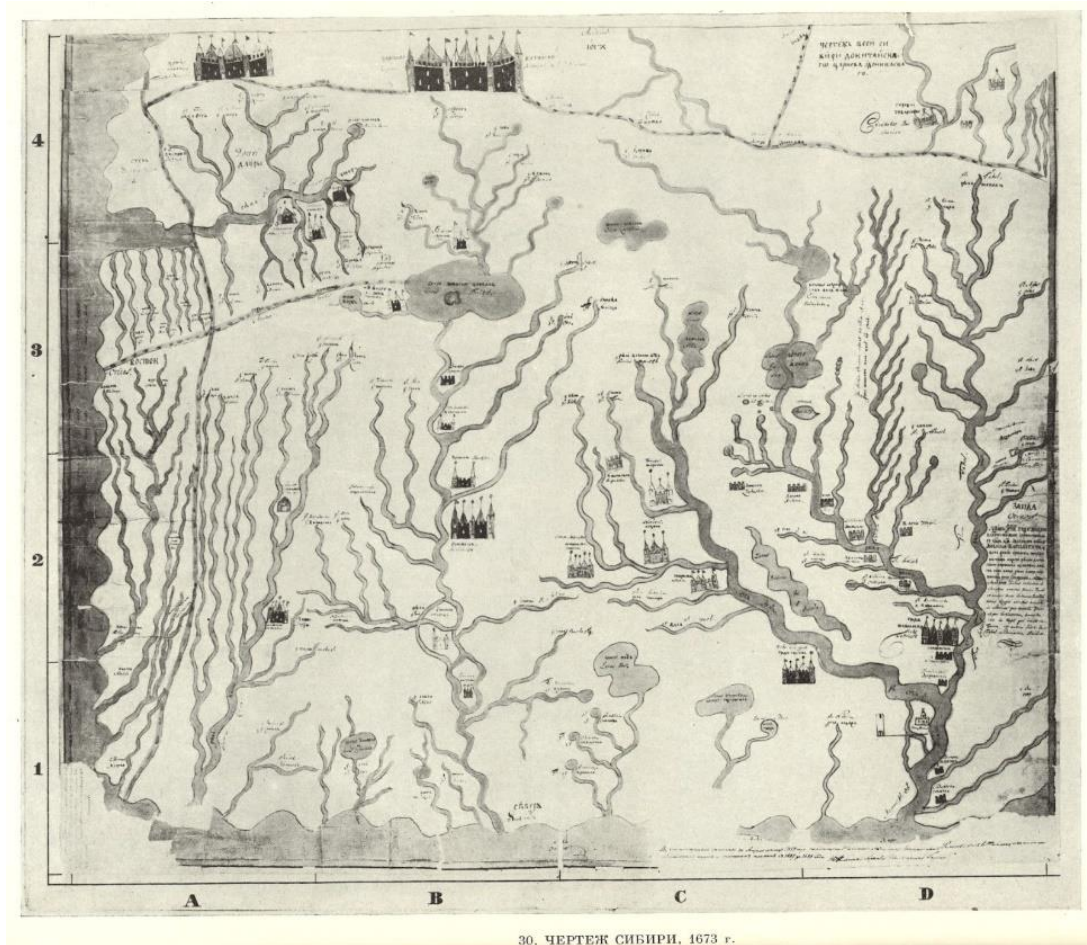
⁸ And later, Catherinian.

representations common at the time—this includes the analysis of historical chronicles, ‘explorer’ accounts, and maps of Siberia.

Methodology, Organization, and Research Questions

This research is rooted in discourse analysis of several key texts on Siberia from the mid–late 17th century to the early–mid 18th century, roughly encompassing the years 1670 to 1740, a touchpoint of change and transition in terms of how Siberian territory was conceived of and thought of by institutions and those in power.

Figure 1. Design of Siberia—1673, Unknown Author



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. At. 490 B 1964.

For example, Figure 8 displays a map of Siberia from 1673, which gives one a sense of Russian mapmaking at the time. This map includes an inverted orientation like many pre-modern maps of Siberia with its extensive use of rivers as the primary points of orientation. Similarly, Figure 9 below displays another well-known map of Russia at the time. One of the more famous and often-copied maps of the time, the Godunov map of 1667, also exhibits the traits of the previous map with its features depicted and use of rivers flowing northward, to the bottom of the map.

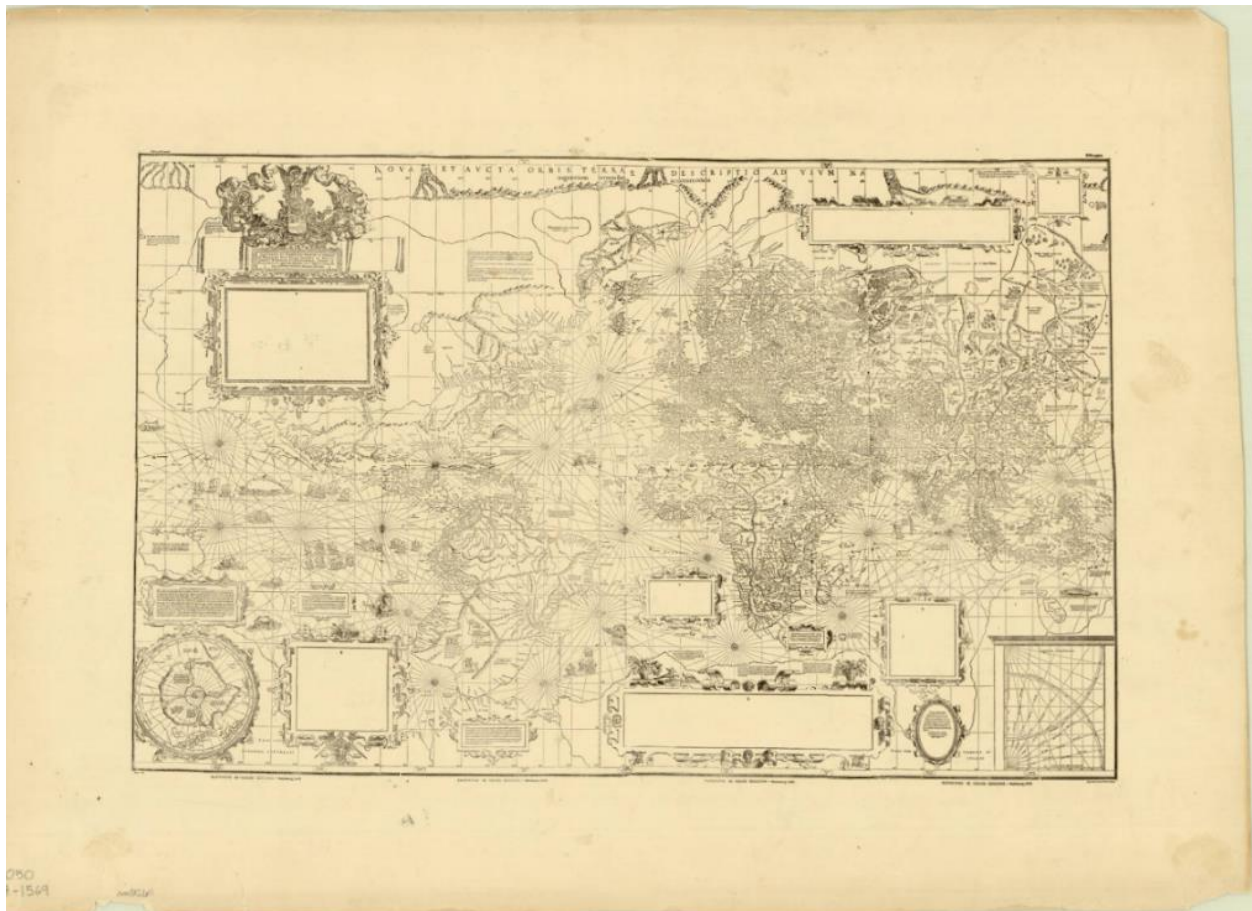
Figure 2. The Godunov Map—1667, Remezov’s Copy



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee.

For the sake of comparison, a European map is shown below in Figure 10. This Mercator map from 1569 shows a great amount of detail and appears more contemporary to the modern viewer. Russian maps began to use these techniques around the 1720s with their increased concern for standardization, Europeanization, and efficiency.

Figure 3. Mercator’s World Map—1569



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. At. 490 B 1964.

While this era of rapid change in thought about territory is most visible in maps of the time, it is also displayed in texts about Siberia. Thus, a number of texts from the time were analyzed as well. 17th century texts include the Yesipov (1636), Stroganov (1670), and Remezov (1696) chronicles, historical texts written by or associated with the church, merchants, or the

state, all of which were highly influential in the incorporation of Siberia into the Russian empire and considered the official account, translated in Armstrong's 1975 work, *Yermak's campaign in Siberia*. One primary source, the Yesipov Chronicle from ~1636, proved particularly influential and was the first official account of expansion into Siberia, upon which later accounts were based. Despite its origins earlier in the century, it has been included in the analysis as it played such a large role in the formation of later texts and discourses, including parts of the Stroganov and Remezov chronicles. The will of God was the primary logic, rationale, and justification by which author Savva Yesipov, an assistant to the archbishop in Siberia, approached writing about Siberian territory, while the Stroganov article focuses on the role of the Russian state and the merchant family Stroganovs in setting in motion the events that led to the conquest of Siberia. Lastly, the Remezov chronicle is a wonder and miracle-laden account that not only sees Siberia as vaguely Russia's because of divine destiny but is filled with fantastical imagery and mythical miracles that bring the supernatural down to earth as a justification for the conquest of Siberia.

18th century accounts are analyzed as well, including *Three Years Travels from Moscow Over-Land to China* (1706) by Evert Ides, *The State of Russia, under the Present Czar* (1716) by John Perry, *Travels from St. Petersburg to Diverse Parts of Asia* (1721) by John Bell, *The Great Northern Expedition* (1739) by Georg Steller, and *The Conquest of Siberia* (1842) by Gerhard Müller and Peter Pallas.⁹ All of these accounts were originally written in English or translated into English from German. 'Explorers,' naturalists, and travelers contributed to a new canon and regime of knowledge about Siberia, focusing on descriptive accounts of what Siberian territory was supposedly objectively like, and were one piece of the tsardom's effort to more rationally know and understand its territories, not only as a justification for their continued rule but also as

⁹ This version of *The Conquest of Siberia* was not published until 1842, but the content of the account was a combination of both Müller and Pallas' experiences in Siberia from the 1730s to the 1770s.

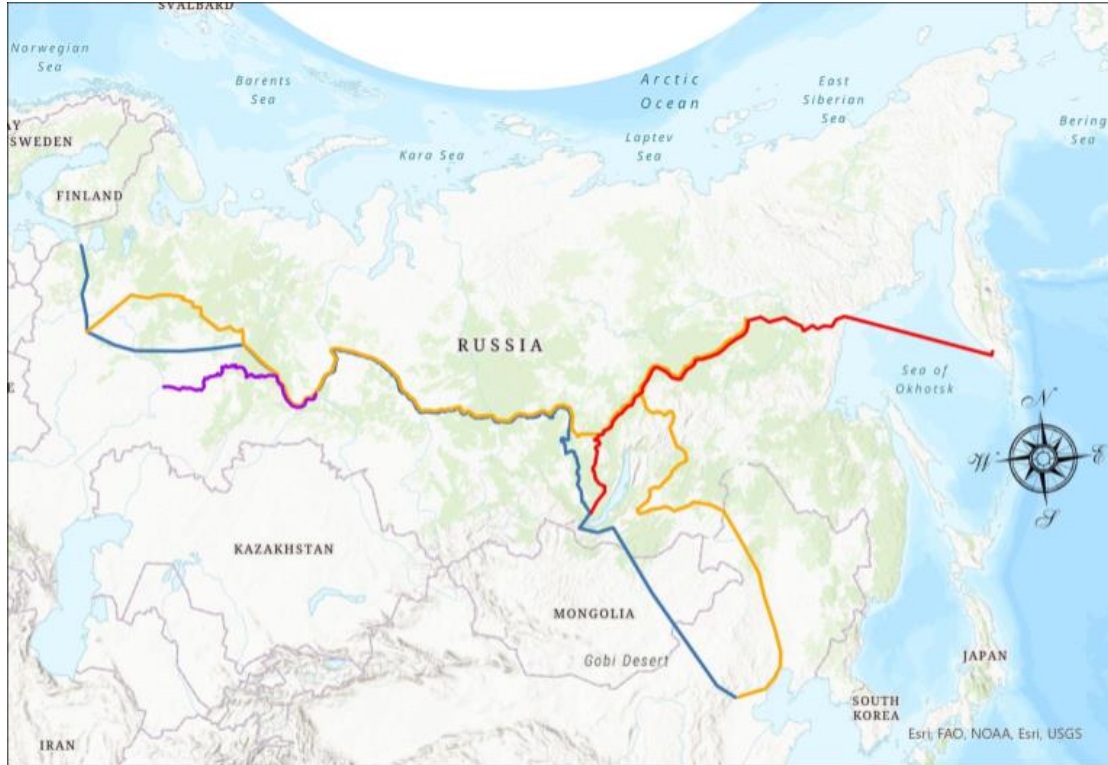
information that would help the state rule those territories efficiently and effectively.

Additionally, historic maps will be an object of analysis and supplement the analysis of texts—they strikingly illustrate the changes in thought and knowledge production during this period. This includes maps by Semyon Remezov, Kirilov, Evreinov, and western European mapmakers like Mercator for comparison. The maps are of Russia, Siberia, and Eurasia in general, and with one exception they span the years 1667 to 1733. In addition, I have supplementary maps using ArcGIS to plot the journeys of various warriors and travelers in Siberia to orient readers. These are not the subject of analyses, but rather they help provide visual context for the areas spoken of throughout the project. Thus, the language in these texts becomes key in understanding not only how Siberia was acquired from a historical perspective but also how it was rationalized as truly belonging to Russia. As my analysis reveals, 17th century texts are profoundly distinct in their content and portrayals of Siberia compared to later texts in the early 18th century. This said, both eras of text can be viewed as exercises in knowledge production—discourses that helped affect territorial thought and practice. These Russian chronicles served as the official versions of the history of Russia and are regarded as foundational documents for understanding the time. As Foucault (1972) writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, “The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain with the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative . . . it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse” (p. 23). The key texts of this project cannot be separated from the time in which they were produced, by whom they were produced, and for whom they were produced. Furthermore, they contribute to specific transitional moments in geographic thought in Russia and are part of larger discourses used to justify territorial expansion.

Within my discourse analysis, the primary sources have been reviewed and reread multiple times for changes within language about Siberian territory and its inhabitants, patterns, themes, and other particularities that revolve around how writers spoke and thought about territory, justifications for its seizure, knowledge production, and indigenous inhabitants. What is key to my analysis is how topics of colonial territory and how what makes up this territory—principally indigenous inhabitants and natural-environmental features—become the subjects of knowledge that are represented and spoken about by the authors in order to reveal supposedly objective truths. I also searched these primary texts for instances of settler logics such as empty land, indigenous genocide, land being made productive, inwardly-oriented political economy, and settler permanence. In addition, maps were chosen and analyzed that communicated these discursive patterns in settler logic that portrayed indigenous peoples or their land, often in an essentializing manner that helped produce the episteme under which cartographers of the time worked and thought. Ruth Craggs (2016) writes of the archive and how history is written, “Historical evidence is also always partial: it represents the views, priorities and knowledge of those who produced it . . . historical evidence is not an objective record waiting to be uncovered, but it is constructed through the cultural, political, economic, and social contexts of its production and preservation” (p. 111). Indeed and furthermore, I wish to show what discursive formations accompanied colonialism in Siberia and reveal the logics and contexts that informed the production of certain discourses about geographic territory at different points in time. As Foucault writes,

“One shows how the different texts with which one is dealing refer to one another, organize themselves into a single figure, converge with institutions and practices, and carry meanings that may be common to a whole period . . . One would try to show whether the political behaviour of a society, group, or a class is not shot through with a particular, describable discursive practice.” (pp. 118, 194)

Figure 4. Map of Traveler Routes



- Yermak's Campaign, 1580-1581
- Steller's Travels, 1739-1741
- Ides' Travels, 1696
- John Bell's Travels, 1721-1722

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system with route data from primary text accounts)

With these sources used in the analysis of discourse, it must be acknowledged that several are translated and thus “re-presented” (Spivak, 1988); thus, leaning too far into individual word choice and translation concerns are avoided. The American Geographical Society Library at UW Milwaukee has a wealth of the historical map sources, and in particular the AGS Library has a large volume of Remezov’s map works which were of great help. Lastly, dates for chronicles are approximate yet within a reasonable estimate of accuracy; some dates are ultimately unknown as to their writing, but historians of the chronicles have a reasonable idea, usually within a span of a few years.

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of the literature on Russian empire from a historical and geographic perspective. Though histories of Russian empire are plentiful enough, combination with literature on settler colonialism and engagement with those frameworks is rare as only recently have these questions and literatures been developed—and in the case of Russia—barely applied to this unique context. From this discussion of literature, I show the large gap that is consideration of early modern Russia as a settler colonial state.

Next, Chapter 3 discusses the discourses prevalent in 17th century knowledge production of Siberia and how this territory was thought of by contemporaries at the time. Siberia was portrayed something of a second holy land that was Russia's destiny to conquer, and Russian expansion into Siberia was conceptualized within a religious framework.

In Chapter 4, I show how these discourses quickly changed among knowledge producers of Siberia and shift what was thought to be the truth about Siberia into something more rational, efficient, objective, and subject to administration by a great power. At this time, travelers and scientists emphasize the untapped potential of Siberian resources, its peoples, its flora, and its fauna. Such aspects of Siberia came to be seen not as placed by God but rather in a space exploitable by the Russian state for political and economic dominance. Throughout both Chapters 3 and 4, I also utilize maps to show how knowledge formed the objects of study and portrayal in Siberia and emphasize how maps helped produce these dominant discourses and were objects of discourse themselves.

Lastly, in the conclusion I discuss the usefulness of a settler colonial framework and its application to early modern Russia, and I also discuss silences in the literature, lack of indigenous perspectives, and the need for decolonization of settler territories. Ultimately, I problematize contemporary literature that has not considered settler logics in early modern

Russia and Siberia and argue that settler colonialism is a considerable force in the discourses that justified expansion into Siberia. Despite changes in priorities and knowledge production, settler logics are apparent in accounts of Siberia in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although the colonization of Siberia was not an intensive genocidal settler project, it still relied on complex and interwoven factors of land, labor, citizenship, and religious status that had the effect of facilitating permanent settlement in the early modern period.

Chapter 2: Geographies of Imperialism and Russian Empire

To help answer the question of how discourses on Russian territory evolved under modernization in the 18th century, two main bodies of literature were drawn upon: Russian imperial history and geographies of imperialism. However, studies in Russian history and geographies of imperialism are topics that tend to rarely intertwine. Within the literature, Burbank and von Hagen (2007), Kivelson (2006), Morrison (2020), Remnev (2007), and Sunderland (2007) approach this combined theme most, however, most of the literature can be separated into the two aforementioned categories. There has been little concern with early modern Russia in settler colonial studies and postcolonial studies, and as scholarship on settler colonial studies continues, it is my aim to contribute to a unique intersection of study where few settler colonial scholars have trod. Along with renewed academic interest in Russia and accessibility of Russian resources since the collapse of the Soviet Union, I hope to study and analyze non-western instances of settler colonialism. Within my thesis, it is my aim to address a gap in this knowledge and provide greater scholarship on framework and nature of settler colonialism in early modern Russia, with a particular focus on the conceptions and management of territory in the period approximately 1670 to 1740, which is when a notable shift occurred in the logics and discourse of Russian imperial territoriality surfaced—a modern, rational, Petrine desire to manage, classify, and order territory in Siberia.

Within Russian imperial history literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, major focuses are on the sweeping changes and modernization that Peter the Great and others brought to the Russian empire that intensively changed imperial practice (Burbank and von Hagen, 2007; Demuth, 2020; Kasper, 2007; Kivelson, 2006; Kivelson and Suny, 2017; Morrison, 2020; Sunderland, 2007; Werth, 2007; Wortman, 2013). Up to this time, Russian imperial territory had

been organized within a medieval, Orthodox ordering and logic that prioritized religiosity and the settlement of territory for the glory of God rather than production (Flier, 2003; Kaiser, 2003; Kivelson, 2006; Kivelson and Suny, 2017; Levin, 2003; Werth, 2007). However, this began to change under Peter and subsequent tsars who, while remaining Orthodox and religious, introduced new ways of thinking about territory and exercising control over it.

The last major theme of this literature is the major role that religion played in the conception of indigenous peoples of Siberia as part of the Russian empire, indicating that it was not so much a racial hierarchy at first, but rather a religious one (Kaspe, 2007; Slezkine, 1994; Werth, 2007). Orthodoxy and whether one was or not limited possibilities for advancement and even where one could live on the frontier, whether in the ethnic Russian settlements and outposts as part of the polity or the forested wilderness as a tributary subject to the tsar (Kivelson, 2006).

Within the literature on geographies of imperialism, major themes are apparent that provide fruitful perspectives for analyzing Russian management of colonial territories. The literature examines 'settler logics,' including a focus on indigenous land versus indigenous labor (Cavanagh, 2020; Choi, 2020; Howe, 2020; Morrison, 2020; Veracini, 2020) and the discourse of land as empty and ready for improvement (Crow, 2020; Kivelson, 2006; Remnev, 2007; Sunderland, 2007). I also draw upon scholarly works that deal with maps as process, maps as discourse, and maps as producing knowledge of territory and space (Culcasi, 2014; Kivelson, 2006; Megoran, 2012; Winichakul, 1996). Lastly, there is a section of the literature concerned with territory and territoriality and its production as a project of imperialism and its management of space (Burbank and von Hagen, 2007; Cox et al, 2008; Johnston et al, 2000; Kivelson, 2006; Megoran, 2012; Painter and Jeffrey, 2009; Remnev, 2007; Storey, 2001; Sunderland, 2007).

Eschatology and Territorialization in 17th Century Russia

Before modernization, faith and Orthodoxy provided the impetus for the organizing of Russian territory on the frontier in the initial stages of its conquest, which was centered around churches built in these new settlements. Flier (2003) discusses the Orthodox logic that permeated the Russian state “in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries . . . up to the ascension of Peter the Great” (p. 128-129). Muscovy and later Russia during these centuries ordered their territory to produce their “apocalyptic, millennial mode” of theology, which emphasized the placement of churches in newly absorbed territories in Siberia (p. 128). It was thought that constructing settlements and populating Siberia was to fulfill Russia’s religious destiny during the end times—the last Orthodox (and therefore, in their view, ‘true’ Christian) nation on earth.¹⁰ In this way, the Orthodox, eschatological view appeared to be a justification for colonizing and exerting initial control over the frontier territories.

Kaiser (2003) goes on to explore the ways in which Orthodoxy influenced everyday life of Muscovites and early Russians. Being so deeply ingrained as the filter through which their understanding of the world was pulled, it is likely that territorial justification would utilize religious and/or divine claims and language, which was in fact the case throughout the era of Russia’s ‘crude imperialism’ in Siberia.

Kivelson (2006) draws a close connection between imperial territory and Russian understanding of it to the foundational underpinning that was Orthodoxy. Russians viewed the world and space and contrasts this with other notions of spatiality that were common in Europe

¹⁰ Foucault (2007) contrasts arts of government in his series of lectures, *Security, Territory, Population*, “there is nothing like the dream of the last Empire that dominated medieval religious and historical perspectives . . . this universal Empire will herald and be the theater of Christ’s return. The Empire, the last Empire, the universal Empire, whether of the Caesars or of the Church, was something that haunted the medieval perspective” (p. 260). In this grand Orthodox eschatology, Russian discourse more emulated medieval perspectives until its adoption of rationalism in the early 18th century. He continues, “the rationality intrinsic to the art of government, involves a production of truth, but its circuits and types are very different from those of the pastorate” (p. 273).

at the time, particularly England. Other authors note that Orthodoxy played a large role in Russian conceptions of spatiality at the time, but Kivelson goes deeper by discussing the specific discourses and ways that these conceptions about territory manifested. Kivelson draws upon maps as discourse and argues that maps helped produce Siberian territory as a space for Russian Orthodox presence and the incorporation of ‘holy spaces’ along Siberia’s southern steppe. Producers of knowledge about Siberia communicated it as a ‘New Eden’ that had great beauty and potential for the Russian nation, particularly the role of the church in organizing these lands and bringing God’s glory to them by constructing churches and the significance of the cross symbol as a marker of Orthodox claims to territory, claims that were seen to be in accordance with God’s will.

Kivelson and Suny (2017) in *Russia’s Empires* discuss the history of Russia from an imperial perspective, tracing the constant thread of empire, centralization, and attempts to modernize throughout Russian history. Authors Kivelson and Suny note the Orthodox aspect of the tsarist state from the 15th century to the 18th century as well as how this prior logic was ceded to a more earthly, human notion of conquest and agency that became common in the 18th century, particularly under Peter and subsequent tsars and tsarinas (p. 93). Other authors do not frame the issue in this way, however, as Levin (2005) stresses that prior to the 18th century, Russian Orthodoxy made concessions and intermingled with pagan rituals, particularly in contacts between Orthodox Christians and indigenous peoples on the frontier, who may have been pressured into conversion on a limited scale. In these situations, indigenous peoples could simply add the Christian god to their table of deities and carry on with their religious life largely unabated because they had ‘converted’ (p. 83).

Werth (2007) differs in that his focus is on religion and conversion attempts on indigenous peoples in Siberia. He notes that widespread conversions were uncommon before the 1740s, although they did occur irregularly and by independent actors who may have wished to secure deals with indigenous peoples. Werth's main contribution include characterizing the nature of conversion and Orthodox conceptions of frontier regions and their peoples prior to the 18th century (p. 169), This is a crucial and defining factor of Russian colonialism at this time because so long as indigenous peoples remained unconverted, they could be treated poorly and subject to an exploitative labor regime which was at the heart of expansion into Siberia—fur tribute. If an indigenous person converted to Orthodox Christianity, they could no longer be part of this regime and would be granted citizenship.

The current consensus among scholars on religion in Russian prior to the 18th century highlights the importance of Orthodoxy to shaping views about Russian territory and what was to be done with the indigenous peoples who inhabited that territory, who were primarily seen as pagans, not yet ethnically inferior. Territory on the frontier was seen as a logical, progressive outgrowth of what had been Muscovy's territory in European Russia, and this process of early settlement was mapped and justified in the name of God, who—it was seen—had a special destiny for Russia during what many perceived as the final days of earth. This was produced in the mapping, discourse, and justifications that Russians used for their management of imperial territory in the 17th century and earlier. However, starting in the early 18th century, this began to change dramatically and signaled the shift toward a new form of knowledge.

Modernization in 18th Century Russia Ordered Territory

A number of authors argue that modernization under Peter the Great and his successors brought large changes about knowledge and governance to the hitherto largely non-centralized peripheral regions of Siberia. Part of modernization in Russia meant attempting to understand and classify the state's large possessions in Siberia in scientific terms so that it could be best utilized and organized for state interests. Burbank and von Hagen (2007) emphasize a major change in governance and territoriality in the 18th century in Russia by noting that the notion of territory first came into its modern practice during the 18th century and during Peter's reforms (p. 5).

Kaspe (2007) writes of political cultures of Russia throughout its colonial eras including the political culture of modernization under Peter the Great. Kaspe also notes that modernization was a push and pull in the Russian empire in the 18th century and something that it had to always grapple with to varying degrees of success. Kivelson (2006), in *Cartographies of Tsardom*, focuses on the 17th century and conceptions of Russian territory in that mostly pre-modernization century, however, she also notes the role of Peter the Great in the mapping and ordering of territory on the Russian frontier. Wortman (2013) analyzes how specific leaders such as Peter and Catherine implemented modernization efforts and their success at doing so (p. 261). In particular, Wortman notes how Catherine had the calculated reputation of being a 'loving' and 'guiding mother' of the Russian empire, and he also points to how this played out in her treatment of indigenous peoples, which was admittedly better than Peter, but it was also paternalistic and patronizing, increasingly revolving around themes of 'guiding them out of darkness' and educating them, which can be seen as a more advanced version of the previous attitudes toward indigenous peoples on the Russian frontier.

Kivelson and Suny (2017) in their work, *Russia's Empires*, cover Russian history broadly through the lens of empire. They discuss Russian empire during the Petrine revolution and his constant warfare, conquest, and drive toward imperial centralization and power as definitional of the early 18th century nascent modern Russia (p. 93-94). The frontier and territory were beginning to be differently formulated by the Russian state; as Kivelson and Suny say, “With Peter the Great (1682-1725), the Orthodox Emperor and Orthodox Empire ceded pride of place—though without yielding altogether—to a more earthly and European ethos of conquest and imperial power” (p. 93). Increasingly, management of Russian imperial territory was seen as a human affair that could be taken advantage of rather than a result of God’s passive benevolence.

Werth (2007) notes the role of religion in the empire and on the frontier by discussing the ways in which proselytizing and indigenous assimilation occurred. Generally, indigenous peoples in Siberia were not forced to convert as this would require them to be treated as full members of the Russian empire. However, this began to change around the 1740s and the era of the Great Reforms when missionaries were given more explicit permission to proselytize in the hopes of assimilating natives into the empire (p. 169).

Scholars regard Peter and Catherine as the major forces behind modernization in the Russian empire, which profoundly affected life on the frontier for ethnic Russians and indigenous peoples. Increasingly, the state involved itself more directly in management of frontier territory. Authors also note how the view of territory changed immensely toward productive and rational management rather than a vague awareness, which was influenced by Central European political theory and cameralism that Peter and others attempted to replicate to consolidate the empire and its territories toward modernization. At this time, discourses around

Russian territory shifted to produce a rational ordering of space and desire to acquire intimate knowledge of the contents of the empire's farthest reaches, territories that were marked by their religious geography, whether they were Orthodox Christian or non-Christian.

Religion Signified Difference

The religious status of being an Orthodox Christian was what initially defined significant participation in the Russian empire. Kivelson (2006) also brings up this point that Russians primarily thought of non-Russians in terms of religion and allowed them to participate within frontier space and different forms of labor based on whether they were Christian or not. Kaspe (2007) highlights how Peter's reforms brought an increased emphasis on national identity based around Russian ethnicity. Before this time and the national/religious connotations that fermented around non-Russians, Kaspe argues that Russians did not think in terms of "broad-based social identification[s]" such as nation or race (p. 459). Similarly, Kivelson and Suny write that "Religious policy rested on a notional hierarchy of religions and customs that placed settled, agrarian Orthodox Russians at the top and animist pastoral nomads at the bottom . . . Religion remained the principal marker of difference between Russians and non-Russians, and religious identity was believed to reveal essential qualities that helped to predict behavior" (pp. 130, 133).

Both Slezkine (1994) and Werth (2007) make important contributions about how early exclusive categories about indigenous peoples and their religious status came to take on racial meaning as they were subjected to a different regime of labor. Slezkine (1994) comments with his broader view of indigenous interactions in Eurasia from first contact into the Soviet period. This early indigenous labor system not only defined indigenous peoples as deserving of a certain status—argues Slezkine—it also defined ethnic Russian identity itself by creating an Other that

ethnic Russians defined themselves in relation and in opposition toward. Werth (2007) discusses this point as well and notes how non-Russians were initially and for a substantial period defined primarily by their pagan and labor status rather than a racial one. They were later labeled *inorodtsy*, aliens, and—as modernity and notions of the nation developed further—thought to be in need of benevolent, paternalistic guiding and development toward civilization and culture (p. 171). Indigenous peoples were Othered initially based on their religion, which translated into separate spaces they could live and separate regimes of exploitative labor—both of which created an association between the wilderness of the non-settled areas of Siberia, the indigenous peoples who inhabited them, and their identity as non-Christian pagans. Authors note that religion played a primary role in limiting the incorporation of indigenous peoples into the Russian citizenry, restricting them to a strict labor regime that characterized the Russian colonial model.

Indigenous Land and Labor—The Russian Imprint of Empire

As Kivelson (2006) writes, “Siberia bears the imprint of Russia’s approach to human geography, which opted for neither extermination nor conversion” (p. 214). This quote concisely summarizes what differed with Russia’s approach to management of imperial territory, and this is proximal to the question of whether Russia acted as a settler colonial state in Siberia. The question of whether the Siberian frontier was a settler society remains an important one as ‘Russia’s approach to human geography’ and its peculiarities and differences from western European settler societies explain how indigenous peoples remain more populous in Siberian regions today relative to other settler colonies. Many Anglo settler states enacted massive extermination campaigns where a high proportion of indigenous peoples were displaced or killed

(Crow, 2020; Veracini, 2020). At the same time, a perspective that is often unacknowledged is that despite these massive efforts, indigenous peoples have survived because of their active resistance to settler rule. As an example of indigenous resistance in colonial Russia in the late 18th century, indigenous peoples would ‘convert’ to appease missionaries but retain their old religious practices in private. This said, conversion was often not the goal of Russians in the early 18th century and beforehand. On the colonial Russian frontier, the focus was overwhelmingly on indigenous labor rather than indigenous land or conversion, which—though exploitative and coercive on a large scale—at least allowed indigenous cultures to remain largely intact and with relatively little displacement. Today, indigenous representation and autonomy is by no means ideal as many of their lands have since been seized for resource extraction, particularly in the sectors of lumber, mining, and oil excavation (Slezkine, 1994).

Scholars are divided on what is more important in a settler colony as some emphasize focuses on indigenous land, others indigenous labor, and still others refuse to establish or work within that binary by acknowledging both theft of indigenous land and reliance on indigenous labor can and often did occur. Cavanagh (2020) takes up the issue of indigenous land versus indigenous labor in his discussion of whether South Africa constituted a settler colony. His analysis indicates that it is not simply a settler colony as many are led to believe, but it incorporates some aspects of traditional colonialism in that the indigenous population generally was not exterminated; furthermore, their labor constituted a major underpinning of the Afrikaner economy (p. 293). For these reasons, what appear to be settler colonies often have a more complex labor situation going on, which constitutes one of Cavanagh’s central points; settler colonies cannot always be neatly categorized as land or labor-centric as some cases incorporate both aspects of settler colonialism and traditional colonialism.

Howe (2020) utilizes the example of Northern Ireland and its settler colonial politics to discuss the same topic, although Howe argues that indigenous labor can be a characteristic of settler colonialism, which goes against others who identify control of indigenous labor with traditional forms of colonialism. Howe believes control over indigenous labor to be the “central economic, social, and indeed political question” of these societies (p. 70). Furthermore, Howe notes the introduction of separate labor regimes in settler colonies, one of which is reserved for the settlers and the other for the indigenous. Cavanagh does not make this point explicitly, but he and Howe seem to converge on this point in their desire to complicate and trouble the notion of settler colonies being not based around indigenous labor.

Other scholars, however, emphasize more strongly the element of indigenous land in settler colonies. For example, Veracini (2020) emphasizes strongly the mainline dichotomy of indigenous land and indigenous labor. He writes, “A focus on land and a relative neglect of the labour of the colonised set settler colonialism apart” (p. 3). For Veracini, a settler colony must have a focus on indigenous land rather than labor. Choi (2020) takes a similar approach to the settler project of French Algeria by emphasizing theft of indigenous land, which instituted the importation of French citizens to the coast of North Africa in an attempt to establish a majority-French settlement. In this case, the focus was much more on indigenous land than labor, although French settlers certainly benefited from both. The end goal of the project was highly biopolitical and calculated, but the realities of French failure in executing their goals culminated in multiple rebellions and fierce contestation on the part of Algerians.

In a similar vein, Morrison’s (2020) contribution is particularly insightful because it deals explicitly with Russia in the context of settler colonialism. Morrison argues that, due to the focus on indigenous labor rather than land, the Russian frontier in Siberia could not be considered a

settler colonial society until well into the 18th century as the tsarist state was dependent on maintaining indigenous health to a certain degree because of its interest in indigenous labor in the fur trade (p. 315). Although indigenous land was violated in some cases, the tsarist state was surprisingly dedicated to their rights and legal protections in other cases.

Morrison's piece and others' contributions lead us to maintain caution and consideration in our labeling of settler colonial projects. For instance, if the Russian seizure of territory in Siberia was considered a settler project, it may provide justification for land back initiatives among indigenous peoples of the region, reparations to them, or even independence from the Russian Federation. In the Russian case, settlement, dispossession, and violence certainly played roles on the frontier, however, these processes of territorial management by the Russian state are difficult to consider settler colonial before the late 18th century as indigenous labor rather than indigenous land was the focus of Siberian territory's incorporation into the empire. On this topic, Sunderland provides some detail, "Over the second half of the 1700s, the court and the colleges encouraged a wide range of rural people to colonize 'open' areas in the borderlands, while making sure that a large portion of these settlers were resettled from crowded areas in the interior" (p. 50). This is a strong indication of settler colonialism during the later part of the 18th century, but things before this time were more complex with regard to land and labor in the Russian colonial borderlands of Siberia. The focus on indigenous labor in Russia and even relative protection for indigenous peoples did not allow for or encourage independent peasants to seek their fortunes on the frontier at the expense of indigenous peoples as was the case in Anglo colonies utilizing a liberal, natural rights logic. Later state directives as mentioned earlier, however, would explicitly encourage Russian settlement and indigenous displacement, a notion made possible by dominant discourses of land being empty and unused.

Land Seen as Empty and Full of Potential

Crow (2020) discusses how land that was in reality filled with indigenous peoples and settlements could be seen as empty in European eyes. Crow writes, “John Locke [elaborated that] only appropriation and cultivation of the land was sufficient to establish legally recognizable possession” (p. 96). Indigenous land claims could not hold up because in order for land to be seen as legally claimed or filled, it had to live up to European standards of exploitation, extraction, and productivity.

Remnev (2007) briefly notes how the labeling of land as empty and in need of improvement constitutes a major settler logic, which operated in unexpected ways in the Russian territory. Kivelson (2006) notes an Anglo settler colonial logic, that of improving land being necessary to its legal recognition by settlers. However, Kivelson introduces more complexity to the land as empty narrative as she notes how Russia differed significantly from the highly land contingent brand of settler colonialism that characterized Anglo settler states, “Rights in the polity were understood to derive from the natural rights of Englishmen, rather than from position on the land. In Russia, by contrast, where the inexorable growth of serfdom makes the concept of ‘citizenship’ a slippery one, rights and recognition in the polity derived from precisely that spatial fixity that locked the population to the soil” (p. 213). Because serfs were cemented under their lord’s will to particular plots of land that they had to work as peasants, the Anglo framework of individual ownership and rights to land did not exist. Thus, Kivelson further notes how the Russian situation and brand of colonialism and its lack of focus on individual settler agency resulted in no major extermination efforts toward the indigenous peoples. The mapping of people in places was designed to help the Russian state acquire maximum control and power

over these territories to enrich itself; as a result, maps of Siberia produced a specific political and economic utilitarian reality with which the Russian state wished to engage.

Maps Produce Reality

Culcasi (2014) notes the immense role that mapping had in the production of knowledge and subsequently European colonial territory in the partition of the Middle East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In this manner, maps made by officials not only produced wishes of colonial administrators, they also produced knowledge about Middle Eastern space, which came to affect reality and the bordering of the region (p. 3). Within this same vein, Kivelson (2006) spends a great deal of time discussing how maps created reality and knowledge of Siberia for the Russian tsars, thus influencing how the territories were governed and ordered. Mapping evolved during the late 17th century to show European tastes, and this, too, created different knowledge for the tsars, who increased state presence and control in the frontier regions of Siberia as a result of more precise and 'rational' modes of mapping and knowledge production. Sunderland (2007) also notes how the Russian state's understanding of its territory provided by maps allowed and produced the knowledge that the land was empty and in need of settlement, surveillance, and presence.

Megoran (2012) discusses the concept of boundaries as the results of discourse and social decisions rather than inherent differences. Megoran notes how, in the Ferghana Valley, notions of identity were not concrete and very mixed, but the mapping of borders and the discourses that mapping forwarded came to invent difference and identity where it had largely not existed strongly prior (p. 469-470). Winichakul (1996) discusses a similar topic in relation to Siam and its mapping, where notions of nationhood accompanied mapping. In this way, mapping served as

an impetus to nationhood and defined borders and peoples. Winichakul writes, “National borders do not necessarily reflect an inherent ethnic bond, but rather a historically-specific set of relations that causes a nation to be defined” (p. 2). Mapping defines these processes and limits space, peoples, and it produces them. In Russia, the most significant maps of the 17th century acted as a discourse that portrayed Siberian territory as largely empty land ready to be filled with God’s word. Kivelson’s work has covered how pre-Enlightenment maps acted as a discourse about Siberia, but my research discusses these notions and compares them to later enlightened geographic knowledge about Siberia. The aim of this is to highlight a short time of great change in knowledge production, discourse, and geographic thinking.

Territory as Partition and the Russian Periphery

Within the literature on territory, some authors define territory generally and lay out its characteristics while others focus on Russian territory. Cox et al (2008) say that “Territory refers to the units of a partitioned space, not to spatial organization in its entirety,” which remains a seminal distinction between territory and space (p. 101). Others (Johnston et al, 2000; Painter and Jeffrey, 2009; Storey, 2001) also emphasize the distinction of territory as a partition or segmented space, not just space in general. Knowledge about these segments of space, territories, is not required for claiming, but it does strengthen the colonial project, and maps are a foundational political tool in this process (Storey, 2001). Burbank and von Hagen (2007) note that “the eighteenth century was a time when territory became not just a goal, but a principle of governance [in the Russian empire],” further underlining the new conception of Russian territory among those in the tsarist government. Kivelson (2006) addresses this point in her discussions of Siberian space in the 17th century, which was just beginning to be formulated, charted, and

organized as imperial territory in the late 17th century and early 18th century. Remnev (2007) speaks of Russian territory and its segmentation in terms of core and periphery in which the periphery was organized and charted in order to better supply the core area with resources and its state goals (p. 427). Remnev discusses, too, the different classifications of imperial territory and how territories in Siberia were specifically designated so as to benefit the imperial core as much as possible. The aim was to designate imperial territories into a hierarchy in order to “[find] the optimal model of relations between the regional power and the center” (p. 430). Sunderland (2007) builds on the reasoning for territorial labeling by discussing the larger politico-ideological influences on the tsarist state and its cameralist ideology of aggregating territories for strict state goals and administration (p. 36). However, for now, I will introduce the discourses prevalent in the 17th century, ones that saw Siberia as a destined, glorious, and righteous land for Orthodox Christians.

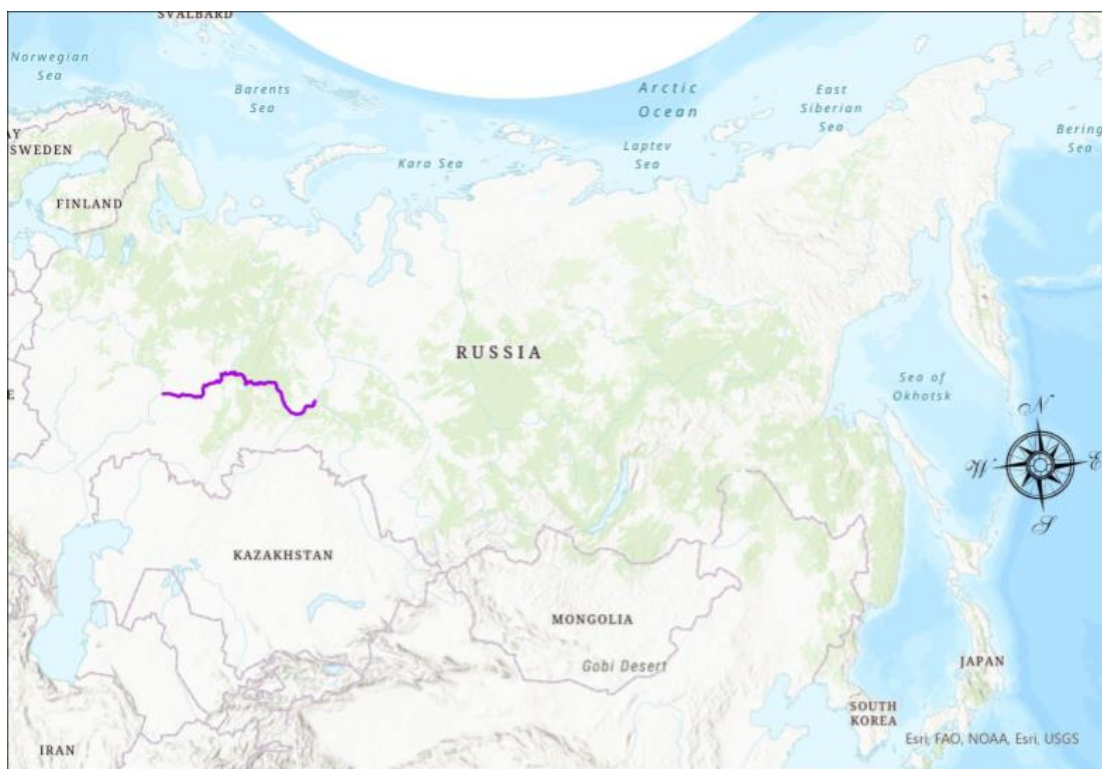
Chapter 3: The Darkness of Idolatry and the Illumination of Faith—Siberia in the 17th Century

In this chapter, I situate Siberia in the 17th century and offer a brief overview of how Russia acquired territories east of the Urals in the first place, which were beyond its realm prior to the 1580s and had never been under Russian control prior. For this reason, Siberia—a term often used interchangeably with North Asian lands east of the Urals—can be considered colonial territory fairly early on. In more expansive definitions, Siberia is all land administrated by Russia east of the Ural Mountains, what is considered the border between Europe and Asia. For the purposes of this project, this is the definition of Siberia that will be used. Though incorporated into Russia today, Russia was not always so large. Before the 1580s, Russia consisted of lands only west of the Ural Mountains, what has been considered the boundary between Europe and Asia.¹¹ At this time, Siberia was inhabited by indigenous peoples who were presided over by the decaying remnants of the Mongol empire. Indigenous peoples paid fur tribute to their Mongol and Turkic overlords—usually called Tatars or Tartars—a relationship in which the Russians would soon replace the Mongols. Russian incursion past the Ural Mountains and into Siberia begins concretely in the 1580s with the raids of Yermak, a Cossack, who opened up the way for

¹¹ Though the Ural Mountains are now considered the traditional boundary between Europe and Asia, it was not always this way, and our current conception of this matter is a consequence of Russian imperialism and mapping working in tandem. Before the 1730s and concerted efforts by Russian mappers to recategorize the Ural Mountains as the boundary, the Don River was seen as the boundary between Europe and Asia, an area significantly farther west. Thus, this claiming of territory and labeling shows a larger desire on the part of the expansionist Russian state to spread the definitions of Europe eastward so as to justify and naturalize their settlement and conquest (Sunderland, p. 43). By pushing the boundaries of Europe eastward, this would include Russians under the desired classification of ‘European’ while also making it appear as though their conquests eastward were rightful and natural. On a related note, Foucault (2007) writes of the definitions of Europe, “First of all, what is Europe? At the start, or in the first half of the seventeenth century, the idea of Europe is absolutely new. What is Europe? First, it is precisely a unit that no longer has the universal vocation of Christianity, for example. Christianity, by definition, by vocation, aimed to cover the whole world. Europe, on the other hand, is a geographical division that at the time did not include Russia, for example, and only included England in a somewhat ambiguous way, since England was not actually a party to the treaty of Westphalia” (p. 297).

future Russian involvement by waging war against the powerful khans in Siberia. After they were deposed, Siberia and its indigenous tributaries lay open for seizure by the Russians (Armstrong, 1975). Population estimates of those living in Siberia in the 17th century are a few hundred thousand, which was not helped by smallpox epidemics wiping out up to 80% of some indigenous groups (Richards, 2003).

Figure 5. Map of Yermak's Journey, 1580-1581



— Yermak's Campaign, 1580-1581

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system with route data from primary text accounts)

Scholars solidly agree that the conquest of and entry into Siberia by Russians begins in the early 1580s with a Cossack warlord and bandit named Yermak (Armstrong, 1975; Müller and Pallas, 1842), fond of plundering the Volga. On one such journey, he crossed the Urals by river

and proceeded to continue his river settlement plundering ways across the Urals against the Khanate of Sibir, what remained of the Mongol imperial fragments post-dissolution. One subject of historical debate is whether it was in fact the desire of the Stroganovs, a wealthy Russian merchant family who had mineral investments in the Urals, to direct and summon Yermak to conquer this region for their later investments (Armstrong, p. 4). Other perspectives suggest that Yermak simply came to Siberia and plundered of his own accord, which would not be unexpected given his recent history and life occupation as essentially a river pirate of the Volga River (p. 5). In any case, this has two outcomes historiographically: 1) the conquest of Siberia began under early capitalist premonitions as a deliberate intention of the Stroganov family to secure more lands for their economic visions or 2) Yermak happened to go down a different river than usual, discovered plenty of places worth looting, and decided that the peoples of Siberia were an easy target for his banditry.

In either case, the Russian state had been sponsoring Stroganov activity in and around the Urals since the 1570s, including the order to construct forts for protection against Tatar incursions. As Armstrong says, “The important thing . . . is to judge the whole matter from the standpoint of Moscow’s eastern policy; and in this context, Stroganov initiative was certainly to be expected: had Ivan not authorised them in 1574 to build strongpoints across the Urals?” (p. 6). Regardless of whether the Stroganovs were involved in directing Yermak and persuading him to make war against the Khanate of Sibir, it remains that the Russian state was well-positioned and increasingly poised toward the east at this time and—whether actively or passively—supporting non-state actors in this region to exert influence and test the waters in Siberia. The conquest of Kazan by Ivan IV in 1552 is also worthy of mention here, which greatly decreased Tatar influence and control in the region. Armstrong goes on, writing “The fact that Ivan IV had

approved in 1558 of the Stroganovs exploring and exploiting the Permian lands may be interpreted as a first move, at government level, in feeling the way eastwards . . . Ivan was clearly using his merchant friends to further aims in which his government was just as much interested as they were” (p. 4). Though Yermak was a convenient actor from which Russia could derive benefit, it may matter little that it was him specifically that led the first incursions into Siberia as the policy of Russia for decades had been curious of that area and slowly edging toward it. The sponsorship of the semi-autonomous bandit warrior Yermak was a cunning political move to feel out dangers and opportunities in Siberia without provoking the Tatars too much—at least toward Russian villages—should things go poorly for Yermak’s attempted plunders (p. 9).¹²

Yermak and his band of Cossacks were able, in a few short years, to subdue the Khanate of Sibir as the Cossacks had access to gunpowder weaponry while the Siberian Tatars did not (p. 125). Despite this, the Siberian Tatars continued to be an elusive enemy in the Tobol River region for years, even after the capture and burning of their capital, Qashliq.¹³ Kuchum Chan,¹⁴ the khan of Sibir, was at large in the area for several years and organized raids against the Russians.¹⁵ Eventually, however, Kuchum and Siberian Tatar resistance to Russian presence faded into obscurity, and the region was incorporated into Russia and a capital city built:

¹² The translator adds a helpful note on this subject writing, “Only when Moscow heard that things were going well, and saw the promise of great gain, did the government move to support what had up to then been an essentially private venture of the Stroganov family. The venture had been known to, perhaps even instigated by, the tsar—but no material assistance had up to now been given” (p. 54). Essentially, the role of the state was limited in that it granted the Stroganovs the land in this region, but the Stroganovs were the ones who summoned Yermak to clear out Kuchum and his khanate. Upon seeing the success of Yermak and his endeavors in defeating Kuchum, the Russian state began to provide direct assistance.

¹³ Also called Isker or Sibir in some texts.

¹⁴ Kuchum Chan was a direct descendent of Genghis Khan. In some texts his name is spelled alternatively as Kuchyum.

¹⁵ Contact between the Khanate of Sibir and Bukhara was common at this time. Armstrong writes, “A surviving letter to [Kuchum] at this time from the khan of Bukhara urges him to stop fighting his own kind and to rally all Mohammedans against the Russians” (p. 8). This evidently did not materialize, however, and it is said Kuchum went south and disappeared; some even say he ended up in Bukhara and died there, an old, feeble man in exile.

Tobolsk—on the ruins of the old Tatar capital of Qashliq. With Kuchum’s decreased power and eventual exodus, along with the establishment of Tobolsk in the late 1580s, the initial struggle to penetrate Siberia was complete, and the rationale of this conquest had to be justified.

The Yesipov Chronicle: Yermak the Chosen

Though all 17th century chronicles to be discussed exhibit the trait of piety and utilizing Christianity to interpret events of the world, the Yesipov Chronicle is notable among the others in this regard. Texts of the period communicated clearly that it was Russia’s divine destiny to conquer Siberia and that God was with Russian warriors wherever they went. The narrative of divine presence is the dominant rationale utilized to justify the conquest such that Slezkine calls it a “crusade for Orthodoxy” (p. 42). Throughout Yesipov’s narrative, the entire mission of Yermak is understood as the mission of a simple man guided by God in a manner not unbiblical and, as will be apparent throughout the chronicles, closely mirrors language of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The chronicler writes, “The infidel kingdom began in Sibir . . . by the will of God it was captured by Orthodox Christians, by a Russian army” (p. 62). Nearly unilaterally, the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the Muslim Tatars of Sibir are referred to and understood in religious terms. It is, in fact, difficult to find their mention in the chronicles as not being referred to as “infidels” (pp. 62, 69), “pagans” (pp. 70, 71), “godless” (pp. 69, 77) or “ungodly” (pp. 78, 84). This one aspect of indigenous identity, their religious identity, became—in the Orthodox Russian view—the encompassing aspect and mark of their being.

This fallen identity is used by the chronicler throughout to not only mark Tatars and indigenous Siberians as Other, but also to justify their many deaths. The logic is essentially that since they are not Christian, they deserve to be conquered and slain. The chronicler writes of

Kuchum, “God wished to destroy his kingdom and give it up to the Orthodox Christians” (p. 68). In aligning themselves with God and utilizing an essentialist, fundamentalist discourse promoting Orthodox Christian religious supremacy, there could be little questioning of the actions of the Russians, Yermak, and his Cossacks. After all, if one has God on one’s side, who can question the defendant’s actions? Especially in a time of religious dominance such as this, the Russian invention of a discourse that claimed the blessing of God for the conquest of territory was final and irrefutable. In their rationalization of violence and conquest, humans spoke for God and attached their actions to the institution of the church, making their conquest unquestionable.¹⁶ Yesipov writes in chapter 11, “These unconquerable heroes spread slaughter around them and displayed fierce-hearted daring” (p. 71). What is normally objectionable in Christian theology becomes justifiable as long as one claims one is acting in God’s name. Similar narratives were at play in the 19th century in the United States where white, enlightened, Christian civilization was advanced at the great expense of indigenous peoples of North America. Highly similar discourses of empty land, land use, and indigenous pagan nature are prevalent in both scenarios (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

In addition, chapters of the account are often begun with the statement of what year it is in the Orthodox calendar. For instance, chapter 8 begins, “In the year 7089 [1581], in the reign of the Pious Tsar and Great Prince Ivan Vasilyevich, Autocrat of all Russia,” (p. 70). At times, this is done to the point of what contemporary readers might call unnecessary repetition. However, one also gets the sense of how writers conceptualized time, primarily in Christian terms in

¹⁶ Much of the rationale of the chronicles falls apart if one questions simply ‘what if God did not actually sanction this conquest? How do we know that God sanctioned this conquest? Is this not just a human transposal onto the will of God in order to justify plunder, material wealth, conquest, and violence?’ Unfortunately, these theological discourses and excuses for violence have not gone away; those claiming to speak for God while committing violence or oppression still wield considerable influence in our world.

addition to what governing leader happened to be tsar at that time, implicitly linking the two and emphasizing God's ordination of the tsar and these lands. Siberia was explicitly viewed as being given to the Russians by God for their faithfulness, "God was pleased to give the Siberian land to the Christians . . . God should be pleased for the universe to endure; and for them to give fur tribute to the sovereign every year without cessation . . . The Lord was bestowing a kingdom and was granting a territory" (p. 74). Not only was the land to rightfully belong to the Russians, but it was also God's will that indigenous labor should be forced to provide fur tribute to the glorious tsar.

Fundamentally, the Russians viewed themselves righteously and as inheritors of a destiny given to them by God—to christianize and fill the lands of Siberia, an Edenic garden full of life, abundance, and natural wealth. To illustrate this, it is worth quoting at length a passage by Archpriest Avvakum from 1673 which describes the bountiful Siberian land:

"The mountains were high and the cliffs of rock, fearfully high; twenty thousand versts and more I've dragged myself, and I've never seen their like anywhere. Along their summits are halls and turrets, gates and pillars, stone walls and courtyards, all made by God . . . Hemp grows there too in the care of God, and in the courtyards are beautiful flowers, most colorful and good-smelling. There's no end to the birds, to the geese and swans—like snow they swim on the lake. In it are fish, sturgeon and taimen salmon, sterlet and amul salmon, whitefish, and many other kinds . . . And all this has been done for man through Jesus Christ our Light" (Cracraft, 1993, pp. 67-78).¹⁷

At the same time as this romantic vision of Siberia, some discourses characterized the land as dark, void, and barren. This contradiction in discourse requires comment. In some notable cases, the discourse of Siberia as hell or a land of darkness has been deployed to describe its backward state under indigenous peoples (Slezkine, 1993, p. 12), while the deployment of a discourse characterizing it as a land of plenty, of light and natural wealth appear with the consideration of

¹⁷ A verst is equal to about 1.06 kilometers or .66 of a mile.

Siberia as a potential site of colonization for Russians.¹⁸ In more abstract terms, discourse regarding Siberian territory at this time is situated, and it is a product of power. In more concrete terms, Siberian territory under indigenous control was considered empty and undeveloped, dark, and void. However, once the possibility of Russian colonization became apparent, discourses emphasized its wealth, a vast paradise waiting to be settled and utilized for productive ends. The chronicler continues to describe Siberia's natural features and beauty, all of which were set by God, and in a similar discursive fashion reflect upon the beauty of a New Eden, one ripe with potential.

“There lies a mountain range of exceeding great height, so as to reach with some of its peaks up to the clouds of heaven; for thus has it been set up by God's decrees, like the fortified walls of a city . . . It is wonderful, indeed, how by God's decrees there are rivers there; the water wore away hard rock, and there are vast and most beautiful rivers, and in them the freshest waters and an abundance of various fishes. Where these waters issue there are forests fruitful for harvesting and most extensive grazing lands for cattle.”¹⁹ (p. 64-65)

With mountains that reach up to the heavens, vast rivers, plentiful fish supply, forests for harvesting, and lands for the grazing of cattle, all of these descriptions meet their logical extension with the question of what happens next. What should be done with these resources? The implication is that they are not being utilized and that they must be—that this is an immense opportunity.

This process of conversion, of Siberia into an enlightened space protected by God, was one that Russian settlement and most importantly—the church—would bring to the land.

However, in its current state, Siberian territory lay under the direction of infidels who neither

¹⁸ This claim will later come under scrutiny as it was, as Kivelson (2006) writes, “Christianization without conversion” (p. 150). Actual conversions of indigenous peoples in Siberia were rare.

¹⁹ The translator notes that this area is indeed important cattle grazing land even today (p. 65).

knew God nor how to utilize Siberian territory. Yesipov continues, outlining the process by which Siberia would be cleansed.

“God sent his chosen to purify the land and to conquer the infidel Khan Kuchyum and to destroy the abominable gods and their unholy temples, which were still a nesting place for wild beasts and a habitation for owls. God chose a leader not from famous men . . . They forgot the honour and glory of this world, they changed death into life, taking up the shield of true faith and fortifying themselves manfully and displaying bravery before the godless ones.”²⁰ (p. 69)

In other passages as well as this one, the conquest of Siberia is referred to as a cleansing or purifying process. In operation with the previously-discussed binaries that dominate 17th century discourse about Siberia in the chronicles—light and dark, Christian and pagan, empty and full, barren and bountiful—the act of a purification via conquest is a concerning one. It was this purification process via conquest that would transform Siberia from a land of darkness into one radiating with the glory of God’s light. In the chronicler’s estimation, Siberia remained yet a land of “wild beasts” and even monsters—beings historically seen as dangerous and characteristically anti-human, thus justifying their removal by enlightened Orthodox Christendom who were to turn “death into life” (p. 69). The chronicler goes on to compare indigenous Ostyaks and Samoyeds to animals or even lower:

“In truth, these people did not make themselves like animals, for if an animal is even something without the faculty of speech, God did not command it to eat or not to eat wild beasts or birds or hay. These men did not make themselves like them, since not knowing God, who is in heaven, nor His Law, and not receiving what comes from those who bid them to listen, they became eaters of raw flesh; consuming the meat of wild beasts and reptiles, they drank abominable things and blood, like water, from animals, and ate grass and roots.” (p. 65)

Because these people did not know God, they became cannibals and what later Europeans would describe as ‘savages.’ As Slezkine (1993) details, the little information about peoples beyond the

²⁰ Regarding the seemingly odd inclusion about owls, the translator offers a helpful note: “Russ. *sirini*, which also means a mythological bird with a woman’s face and breast.

Urals that the Russians had included merchant and traveler tales of strange beasts, monsters, half-humans, and cannibals (p. 32-34). Thus, one must recognize that common Russians, priests, soldiers, and other state-actors approached reality through an entirely different episteme, set of assumptions about the world, and sense of temporality than a contemporary understanding.²¹

The chronicler is also wont to lionize Yermak somewhat, emphasizing his humble background and newfound purpose and piety. The chronicler goes on to write how Yermak and his soldiers “placed their hopes firmly in the Lord and they all said: ‘We are worthy to die for the true faith and to suffer for the Orthodox religion and to serve the most pious tsar’” (p. 69). These characterizations are strange for a few reasons, and they are explicable by the situatedness of the author. Savva Yesipova was an assistant to the archbishop of Siberia during a profoundly devout time. His first filter of perceiving the world is through God’s will and God’s choices about what to make occur in the world. Anything that happens is attributable to God’s will. Thus, a certain romantic humility is attached to Yermak, not unlike that of biblical David in the book of 1 Samuel. That said, it is a strange characterization because Yermak was something of a river pirate warlord who had, up until very recently, been operating in conflict with the interests of the Russian state. Furthermore, it seems unlikely Yermak’s motivations were religious given his hitherto absence of any signs of piety, although it must be acknowledged that it was difficult to exist in the world at this time and not have a theological worldview. For these reasons, the ascriptions of humility and piety to Yermak on the part of the chronicler seem to be invented aspects that help provide a coherent story rather than actual aspects of Yermak based on facts of his life. In this instance, the situatedness of the chronicler becomes apparent, both in his position as an assistant to the archbishop and as someone who has interests in providing a coherent,

²¹ This is not to excuse their actions, but it is to draw attention to how discourse and knowledge profoundly affect the limits of human perception and thus human actions based on those perceptions.

morally-justifiable narrative for the conquest of Siberia, one that the Orthodox church in Siberia could benefit from while promoting Siberia as a paradise for Orthodox Christians.

Another aspect of Yesipov's Chronicle is that of his description of Russian forces versus Tatar forces as these differ significantly. It would also seem that Yesipov—and later chroniclers as will be seen—tend to exaggerate or make up certain aspects of the tale in order to portray Russians more favorably and Tatars less so. Yesipov writes, "Hearing of the coming of the Russian troops and of their courage and bravery, Khan Kuchyum was greatly afflicted concerning this and increasingly exerted his mind" (p. 70). This is said without any apparent source or knowledge on Yesipov's behalf. How could he have known how Kuchum felt or what he was thinking? It is also worth mentioning that it is not clear what courage and bravery Kuchum would have heard about regarding the Russians. Yermak's campaign in Siberia was yet to begin at this time. As a result, Yesipov's statements here about Kuchum's fear seem to be manufactured. Other portrayals of Kuchum consistently characterize him as cowardly, greedy, devious, cruel, and even foolish (p. 72). Yesipov also quotes Kuchum at various points in reference to his supposed great fear and worry about the Russians and a section where he despairs dramatically (p. 72), but there is not evidence in the account nor any explanation for how Yesipov found these specific details or knew of them. Yesipov continues to characterize Yermak positively, praising his valor and nobility; however, in the same paragraph just a few sentences later ironically revealing another motive for the Siberian conquest, likely Yermak's true one. "Yermak with his company displayed his valour through all the Siberian land . . . he returned to the city of Sibir with great rejoicing and booty" (p. 76). Despite Yesipov's praises, it is unlikely Yermak was a changed man from his prior river pirating days, which were still quite recent. However, Yesipov's comments toward Yermak here in some ways emblemize the

Yesipov chronicle and the general narrative of the conquest of Siberia—an external deployment of a rationalizing discourse onto a violent situation in such a way that its true motivations are obscured.

Throughout the Yesipov Chronicle, the story of the conquest of Siberia is told, but it is a violent series of events cloaked in religious language and rationalizations. This romantic theological narrative of Yesipov is highly situated; it was written by a Russian male with reasonable opportunity who had an interest in presenting the narrative in a manner conducive to his religious position as an assistant to the archbishop of Siberia. The chronicler writes,

“They humbled the proud and through all the Siberian land they triumphed with free steps, and they were not hindered by any man. And by these men there were established cities and God’s holy churches were erected. If in ancient times the Siberian land was darkened by idolatry, now it is shining with devotion to God; the service of devils has disappeared and the altars of idols are shattered. Knowledge of God was implanted . . . ‘Their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world.’” (p. 70)

From the darkness of idolatry to the light of Orthodox faith has Siberia come, and this is thanks to Yermak, the Cossacks, and the Russian forces that were to eventually support them. It is ironic that the phrase ‘humbled the proud’ appears as the tone of the chronicle is proud and self-righteous throughout. Within the same short sections, there are instances where the number of pagans killed is bragged about—treasure and great riches won, Russian forces proclaimed as brave and courageous—yet simultaneously are said to be humble about their accomplishments. As part of this enlightenment of Siberia, churches were to be built along its vast stretches and radiate God’s glory by their very being, hence the emphasis on the construction of Orthodox churches and steeples in Russian maps and texts concerning Siberia during this time. In his concluding chapters Yesipov writes,

“Thenceforth the sun of the Gospels illuminated the Siberian land, and the thunder of psalms resounded, and above all in many places cities were established, and God’s holy churches and monasteries were built . . . Let us, brethren, celebrate once more the

miracles of God, which have been accomplished in our day in lands newly enlightened concerning Jesus Christ, our Lord.” (pp. 82, 86)

What Yesipov here describes as a miracle was in fact the conquest and acquisition of colonial territory to the tsardom of Russia. What was once viewed as a land of monsters, beasts, devils, and darkness could now become a new promised land for the destiny of Orthodoxy-illuminated Russia in the 17th century. The creation of this discourse appealed to then-contemporary beliefs among Russians that the tsar was God’s messenger on earth as well as their leader, protector, and guide during a time of eschatological significance—thus, descriptions and portrayals of Siberia were inflected in this manner.

The Stroganov Chronicle: An Alliance of Merchants and State

Being written around 1670, much of the information in the Stroganov Chronicle was based on information from the Yesipov Chronicle. In this respect, the Yesipov Chronicle was fairly influential and a foundational work for understanding the conquest of Siberia, not just in a literal sense but also in a discursive sense. What occurred in Siberia and the actual events of its conquests, the motivations, were one thing, but discourse produced another. So, too, does the Stroganov account emphasize and contribute assumptions about Orthodoxy, the will of God and colonial expansion, but it, too, takes place under situated conditions and differs from that of the Yesipov. It is similar to the Yesipov Chronicle in that it is heavily concerned with Orthodox justifications for expansion, but it differs in a few key ways.

The Stroganov Chronicle was written and compiled using information from the Stroganov archives regarding their expansion into the lands past the Ural Mountains and correspondence with Yermak’s warriors (Armstrong, 1975). For this reason, one of the largest differences of the Stroganov Chronicle is that it communicates the Stroganov family’s

perspective and frames the conquest of Siberia as a state-assisted merchant enterprise rather than as the mission of a lowly man chosen by God as in the Yesipov Chronicle (p. 5). To this end, in the first chapter the chronicler writes,

“God granted the Siberian state for the sovereign to rule over . . . God inspired the Pious Sovereign, the Tsar, to question the men of his state who had knowledge concerning that land. The sovereign ordered that Yakov and Grigorey Stroganov should be brought before him, and he questioned them how the land of Perm might be protected from attack by the Siberian peoples and by what means restraint could be exercised on Sultan Kuchyum.” (p. 35)

This is considerably different from the Yesipov Chronicle and its origins of how the first intrusions into Siberia were made. The Stroganov account frames the Tsar and the state as intentionally gathering information on the land in order that it may soon be secured for the business interests of the Stroganov family. The tsar then granted these lands to the Stroganovs: “The Tsar and Great Prince Ivan Vasil’yevich of all Russia, granted Grigorey son of Anika Stroganov the empty lands below Great Perm for 88 versts down the river Kama” (p. 36). Here and elsewhere, the Stroganov account emphasizes the pre-encounter planning and land grants that took place before Yermak’s conquest, whereas the Yesipov account stresses the immediate events of Yermak’s conquest, the details of his battles, and his glory and destiny.

Readers, too, get a sense of the military planning aspect of the conquest, as the process by which settlements were established is described in greater detail. The Stroganov chronicle states, “In those regions where Grigorey Stroganov might choose a strong and well guarded place, we have commanded him to establish a stronghold and build fortresses . . . for defence against the Siberian peoples” (p. 36). The Russians are also consistently framed as outnumbered and acting in defense against the vast hordes of Eurasia. In actuality, in many of the cases where defenses were built or wars waged, the Tatar forces were not especially numerous. It is claimed elsewhere in the chronicles that there were many times as many Tatars as there were Russians—“one

cossack had to contend with ten or twenty or thirty pagans”—and that this imbalance was made null by the presence and blessing of God on the side of the Russians (p. 51). However, there is little evidence for this claim as estimates of Kuchum’s forces do not exceed a few thousand, while the chronicles claim Yermak came with 540 men (p. 69). Thus, Kuchum’s force would not likely exceed four or five times that of Yermak. Were the claim about Tatar numbers in chapter 17 of the Stroganov Chronicle true, it would mean Tatar forces would number 5,400; 10,800, or even as much as 16,200 men, which is highly unlikely. What can be gleaned from these features is a lionization of the affair on the part of the Russian side, wishing to appear as the heroic defenders, outnumbered yet still victorious. Couched in the religious language that characterizes all 17th century chronicles, the narrative echoes that of Israelite conquest of Jericho in the book of Joshua.

Furthermore, within this defensive military endeavor, Tatar peoples are framed as vicious, cruel, incapable of reason, and willing to murder in great numbers any who oppose them. The chronicler writes, “On his [Kuchum’s] advance they killed many Ostyak subjects and took their wives and children into captivity. They killed the sovereign’s envoy, Tret’yak Chebukov, and all the Tatars serving with him, who were going with him to Kazan’ against the Kazan’ Horde, and took others into captivity” (p. 39). Indeed, when Kuchum’s forces ruthlessly kill it is seen as part of their nature and deterministic of their kind, while when Russian forces ruthlessly kill it is a source of pride, their prowess, and a sure sign of God’s blessings in their endeavors: “The cossacks all together fell upon the pagans, displaying their bravery and ferocity before the impious and godless infidels. In a short time the pagans began to fail in their strength. God granted the cossacks victory over the pagans. The cossacks gained ground, overcame them and killed innumerable pagans” (p. 50). Once again, the slaughter of pagans is celebrated as a

just and righteous activity on the part of the Russians. It is said in chapter 17 of the Stroganov account, after all, that “God opposes the proud and gives his grace to the humble Christians” (p. 51). Can there be such a thing as a humble colonial conquest? Simultaneously, the Russians are framed not only as the defenders, but also victims and even helpless: “For God can help even the helpless. We have ourselves heard, brothers, how much evil those godless and accursed infidels of the Siberian land and Sultan Kuchyum did” (p. 49). As in the Yesipov Chronicle, God is made to speak; he is given a voice favorable to the Russian perspective that justifies all their doings. The deaths and ousting of the Siberian Tatars is a precondition to “the pacification of the Siberian land” (p. 53); as in the Yesipov account, it is a Christian conquering power that must cleanse the wilderness of Siberia and transform it into an enlightened space, gilded with settlements, each with a church to signify the filling of the land with the gospel.

The Yesipov Chronicle retains similar aspects of religious language and justification throughout its course. Indigenous Siberians and Siberian Tatars are primarily understood, nearly unilaterally, in terms of their religious difference. They are unequivocally pagans—“abominable infidels”—and this understanding of their identity is rigid and inflexible (p. 50). In addition, the religious chronology is how time is labeled and understood; in chapter 13 of the Stroganov account, the chronicler writes, “In the year 7090 [1581] on the 9th of September, sacred to the memory of the ancestors of our Lord” (p. 46). So, too, is the mission and endeavor of the Stroganovs in Siberia blessed by God. In attacks and offensives of the Tatars, the chronicler writes, “God did not permit the accursed ones to succeed . . . And so, by the help of God, the accursed barbarians were defeated” (p. 43-44). Actions taken by Yermak, the Cossacks, and the Russians are seen as God’s will, so they can do no wrong, while actions of the Tatars are seen as colored by their godlessness, so they are inherently evil and justified in death. In the chronicle,

God is even capable of great miracles to help his peoples, the Russians. The chronicler writes of a miraculous event and God's protection of the Russian forces, "The pagans began to shoot at them from the mountain, and their arrows fell from above on the Russians' boats like rain. But the Russians passed by these places, unharmed in any way by the Tatars" (p. 48).²² These sorts of tales and claims to the miraculous give a tremendous power to that of the chronicle; in this manner, any critique is stifled as if those who act in the name of God are wrong, then it must be that God himself is wrong—an impossible contradiction. Thus, these claims to God's will helped form the bedrock and ideology in discourse that justified the colonization of Siberian lands by the Russians. Acts of violence that would be seen as wrong can be justified if one appeals to an absolute such as the will of God. It is in this way that these actions are made unquestionable.

In this final victory, Russian settlements were established along the rivers and steppe and continually constructed as strong points from which to conduct the fur trade and merchant activities. The writer describes a number of settlements and their beginnings, "[the Russians] established a stronghold above the river Ob' at the mouth of the Irtysh and settled in it . . . The Russian troops arrived, settled in it and fortified the city strongly; it is now the city of Tobolesk, protected by God" (p. 59). These victories struck great fear into the Siberian Tatars according to the chronicle, which speaks of their godless fear at the righteous Christians, "Henceforth there was great fear among all the infidels of the Siberian land, and all the Tatars, both near and far, did not dare to go to war against the sovereign's cities" (p. 60). This is another example in the text of the writer ascribing to the Siberian Tatars various emotions and reactions that they may not have actually exhibited. The chronicler continues on the establishment of settlements and churches in Siberia,

²² This anecdote is tame compared to Remezov's later fantastical assertions about the conquest of Siberia in his chronicle.

“In many places by the command of those sovereigns Christian cities and strongholds were established, and in them churches to God were raised up, and monasteries were constituted to the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The unbelievers saw such grace shining forth in their land and the sovereign’s imperial hand raised over them, and many submitted themselves under the sovereign’s hand and left their impious faith .Many unbelievers came to baptism and were baptised.” (p. 60)

As Kivelson (2006) and others (Slezkine, 1994) have pointed out, the conversion of indigenous peoples in Siberia was limited until the 19th century. Thus, this notion reflects what Kivelson has called “Christianization without conversion” in Siberia (p. 150), the attempt of the Russians to create a Christian space out of Siberia where conversion was in fact quite limited yet statecraft was exercised in the name of God and Siberia seen as an empty paradise. The largest reason for this lack of conversion was that those who were Christian could not be subjected to the fur tribute system. Steller writes, “All native men of Siberia and northern Asia between the ages of eighteen and fifty except the crippled, the blind, and converts to Russian Orthodox Christianity were required to take the oath of allegiance to the czar and to pay an annual yasak in furs” (p. 8). This was a key dynamic in the political economy and labor population in Siberia as indigenous peoples were purposely not proselytized to in order to maintain a surplus labor population of fur tribute gatherers for the state. Despite this foundational reality and aspect of indigenous labor in Siberia, Siberia remained in discourse as a land of immense faith and piety, despite its very low rate of conversion among its indigenous inhabitants. As Sartre says of the European humanist project, “honeyed words, its affection of sensibility, were only alibis for our aggressions” (Hirano, 2020, pp. 336-337)—so, too, did Orthodoxy produce understanding of the colonization of Siberia at a time when religion not just explained confusing and unknown phenomena but actively produced people’s understanding of reality in a material way.

The Remezov Chronicle: Odyssey and Oracle

If the Yesipov and Stroganov chronicles produced differing perspectives of the Siberian territory as a place conquered by a humble Yermak and his selection by God versus a more comprehensive geopolitical and entrepreneurial tactic on the part of the Stroganovs and the Russian state, then Remezov's telling lists toward the mythological and fantastical. While the Yesipov and Stroganov accounts certainly give the indication that it was God's will that permeated the conquest of Siberian territory, this dominates Remezov's perspective as he even speaks of God himself coming down amid various battles with the Siberian Tatars. Remezov's take on the Siberian conquest is a detailed account of how God intervened directly to forward his geopolitical mission for Russia and all true Christians in their displacement of the Siberians and their drive eastward. Miracles and divine presence manifested physically in Siberian space are what define Remezov's account such that it approaches the point of silliness from a contemporary perspective. This said, it is not the aim to dispute or take Remezov to account for what might now be seen as silly, devout exaggerations but rather to highlight that this was the primary lens through which Siberia, its space, and its history were understood in common and official terms for many years. At this time, this picture of Siberia that Remezov painted—through discourse both written and mapped—became reality, an established knowledge seen as objective. Foucault (2007) says of discourse and its power, "A constant interplay between techniques of power and their object gradually carves out reality" (p. 79). In this case, an interplay between the Russian conquest and the discourse surrounding began to define, for centuries, the supposed true reality of what occurred. Remezov was a major contributor to these versions of history and how territory was rationalized as belonging to the Russian state.

Remezov was a significant Russian historian and geographer, himself of Siberian settler descent, born in Tobolsk. His maps and writings on Siberia were some of the most comprehensive to date and informed Peter the Great's reign as ways of knowing Siberian territory and incorporating it for state interests and Peter's modernization reforms. His maps can be seen as a rich middle ground between previous Russian mapmaking knowledge and European Enlightenment mapmaking methods; like the late 17th century and early 18th century in Russia, Remezov's maps signal an evolution and an import of western ways that was characteristic of Russian society writ large.

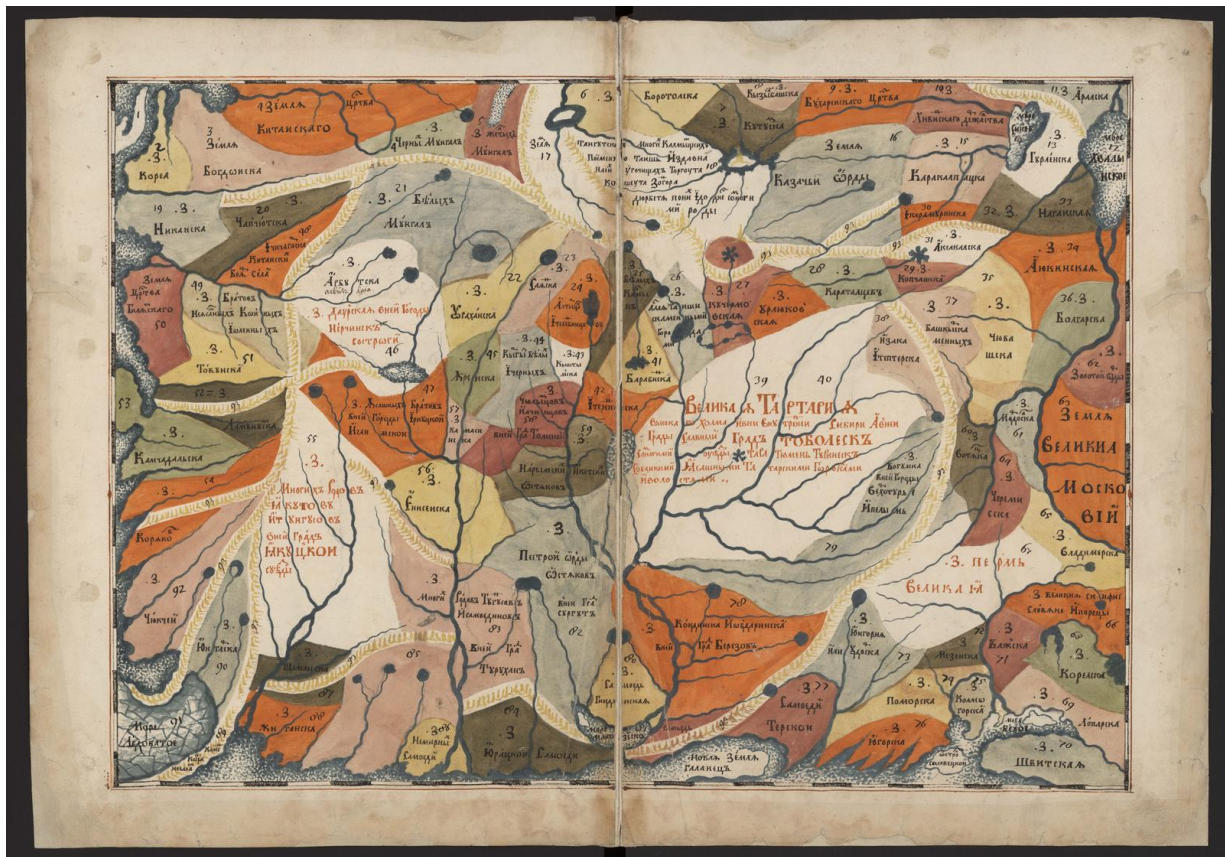
Figure 6. Map of All Siberia—1701, Remezov



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) (FOL) At. 490 A-1882 2003 v. 1.

Figure 11 shows a general map of Siberia by Semyon Remezov, an example of a transitional map of the time, where some aspects of Russian mapmaking are shown and some European methods are used. Features to note include the Great Wall of China in yellow at the top left of the map and the prominent ice sheets in the lower left of the map, signaling possible connection to North America. It appears more detailed than many prior Russian maps, but there are also aspects Remezov chose to include in this newer map such as the rivers and bodies of water that remain points of orientation. Significant geographers after Remezov would fully embrace European mapmaking.

Figure 7. Ethnographic Map of Siberia—1699, Remezov



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) (FOL) At. 490 A-1882 2003.

Similarly, Figure 18 below shows an ethnographic map of Russia commissioned by Peter the Great and made by Remezov. Increasingly, aspects of Enlightenment thought and ways of knowing begin to make their way into Russian maps. Visual depictions of Siberia like this relegated certain spaces to certain peoples as represented by the different colored sections. Some familiar points of note include Kamchatka in green on the far left, the Chukchi on the lower far left in pale pink, Korea in yellow on the top far left, Yakutsk in the white space toward the bottom left, Tartaria and Tobolsk in the white space in the center-right, Perm in white on the lower right, Muscovy in orange on the far right, and Kitai—China—in orange near the top left corner. Maps like this labeled the lands of Siberia, and they represented a concerted act of knowledge production that took place at a specific time and under certain political conditions. Maps and representations such as this would be presented to Peter and influence his thinking and decisions about Siberia and how best to utilize its vast wealth, peoples, and land.

However, Remezov also retains aspects of older mapping methods and his mapping communicates largely Orthodox beliefs and assumptions about Siberia. Thus, in a fairly short period, maps of Siberia—along with knowledge of Siberian territory itself—changed dramatically and contributed to Enlightenment ways of knowing and an increased role of the state. Due to the amount of maps and writings he produced during his time as a cartographer and historian, he and his works constitute a cornerstone for analysis and understandings of how Orthodox knowledge of territory translated into new, enlightened knowledge. As Kivelson (2006) writes, “In texts and in maps he documented a life devoted to glorifying his natal city and his Siberian homeland. Tobolsk, the Muscovite regional capital in western Siberia, occupies the center of all his work, radiating forth as a numinous, incandescent beacon” (p. 133). To Remezov, Tobolsk was a beacon of God’s glory and light on earth as well as the blessed city

upon which the mission of the colonization of Siberia was initiated upon. One may recall from the earlier chronicles how Tobolsk came to be founded—practically on site of the old Tatar capital of Qashliq. Though Remezov’s Enlightenment influences may be noted, this is not at all to say that Remezov was secular; rather, he was quite devout. However, what is interesting is how his devoutness intersects with increasingly geopolitical visions for Russia along with the deployment of a discourse concerned with an expanding empire and its destiny—perhaps the defining aspect of the Remezov Chronicle.

Furthermore, it may be acknowledged that in undertaking a new writing of an account already established by the Yesipov and Stroganov Chronicles, Remezov was engaging in the writing of a new history. What was wrong with the old ones? Remezov drew upon them, but what is revealed in Remezov’s account is an increased sense of destiny, urgency, and divine passion which Russia possessed, along with its right to expand God’s kingdom “unto the ends of the earth” (Kivelson, 2006, p. 149). As will be seen in Remezov’s account, the expansion of God’s kingdom unto the ends of the earth was one part of a discursive practice used to obscure the conquest of Tatars and the submission of indigenous peoples in Siberia to fur tribute toward the Russian state.

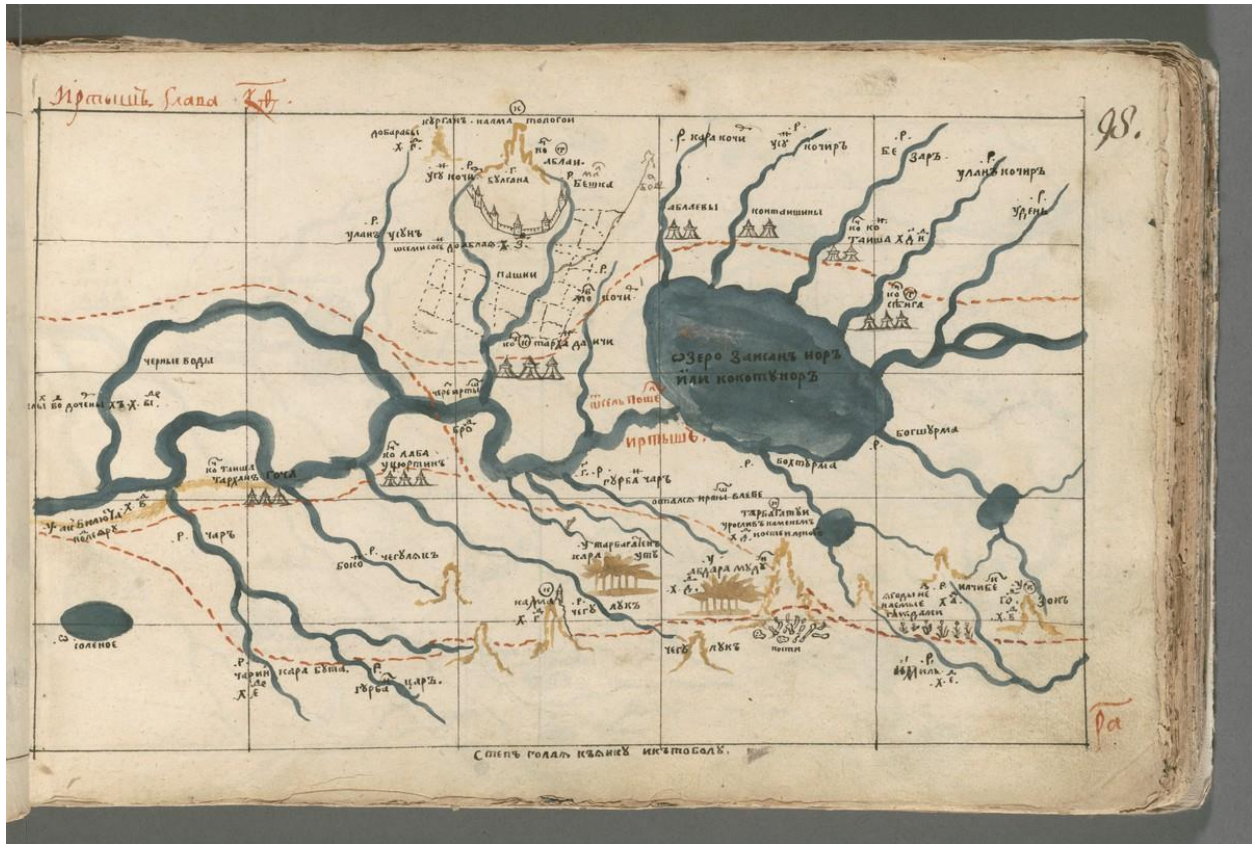
To this end, the first lines of Remezov’s account begin with the command of God to spread throughout Siberia. Remezov writes, “From the beginning of time our Christian God, the All-Seer, Creator of all creatures, Founder of his house, and Provider of the vine and of spiritual sheep, decreed for the Gospels to be preached throughout Sibir’ to the ends of the universe and the limit of the mountains” (p. 88). It is unclear by what source or on what occasion Remezov heard God say this as Siberia is not mentioned specifically in the Bible. The closest thing mentioned to Siberia would be Scythia, traditionally thought of to be the lands around the Black

and Caspian seas that were populated by the nomadic Scythians. It would take a leap in logic to extrapolate that the Bible was talking about Siberia in this case. In addition, when Scythia is mentioned, it is not in the context of any command to conquer or spread unto them; it is usually in the context of listing ethnicities familiar to Mediterranean cultures at that time (Colossians 3). The only other—even more vague and contextless—interpretation that could be applied is that of the sentiment expressed in Matthew 28, commanding the disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This does not mention Scythia or Siberia and again can only make sense if extrapolated by the author to a substantial degree, the command simply meaning to spread Christianity.

Furthermore, if spreading Christianity throughout Siberia was the aim of Russians and the subject of their discourse, then what actually happened was quite different and mostly economic in nature, again more motivated by the fur trade. This Christian logic and discourse is one that Remezov immediately applies to his account, and it colors his interpretation of events in Siberia. This is apparent in the way Remezov speaks of conquests and victories by the Russians. They had to occur because God was with the Russians; when something goes poorly for the Russians, it is not because God was not with them but rather because the strength of the devil and sin was so great in those indigenous to Siberia. This logic is self-justifying and allows any level of violence or exploitation to occur because it is in the name of this greater good and sense of divine destiny. The phrasing of “from the beginning of time” connotes a sense of larger destiny and inevitability, thus justifying the current Russian project in Siberia (p. 88). It is as if to say ‘it was always this way and Siberia was always destined to be Christian land.’ Below, Figure

5 shows a map along the Irtysh River, depicting human remains in the lower right along paths traveled by Russians, likely the site of a battle or killing between Russians and Siberians.²³

Figure 8. Map of the Irtysh River—1696, from Remezov’s Chorographic Sketchbook, I. 98



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) At. 490 A-1667 1958.

This sense of religious destiny for the land of Siberia is seen throughout Remezov’s account. This Edenic vision of Siberia and what it could be under Christian control prevails in the account. Remezov writes, “When spring came the brave cossacks, seeing and realising that the Siberian land was rich and abounding in all things, and that the people there were not

²³ Near the site of this map on the Irtysh River, there is a town called Ermak, another spelling of Yermak. Yermak is seen as something of a folk hero in Russia, and many places are named after him. An example of settler place-naming.

warlike, sailed down the Tagil” (p. 108). The language and phrasing used here is similar to biblical accounts where moments of divine contemplation occurred. Remezov writes of and illustrates Siberia as a place of lush beauty as shown in Figure 12, a map of the settlement of Surgut and the Ob River that runs across Siberia.

Figure 9. Map of Surgut—1701, Remezov



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) (FOL) At. 490 A-1882 2003 v. 1.

In the Bible, the spies of Joshua looked upon the land of Canaan and saw its beauty and wealth, as well as the fear of the Canaanites and its propensity to fall. Just as in that occasion there was an undercurrent—or at least recognition—of material motivation, so, too, is there the hope for riches in Remezov’s account. The chronicle speaks of the Cossack meeting with Maksim

Stroganov, who had expressed anxiety about the success of Yermak's conquest. "They . . . set out on their way on the 13th day of June, peacefully and all of them promising Maksim: 'If God sets us on the way of acquiring booty and of remaining in good health, on our return we shall pay and reward you'" (p. 100-101). The conquest and subjection of a weakened Siberian Tatar khanate would have benefits for multiple parties involved: Yermak, the Stroganovs, and the Russian state and its increasingly short supply of furs in the White Sea region to the northwest.

It is worth noting the indigenous peoples famously brought to submission for the purpose of fur tribute under Russia at this time were previously under a similar Tatar tribute system that was established by the Mongols centuries earlier (Armstrong, p. 111). This tribute system gave the khans of Siberia a great deal of wealth and power they would not have otherwise had. For this reason, it should be noted that indigenous peoples of Siberia were not 'free' or in a state of bliss prior to Russian encroachment as many groups were similarly subjugated under the khans and Mongols for centuries prior. What the Russian incursion into Siberia brought was a changing of hands of these subjects and a reorganization of who would be paying tribute to whom—it also represents a geopolitical inversion of medieval Muscovy's subjection to the Mongols and Muscovite payment of tribute toward them. This may help to explain the pride and self-righteousness that Remezov writes with throughout his account. Muscovy was a Mongol tributary for centuries, so this geopolitical moment—the conquest of Siberian tributaries—carried great significance and metaphor.

Remezov continues his account and soon enters the realm of the miraculous in his relaying. He writes,

"Throughout the years the kings and princes, the chanters, the mullahs and preachers and other infidels kept seeing on the site of present day Tobol'sk with its cathedral and bell-tower, a vision of a shining Christian city up in the air, with churches and a great ringing of bells, which aroused wonder and great perplexity about what this might be. According

to the histories of the infidels they began to see this vision since the year 7066 [1552] every day at dawn and at every festival of theirs before the coming of Yermak.”²⁴ (p. 112)

Throughout the text, the Tatars are consistently framed as foolish pagans who would not heed God’s warning or repent from their ways. Remezov’s explanation of their vision is strange because it appears to be associated with the sunrise and could just as easily be a merging of religious exaggeration and the simple fact of the sunrise occurring every day at dawn. In Remezov’s handbook, he includes a picture of this vision which is a Russian orthodox city beset upon a shining sun-like orb in the clouds, so the mythological and fantastical aspect of this event may be explained by that.²⁵

Remezov continues, this time with another vision and warning to the Siberian Tatars:

“Under Khan Sauskan, in the city square where now stands the cathedral, there appeared to all infidels a pillar of fire reaching from the ground to the sky with various apparitions within the flames. And to this day the infidels . . . are unable to relate about this vision and terror, only that ringing of bells had been heard” (p. 114). This, too, is very similar to a biblical account, that of the Hebrews and their escape into the desert after enslavement by the Egyptians. In Exodus 13, the Hebrews followed a pillar of fire at night in the desert to guide them on their way through the wilderness. This pillar was said to be God himself. In Remezov’s handbook illustration, various angelic figures with swords along with several eyes appear in the flaming pillar to the Tatars, at the sight of which they show great fear and concern.²⁶ It is also significant that Remezov

²⁴ The translator includes a helpful note that it was also in 1552 that the famous conquest of Kazan occurred (p. 112), a noteworthy stronghold of Islamic Tatars and a thorn in Russia’s side for many years. Remezov including this note about when Kazan was conquered helps to draw a line in historical discourse between the conquest of Kazan and the conquest of Sibir as part of the same thread—a new, rejuvenated, holy Russia that was fulfilling its destiny to expand against enemy forces.

²⁵ Appropriately, the headland near Tobolsk was named Altyn Yarginak, meaning ‘the golden place of judgement’ (p. 113). The term judgment connotes a sense of self-righteous justice, something that was deserved—the Russians acted took on the mantle of acting in the name of God and his judgment.

²⁶ Remezov uses the symbol of the eye throughout his drawings to indicate God and his all-knowingness (p. 114).

mentions this vision of the flaming pillar would occur on the site of the cathedral in Tobolsk.²⁷ A sense of destined replacement or of divine command is present; the implication is that the Tatars had the chance to repent or flee, but it was in their stubbornness and lack of Christian civility that they persisted in their wicked ways. Thus did God will that they be conquered and displaced. Once again, the attribution of Russian actions to God's will or the command of God helps to rationalize whatever they do. This pillar was a sign of God's will and his desire to see that Russians expand and conquer Siberian territory.²⁸ Later on in the account, Tatars see the pillar of fire again, and they lose their minds in terror and flee, some even dying of madness and fear at this sight (p. 115).

To further highlight the immorality of the Tatars, Kuchum's personal life and habits are discussed by Remezov. He writes, "Kuchyum was of the infidel faith, worshipping idols and eating unclean foods. He led a sinful life for he had 100 wives, and youth as well as maidens, which is also permissible to the other infidels in whatever number they desire" (p. 117). This helps to further the notion that these were different people who had it coming. Characterized as sinful, undeserving, adulterous infidels who engaged in the pleasures of this world, "God the all-seeing soon put an end to his [Kuchum's] reign" (p. 117). The mentioning of Kuchum is sinful would be an obvious fact in Christianity as it should be noted that all Christians are sinners. In this sense, Kuchum is hypocritically othered because his sins are apparently greater than Christians or unforgivable. Kuchum, in particular, was seen as a foolish, cruel, and stubborn coward. Remezov writes once again of the vision,

"The above-mentioned vision appeared to the infidels at all times so that such manifestations greatly frightened them. And they began to consult the soothsayers as to

²⁷ To Remezov, the site of the Tobolsk cathedral and the space where it was situated was likely the most holy and glorious place in all of Siberia.

²⁸ Some suggest that this vision may have actually been an aurora, which is an intriguing theorization, but auroras are fairly rare in that area of Siberia (p. 114).

what was going to happen and to question the captives about what this vision meant to the Russians. The soothsayers and the captives of one accord foretold to Kuchyum that God would soon give the place to the Christians, and drive him out, and he would come to an evil end. And so it happened. But for this he ordered many to be put to death.” (p. 120)

Further underlining Kuchum’s character flaws, Kuchum is portrayed as stubborn and out of touch. He cannot simply accept the meaning of the vision, the meaning being that he must desist as God on the side of the Russians has come to usurp his throne and give his kingdom away. Instead, he refuses, and he puts many of his own to death for communicating what is seen as an impending truth—the destined transfer of his lands to the Christian Russians.

Like Pharaoh in the book of Exodus and his stubborn refusals to acknowledge the truth of God and his will, Kuchum and the Siberian Tatars experience multiple visions and signs of their doom, but they refuse to heed them. They instead become fearful, angry, and blame each other. Another instance of this is the vision of the two beasts in the river. During Kuchum’s reign, two beasts came out of the Tobol and Irtysh rivers onto an island at the rivers’ confluence; they then proceeded to fight one another. The beast from the Irtysh was white, big, hairy, and looking like a large wolf. The other beast that came from the Tobol river was small, black, and like a dog. The small dog killed the large one (p. 121). At this, Kuchum was perplexed and fearful, wishing to know what the vision meant. Remezov writes,

“Many saw this apparition, as well as Kuchyum himself with his men, and he questioned his chanters, mullahs and soothsayers on its meaning. They said to him: ‘The great beast is your kingdom while the small one is the Russian warrior, and it will soon happen that he will kill and capture and plunder and seize your towns’. Kuchyum ordered them to be dragged by horses over the fields.” (p. 122)

Repeatedly, Kuchum is warned of his kingdom’s fate, but he refuses to do anything about it besides punishing those who inform him. Thus does Kuchum constantly appear as strong-willed and vain, similar to biblical leaders such as the pharaoh of Egypt that refused to acknowledge the

truth of God's will. This is how Remezov portrays Kuchum and his logic for interpreting the events of the world; they correspond to biblical narratives. As such, the conquest of Siberia takes on a similar discourse and logic and becomes comprehensible through these repeated signs, figures, and tropes that align the geopolitical motives of 17th century Russia with the will of God and the heritage of Christianity. Figure 7 shows a river map by Semyon Remezov depicting, among other things, a conversion of indigenous peoples in the top right of the map. A priest is clad in black, while native Siberians gather around him. Despite this depiction, such conversions were quite rare at the time. Official depictions of Siberia may have included actions like these to justify expansion under a religious guise. Remezov's writing and illustrations portray Siberia as a site of destiny and glory.

Figure 10. Unknown River Map—1696, from Remezov’s Chorographic Sketchbook, I. 111



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) At. 490 A-1667 1958.

Remezov’s account does not cease its fantastical style with his discussion of the pillar of fire, however. Of the second battle with Kuchum, Remezov writes, “The infidels were like sheep rushing out of their folds but with God’s help and the manifestation of heavenly hosts they too were defeated” (p. 131). In Remezov’s handbook, his drawing shows an angelic figure fighting alongside the Russian forces, clasp[ing] a sword having just killed a Tatar.²⁹ Figure 8 depicts the divine intervention not just vaguely but literally present among the soldiers in the battle.

²⁹ It is not extremely clear what Remezov’s intentions were with this drawing and whether he meant to literally suggest that an angel fought alongside the Russian forces. In lieu of any other indications, it would seem that he did believe this and portrayed it thusly as a literal event. As one may recall in the earlier Yesipov and Stroganov accounts, there were a few occasions where God’s protection was mentioned as being upon the Russian forces and they did not suffer any attack from the Tatars as a result. Remezov may have exaggerated this aspect in an artful and fantastical way. Regardless, it remains in his official account of the conquest.

Figure 11. 'The Manifestation of the Heavenly Hosts'—1700, *Sibirskiye Letopisi*, Part 37



Illustration from *Sibirskiye Letopisi*, in Armstrong (1975, p. 131).

A bit later on, a similar occasion happens as a spirit of St. Nicholas appears to the Russian forces after a very bloody battle. Remezov writes, “They fought mercilessly hand to hand, slashing one another, so that horses were up to their bellies in the blood and corpses of the unbelievers . . . With God’s help the cossacks got the upper hand and put the others to flight; the khan’s heir also fled. Then at the apparition of St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker he ordered them to venture, and they proceeded downstream” (p. 137). St Nicholas appears and directs them to continue, pressing their advantage and sailing downstream further. Guided by the saints and God’s blessing, the Cossacks continued.

Having sailed downstream further, another miracle—perhaps the most surreal of all—occurred. Remezov writes, “And there appeared the Saviour, whose image on the banner, beloved by the cossacks, moved of its own accord and advanced downstream . . . The pagans shot from the hill at the boats innumerable arrows, like rain, but, saved by God, Yermak and his men sailed past this place without a hair being harmed” (p. 139). The other chronicles mention this moment as the Cossacks are sailing along and shot at by the Tatars; God’s blessing is upon the Cossacks, however, and they are made invulnerable to harm. This is similar to the biblical account in Daniel 3 of the fiery furnace and the protection of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from being burned. After this, Christ himself appears to all on the river. Remezov writes,

“Then all the infidels saw how along that bank there appeared on clouds the great and wonderfully beautiful king in a bright light with many winged warriors flying and bearing his throne on their shoulders while the king threatened them with a naked sword in his left hand. O wonderful miracle! According to the infidels’ own accounts, the arms of those strong in archery who shot at him from afar went dead by divine fate and their bows were shattered . . . In that hour of battle the infidels . . . saw the figure of Christ giving assistance and turning aside the arrows flying at them, and with redoubled strength the cossacks fought and killed the infidels, seeing upon themselves the manifest grace of God” (pp. 140, 142)

There is little that could more explicitly signal God's approval of Yermak's venture than the appearance of Jesus himself. Remezov sketches this in his handbook, the Tatar forces on one bank of the river and the Russian forces in boats, with Jesus seated on a throne between the two armies, deflecting the arrows of the Tatars away from the Cossacks. The Tatars are terrified at this vision, severely weakened, and many are killed. Later on, too, there is a tale of Yermak killing a giant some 14 feet tall (p. 146). To Remezov, the conquest of Siberia was a mythologically religious, divinely destined, biblical event.

Throughout the Remezov Chronicle and his interpretations of past chronicles on the conquest of Siberia, events of the Bible are alluded to and reinserted in order to create a new mythos of how Siberia was conquered and justified as belonging to Russia. To Remezov, it was Russia's religious destiny to take the land of Siberia, itself a similar narrative to the Hebrew conquest of Canaan as being preordained by God. As always, under this religious veneer was a material reality; Remezov writes,

“They seized Karacha's town, and in it countless treasure, gold and silver, and precious stones and pearls, and money in quantity, and cattle, and remained there two weeks of the Assumption fast. They kept fervently praying and fasting, ardently entreating the Lord to keep them alive and grant victory over the infidels so that the Christian race should be exalted and glorified to the ends of the earth and that God's hand should stretch over the true tsar.” (p. 150)

This phrasing appears a number of times throughout the chronicles, and each time it has a similar contextual meaning that belies its stated meaning. What spreading Christianity “to the ends of the earth” effectively meant in discourse was the allowed conquest of non-Christian peoples because they were not Christian, including the looting of their towns and the demanding of tribute to the Russian state. A number of other miracles and signs appear to Kuchum and the Siberian Tatars after this point including: a bright cloud and the ringing of bells over what would become Tobolsk (p. 152), Tatars fleeing in battle as if on fire (p. 155), visions of Yermak

appearing to Tatars (p. 213), miracles done with Yermak's body and clothing that healed the sick (p. 216), as well as pillars of fire and visions of large candles (p. 216). One more miracle is worth mentioning, and it is the flight of Kuchum. Remezov writes,

“On the 25th day of October Kuchyum . . . had a vision sent by God: the skies suddenly opened at the four corners of the universe and there issued forth to destroy him shining warriors armed, winged, and terrible, who on reaching his residence surrounded the whole of his army saying: ‘Unclean son of the dark demon Bakhmet, leave this land, for the land and its fulness is the Lord’s and all the Christians living in it are blessed; fly to your habitations near the abyss of the thrice accursed demon Bakhmet.’ Kuchyum rose trembling in his whole body and said: ‘Let us flee from here, from this terrible place, so as not to perish.’ And God’s angel drove them along.”³⁰ (p. 163)

Finally, Kuchum heeds one the many signs given to him and decides to flee. These angelic warriors essentially tell him to go back to where he came from, to where he belongs, possibly in the desert or southward toward Central Asia.³¹

³⁰ The translator includes an interesting note that the name Bakhmet is possibly a corruption of the name Mohammed, referring to the status of Tatars as Muslims and the Christian thought (in this case) of the prophet Mohammed as demonic and associated with satan.

³¹ This is further interesting because it is said Kuchum fled to Bukhara after this vision.

Figure 12. Map of Irtysh Landmarks—1696, from Remezov’s Chorographic Sketchbook, I.

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Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) At. 490 A-1667 1958.

Figure 6 shows , on the left, a Russian outpost with soldiers and cannons fighting against Tatars. Further along the red path to the right of the map is a fire, perhaps the destruction of an indigenous camp. After the dispelling of Kuchum, Remezov writes of “settled Siberians” and the improvement of Siberia, the settling of towns, establishment of farms, and more. He writes, “After the baptism of many infidels Sibir’ expanded, and towns and monasteries were built with everything necessary to their subsistence” (p. 239).³² At least at a small scale, this was the

³² As it has been discussed previously, conversion of indigenous peoples in Siberia was very uncommon at this time, so Remezov’s mention of baptizing infidels must be either taken as false, an exaggeration, or even metaphorical.

beginning of Russian settlement in Siberia. Whether this can be said to constitute settler colonialism remains to be explored and will be more conclusively discussed in Chapter 5.

At this and with—in Remezov’s view—the infidel evil vanquished, the Remezov Chronicle begins its conclusion. Remezov offers a hopeful vision of Siberia for Christians beginning to come to its bountiful lands and speaks of the cleansing process that Christian forces undertook there:

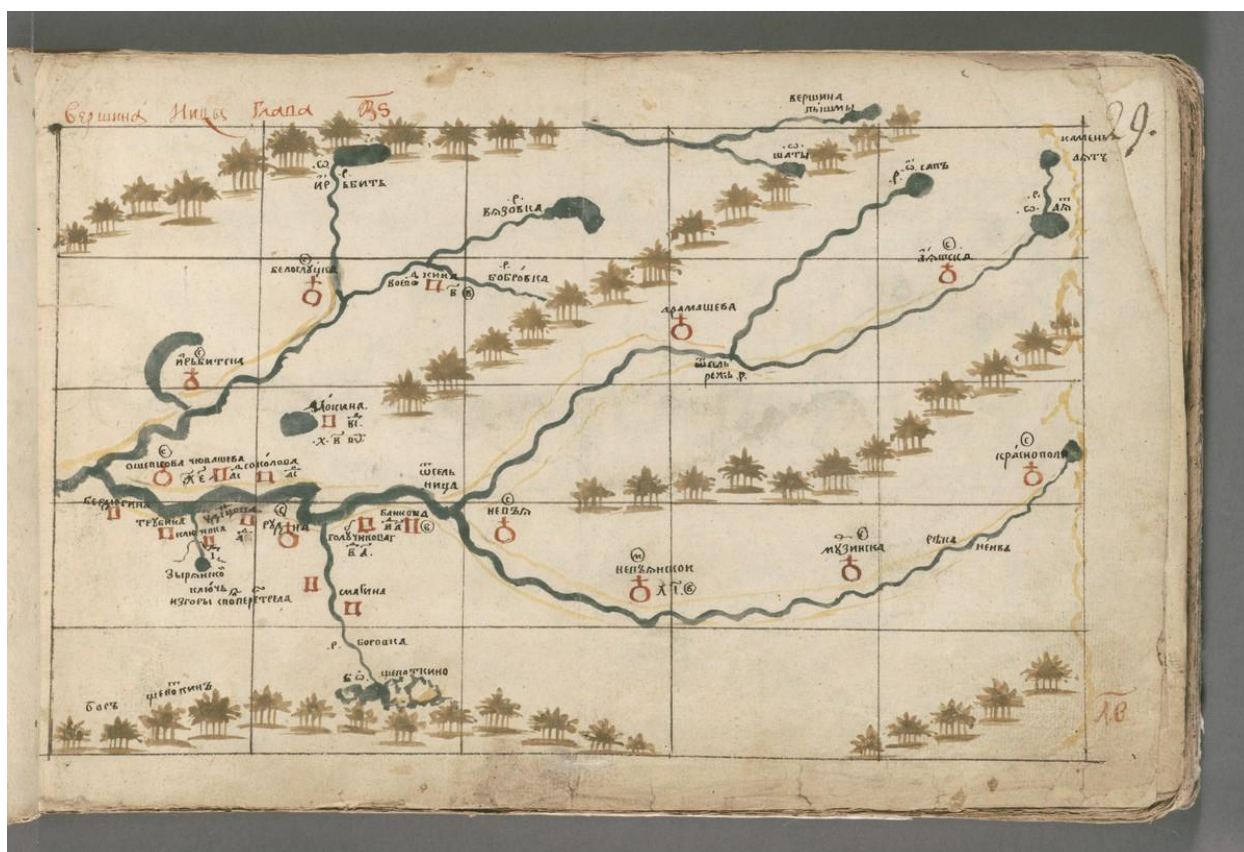
“Since ancient times Siberia was darkened by idolatry but today the Siberian land and country, and above all the principal city of Tobolesk, under God’s protection, have become filled with the holy glory of divine manifestations . . . the land was illuminated by such a light of inexpressible joy and enlightened by the all-holy and life-giving spirit in the form of an eagle . . . blessing shone forth, all-present and all-pervading, and was glorified to all the ends of Sibir’ . . . Through its priests and warriors, in the love of Christ and brotherly love [Siberia] remains luminously golden and filled with light, exuding spiritual grace, finally manifesting divine guidance and serenely gathering the community of the Orthodox in a spiritual union.” (pp. 248-249)

By the conquest of Siberia, the Russian peoples were regenerated and Christianity found new life in a land made beautiful by its very presence and the construction enacted upon its wilds. The new stewards and destined caretakers of Siberia would bring the land to an unforeseen light and organize and utilize it for Russia’s destiny as the sole remaining Orthodox—and thus true—Christian power on earth. Remezov continues, “When the holy fathers saw Greek honour hard pressed and ready to fall they gave this advice to autocrats about the faithful servant . . . autocrats should exercise wisdom or follow the example of the wise, extolling the holy fathers on whom truly God rests as on a throne” (pp. 270-271). After the fall of Byzantium in 1453 and the subordination of the Greek Orthodox Church to the Ottomans, Russians saw themselves as inheritors of this legacy. As such, this affected Russia’s geopolitical vision and sense of religious destiny—historians and politicians saw it as the last bastion of Christianity in a fallen, dark

Many churches and settlements were constructed, and Siberia was seen as a land of God’s glory, but this did not mean indigenous peoples were being converted. The territory was baptized, but its peoples were not.

world. Siberia was seen as the key to rejuvenation and a space for a renewed glory of Orthodoxy. Maps like those in Figure 13 portray Siberia in this manner as the construction of churches, their placement in space, and their depiction geographically helped forward Remezov’s notion of Siberia as a land filled with God’s glory. Symbols that look like spheres with crosses on them are common in his maps and signify the presence of an Orthodox church successfully constructed.

Figure 13. Unknown River Map—1696, from Remezov’s Chorographic Sketchbook, I. 29



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. (AGS) At. 490 A-1667 1958.

This concept of holy Russia and its destiny would remain in the geopolitical consciousness of policymakers in the Russian empire for centuries. Siberia provided a territory and the confidence to continue this path. In Remezov’s final words of his chronicle, he issues a warning and advice for the immense destiny Russia had in the world. He writes, “I have briefly

spoken about the staunch cossacks in their Siberian life, I have clearly shown them in the city of Tobol'sk for all to see, and if I have not attained eloquence and have opened with an iron key, I have prepared for the future a golden one so that the whole nation may be sustained" (p. 276). Remezov's words take place at a very particular time, the first seeds of a Russian national consciousness associated with Orthodoxy emerging. With this, Remezov hands the keys of knowledge about Siberia to another generation and a new rationality. In their hands were both knowledge of Russian territory and the destiny of Russian tsardom.

Chapter 4: Enlightenment, Exploration, and Territory

In 1696, Peter Alekseyevich Romanov became the sole reigning tsar in the tsardom of Russia. Peter the Great is known as the first modernizer of Russia, and he is known for bringing Enlightenment influence from western Europe into the country for the first time.³³ Along with western European dress, language, hairstyle, and shipbuilding came two key changes as a result of Peter: mapmaking and statebuilding. In 1724, Peter established the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. Jonathan Slaght writes “Once a network of Russian fortresses and peasant villages had been established across the lands of the eastern half of the Russian Empire, another group of explorers came. Armed with journals, notepads, and specimen cases instead of weapons, these were the naturalists” (Engel and Willmore, 2020, vii). The professors and scientists here, imported from western Europe, would quickly contribute to an entirely new vision of what Siberia was and could be, both in discourse and pictorially.

This included European methods of mapmaking, which were seen as more ‘accurate’ and utilized a number of features in contrast to 17th century Russian mapmakers. Firstly, the basis for Russian maps were often the extensive navigable river systems in Siberia. Russian maps also used churches, with their eastward orientation, to signal direction. However, maps varied with regard to how they were oriented, and some maps even used multiple points of orientation. Furthermore, Russian maps of this time also were much more inclined to utilize natural landmarks and scenery to indicate location, leading contemporary viewers to characterize these antiquated maps as more ‘artful’ (Kivelson, 2006, p. 23). Postnikov writes,

“Russian cartography before the eighteenth century knew none of the mathematics and geographic fundamentals practiced in western Europe to map vast areas of the earth’s surface by using latitude and longitude coordinates, projection, and scale. Instead, a

³³ It is often regarded that the first hints of modernization and westernization occurred under Alexei; still, Peter is known as the one who reformed the state in an unforeseen fashion.

single cartographic canvas was composed of structurally heterogeneous materials, which were spatially arranged around the ‘skeleton’ of routes. These routes extended along main rivers and roads.” (in Kivelson, 2006, p. 23)

Lacking uniformity and established conventions, Russian maps before the 18th century varied with the cartographer a great deal. It could be said that many different knowledges were being formulated graphically. However, these different interpretations of Siberian territory were not conducive to the emerging governmentality and statecraft aims of Peter the Great and his successors.

Especially under Peter, maps became a form of power-knowledge. Engels and Willmore write,

“Any systematic exploration and scientific discovery of Siberia was due in large part to Peter the Great, who, in order to implement his vision of expanding the Russian Empire, drew foreign scholars to Russia to create a scientific academy in St. Petersburg, inaugurated in 1725, that resembled those he had visited in Europe. Young and mostly German-speaking scholars initially formed the core of the academicians. One of their tasks was to organize and eventually accompany scientific expeditions to the unexplored lands east of the Urals . . . [These journeys] to western and central Siberia marked the beginning of research into geography, mineralogy, botany, zoology, ethnography, and philology in this region as well as opening up the area to trade and economic development” (p. 4).

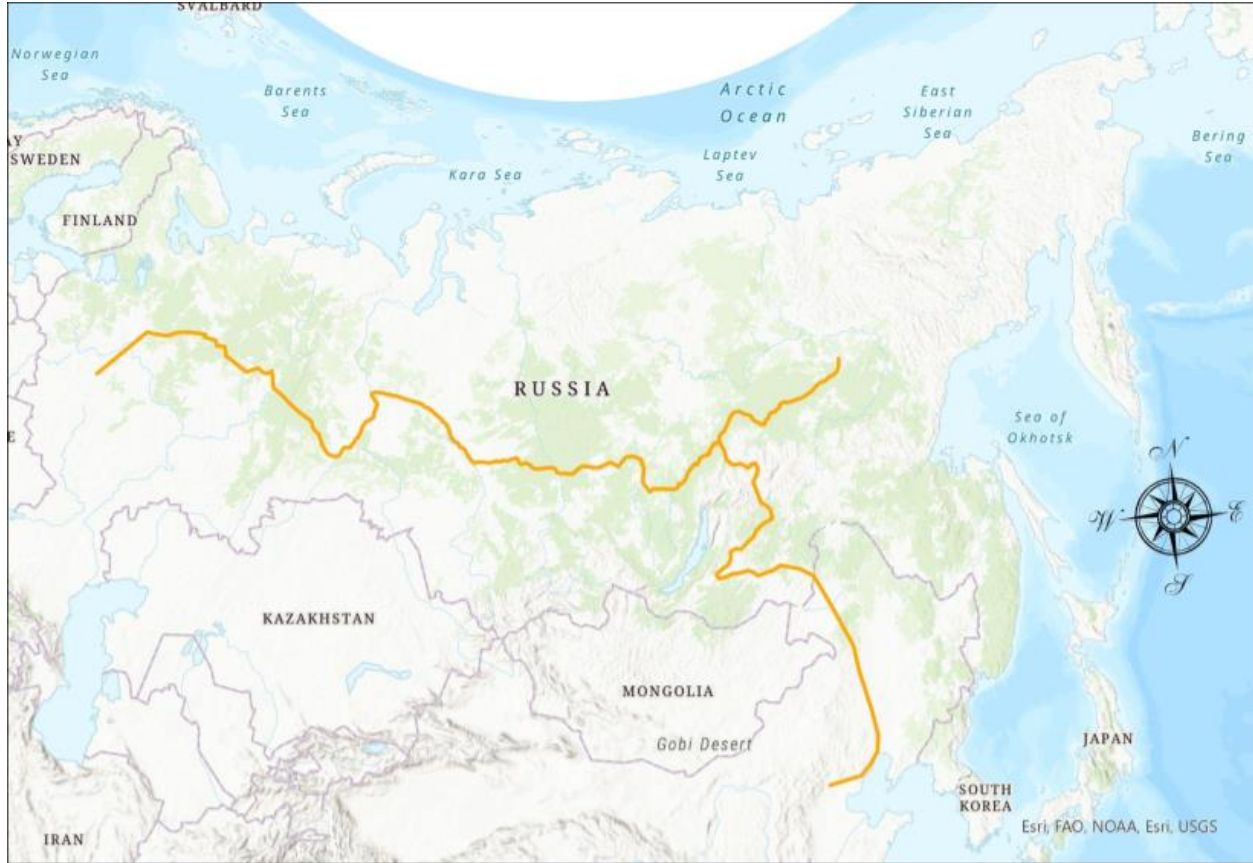
Maps were to be a monopoly on knowledge by the state, and the unpermitted sharing of maps by officials could be punished severely (Kivelson, p. 26). Kivelson goes on to write, “In their silences, as well as in the information they contained, maps served the interests of the state . . . Russian maps developed in tandem with the rising tsarist state” (pp. 27, 30). Peter during his reign, with his modernizing impulses, sought to transform what was seen as the backward and archaic Muscovite realm into an enlightened state akin to those of western Europe. Its large possessions in Siberia were the pride of the Russian state and a sure sign that it ranked regally among the other European empires of its time. However, even in the late 17th century and early 18th century, Siberia remained not well understood in terms of its geography, environment,

peoples, and resources. Peter, with his cameralist approach toward governing—one that sought to utilize and maximize all resources for the purposes of the state and its wealth—commissioned a number of explorations, cartographers, and expeditions to find out more about Siberia, its species, and its resource wealth such that this territory could be known, incorporated, and exploited for both the physical wealth of Russia but also for its cultural capital—the possession of Siberian territory made Russia the largest empire in the world. “Under Peter, the embrace of cameralist political theory turned the state into the rational master of an under-exploited universe whose resources had to be better known, better managed, and more fully maximized in order to achieve ‘happiness’ (*blago*) and ‘utility’ (*pol’za*)” (Sunderland, p. 36). Siberia had been acquired, but it had not yet been understood or made productive by the discourses surrounding it. This was to come, under those whom Peter and his successors sent out to chart and describe Siberia systematically.

Evert Ysbrants Ides: Civilization, Comparison, and Culture

Early in Peter’s reign, a Dane named Evert Ides was recruited to journey through Siberia to continue commercial agreements with the Chinese who had recently been established as a contact to tsardom. This era was during a cold war of sorts between Russia and China over control over North Asia and the steppe region (Afinogenov, 2020), but they also traded and maintained commercial ties for the first time in part due to the ascent of the Manchus and their dynasty. Ides’ account, *Three Year Travels From Moscow Over-land to China*, was published in 1705 and one of the first comprehensive accounts of Siberia during this time as well as the previously uncontacted Chinese. His work—among the others in this chapter—represents a vastly different interpretation of Siberia, its peoples, and its resources from previous eras.

Figure 14. Map of Ides' Travels



— Ides' Travels, 1696

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system with route data from primary text accounts)

What is apparent is a new emphasis on knowledge and description as tools of finding the true nature of territory. As the 18th century goes on, indigenous peoples of Siberia are no longer viewed principally in terms of their religion or paganism but rather in terms of ethnicity and place they inhabit spatially. Peoples are seen to belong to certain tracts and territories. For knowledge-producers of Siberia in the 18th century, Siberia becomes a land of great wealth—not in a religious, mystical sense—but in a material and extractive sense. In the introduction to his account Ides refers to Siberia as “a Terrestrial Paradise” and questions soon after,

“For what advantages do’s the universe afford that are not to be found here? What Treasures and Minerals, such as Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron, Saltpeter, Sulphur, Salt; what rich plenty of these and the like do’s the Earth harbour in her bosom, which hitherto were not brought to light; but now thro’ your Czarish Majesty’s Fatherly bounty and wise Government?” (“The Author’s Epistle Dedicatory,” n.p.)

Contrary to earlier writers, Siberia appears not as a vast land filled with God’s glory and Russian settlement but rather an untapped reserve of nearly all possible minerals waiting to be utilized.

The wealth of Russia’s territories also reflect the glory of its ruler who has the wisdom to administer and extract these resources for his and the state’s benefit. Ides goes on to describe the bodies of water in Russia’s newly-enlarged territory: “The *Caspian* Sea, which to the amazement of all Naturalists, has no visible communication with the Ocean, waits only for the honour of being covered and adorned with your Majesty’s Naval Force . . . in the course of a regulated Trade to the *East*” (n.p.). The great rivers in Russia, too, provided assets to the tsar, and all that was left to do—according to Ides—was make full use of them and develop them. In Ides’ view, Siberia was the site for perhaps the greatest wealth of resources in the world; however, it was not being taken full advantage of by the tsar. Ides continues, “Your Czarish Majesty’s Country is a Land flowing with Milk and Honey, and surpasses most Countries in the World, in its Riches, in its healthful Air, and in the fertility of its Soil” (n.p.). Despite a new focus on the sciences and development, biblical allusions are not gone as Canaan, too, was famously described as a land of milk and honey before its conquest. In Ides’ description of the settlement of Solikamsk, he lists systematically the resources found there, the amount of salt springs utilized, how the salt will be shipped, the boats used, and how many sailors are required for this (p. 5). Siberia is described as a land of wealth and plenty, but to Ides, it is also filled with undeserving inhabitants. Ides writes,

“I must acknowledge that the Lands indifferently well peopled on this River, deserve really to be reckoned amongst the most charming in the World . . . I every where found the most beautiful Flowers and Plants, which emitted a most agreeable fragrant scent, and

all sorts of great and small Wild Beasts running about in great quantities. But the Wogulskian Tartars to which this River led us, are stupid Heathens.” (p. 6)

Ides then proceeds to spend the night among the indigenous and learn of their ways and religion, which he documents extensively and systematically—his extensive description of indigenous ways and indigenous religion are among the first of their kind. Despite his insistence that the indigenous peoples were “stupid heathens,” his curiosity and desire to learn more about them signal a transitional period in knowledge production about Siberia. In earlier times, indigenous peoples were simply dismissed as pagans or heathens. Though they remain as such in Ides’ account, they are simultaneously the object of increased curiosity that was leveled toward Siberia at this time more generally. The Russian state and its various actors, during the early 1700s, were increasingly desirous of knowledge about Siberia, its peoples, its wealth, and its resources. Passages like this serve as a solid example of this transitory phase in which indigenous are viewed with both hostility and condescension yet also a developing curiosity of them and their ways.

In keeping with this theme, Ides spends a great deal of time describing the various water ways of Siberia and how they might be best navigated (p. 14). Once known, these rivers would serve as highways for transport to various settlements and be the main thoroughfares for much of the Siberian economy, including and most principally the fur trade as extracted through the forced labor of indigenous Siberians. This knowledge-gathering about Siberian rivers and their eventual and increasingly-detailed mapping coincided with the increasingly centralized and governmentalizing Russian state as the 1700s went on.

Ides also describes indigenous appearance in great depth, often describing in detail each indigenous group, their physical features, and ways as he goes along (pp. 21-23).³⁴ Though they are still seen as heathens ultimately, there is an increased emphasis on indigenous groups looking a certain way and belonging in certain established places in space. “These Heathens are called Nisovian Tungusians. They are tall and strong Men, and have long black Hair, which being bound up in the shape of a Horses Tail, hangs upon their Backs. They are broad faced, but their Noses are not so flat, nor their Eyes so small as the Calmackians” (p. 30). Ides goes on to describe Buryat clothing, homes, and methods of hunting in detail and even with some fascination (p. 31), but this is undermined by his ultimate consideration of them as heathens or their lack of intelligence. He writes, “They are utterly ignorant of all sort of Agriculture and Fruit Gardens . . . Their Faces and all over their Bodies look like young Devils, by reason that they know nothing of any such thing as washing at any other time than when they are Born, nor do they ever cut the Nails of either Hands or Feet” (pp. 33-34). Later on, he calls them barbarians (p. 35). Of the Targazinians, then under Chinese tribute, Ides writes, “They are an Infidel Heathen Nation, which worship the Devil” (p. 50). This is a common sentiment among Europeans in travel accounts in Russia at this time as many indigenous rituals were reduced to and described as worshipping the devil.

In contrast to these curious if condescending descriptions, many Russian traveler accounts of the 1700s show great admiration and wonder for the Chinese, their cities, their entertainment, food, and way of life. Though they do acknowledge the religious differences of the Chinese, the tone is very different from those deemed inferior or at a lower level of

³⁴ In this section, Ides describes the Ostyak people. He notes their wearing of fish skins for clothing. It is later noted that this was a longstanding insult between the Chinese and indigenous Siberians during their dealings. Chinese would call Tatars ‘fish-skins’ pejoratively.

development. In these terms, the Chinese are viewed as equals or even more advanced in some respects than the Europeans. Ides writes, “the Mandaryn, who was an agreeable well bred Man, very civilly invited me to take a Meal with him” (p. 53). He goes on to write of Chinese economic development, their rich fields, the effectiveness of their agriculture, and their plantations (p. 54). He also comments on the physical beauty of Chinese women, which is a description completely absent from his descriptions of Siberian peoples (p. 55). To Ides, Chinese are seen more or less as equals, and a sense of awe and wonder dominate his descriptions of his time in China. Ides describes well-established lineages and the sophistication of the Chinese people as compared to the Tatars and indigenous Siberians. He writes, “The present Descendants of the ancient Chinese are naturally more sincere than the Mansures or Tartars. They live temperately and frugally; are very neat and clean in their Cloaths” (p. 108). Because the Chinese appeared more advanced, more urban, and more akin to Europeans in their ways, they were considered more advanced, good-natured, and respectable. Peoples like the Samoyeds, however, are viewed as less than human and even as animals.

“Besides there are the Samojedes that inhabit all along the Ice Coast of the Province of Siberia, which are a People that have not much more to pretend to, than a humane Face and Figure; they have a very small share of Understanding, and in all other particulars are very like Wolves and Dogs . . . they inhabit a Country which richly abounds with Wild Game, Fish and Flesh; but most of them are too idle to provide themselves with it.” (p. 91)

Here Ides notes the great riches of the Siberian land but that its current inhabitants lack the industriousness and drive to make use of it. Historically, this framing has served a foundational settler colonial discourse. Indigenous peoples are seen to have not been using the land and are seen as lacking in moral vigor and drive as a result. In other territories (Crow, 2020), this has been the rationale for genocide, displacement, and theft on the part of settlers and their state. Although no central process of settler populating and state involvement or favor was at play

during this time on the Siberian frontier, discourses like this circulated well beyond their time in justifying later actions. Ides continues on in his description of the Samoyeds,

“They make a very disagreeable Figure all over, insomuch that I may venture to affirm that such a shocking ill looked People are not to be found on the surface of the whole Earth. Their stature is short and flat, they have broad Shoulders and Faces, flat and broad Noses, great blubber hanging Lips, and frightful Eyes like those of the Linx. They are very brown all over, their Hair is dishevelled . . . These Samojedes are gross idolators . . . Instead of singing they make a howling noise like that of Bears, they neigh like Horses, or chirrup like young Birds. They have a sort of Conjurers, that shew all sorts of Diabolical Tricks, most of which are fraudulent delusions. But here taking our leave of these monstrous Samojedes, we shall turn our discourse to another subject” (p. 92).

Samoyeds are viewed as the lowest of the low, by some accounts even lower than animals. Ides details how in his view they behave dirtily, like animals, and eat raw meat or even engage in cannibalism.³⁵ To Ides, these people are not worthy of the land they call home, which begs the question of whom is worthy—those who will make the land and its great wealth productive: Orthodox Russians. Kamchatka and nearby lands Ides calls “Icy Cape,” and of the inhabitants of this area Ides writes, “They eat all their Flesh and Fish raw, and wash themselves with nothing besides their own Urine; and they are a sly treacherous People, that never keep their Words” (p. 104). He goes on to describe what furs and fish are available in this region and where the most abundant locations for catching these animals are, ironically a fact learned from indigenous peoples. At best, indigenous peoples can be disregarded or ignored as long as they do not get in the way; at worst, if they are not compliant or prove hostile, then they must be killed. These discourses of inferiority and savagery serve to justify their deaths and displacement.

Overall, Ides’ account serves as a paradigm shift of transitioning thought as centralizing Enlightenment ideas about territory began to take hold. Certain elements of older geographic thinking remain such as the emphasis on indigenous religion as heathen and of Siberia as a

³⁵ It is often remarked that the term Samoyed translates to ‘cannibal’ or ‘flesh-eater’ (Slezkine, p. 34).

paradisaal 'land of milk and honey'; however, many new theorizations of what Siberia was and ought to be also were introduced, conceptualizations that would define knowledge about Siberia for well into the 18th century. Ides was among the first to take note of indigenous ways and lifestyles, including where they are located and how they looked, all of which are described in detail in several-page sections. This classification and curiosity about those who inhabited Siberia was unprecedented and showcased increased desire on the part of the yet-enlightening Russian state to know and organize its territories in Siberia for maximal utility. In addition, although land is still limited by discourses of holy paradise at this time, there is an increased emphasis on specific species of plants, animals, and resources which reside in particular locations. A vaguely-destined, rich land of paradise that God has provided for Russian Orthodoxy begins to turn into a space of sites, numbers, resources, and wealth for the Russian state. As the Petrine era continued, these new approaches toward and discourses about Siberian territory and knowledge of it only intensified.

John Perry: Projects, Infrastructure, and Potential for Siberia

Published in 1716, John Perry's account details his time in the service of Tsar Peter as an ex-naval officer in the British Navy. His perspective covers the years and his time in Russia from 1698-1712 with a particular eye for the workings of the Russian state, its various projects of modernization, and how Siberia served as a space for these projects. For this reason, Harry Nerhood (1968) calls Perry's account "an extremely important document for understanding the period" (p. 22). Perry allows readers a unique look into Peter's rule at the time and indeed changing conceptions of how the vast geography of the Russian empire ought to be improved and best used by the state. He details Peter's larger aims for Russian territory and its development but also smaller descriptions of Peter's other modernization efforts including: the

shaving of the nobles' beards (p. 195), the establishment of schools for mathematics and navigation (p. 211), and the changing of the Orthodox calendar to the Julian calendar in 1700 in order to paint a cohesive and connected portrait of early modern Russia and the state in the 18th century (p. 235).

One of the first things that Perry details is Peter's initial failed attempts to create a channel between the Volga and the Don in order to better facilitate his navy's travel throughout the empire, particularly for the purpose of fighting the Turks.³⁶ The creation of even a relatively short canal between the Volga and the Don would have vastly improved Russia's naval capabilities to the south, a region the tsars had their sights on for many years. This channel, along with the use of other rivers, would have allowed Russia's navy to travel freely between the Baltic, Black, and Caspian Seas as needed, lessening the need for separate fleets in the north and south. However, major canal and engineering projects such as this had rarely been attempted in Russia up to this point, so outside help was needed. Thus, John Perry, an expert in groundworks and naval enterprises in Britain, was recruited to assist with the canal construction. Perry writes,

“As a Person capable of serving him on several Occasions, relating to his new Designs of establishing a Fleet, making his Rivers navigable . . . After his Majesty had himself discoursed with me, particularly touching the making of a connection between the River Wolga and the Don, I was taken into his Service.” (p. 2)

Throughout Perry's account, his focus on the external designs of Tsar Peter and the modernizing Russian state upon the environment communicates a new approach and thinking toward what Russian territory could be used to accomplish. Increasingly, if not filled or improved, land was thought to be wasted potential. The rivers, resources, animals, lumber, and wealth of Siberia were thought to be an empty space that the state could improve and use to maximize itself and its glory among other European nations. As Sunderland writes,

³⁶ Later attempts at building the canal between the Volga and Don would be complete centuries later, in 1952.

“All of this spatial redefinition and reorganization helped to create an operational terrain in which the cameralist state could seek to do what it was supposed to do best: maximize the exploitation of its territory. In order to make their territory as productive as possible, the Russian governments of the early 1700s attacked the problem of territorial underproduction by embarking on a concerted campaign to conquer territorial distance by building roads and canals . . . just as it promoted the settlement of ‘empty places’ because ‘empty places’ were increasingly seen as woefully underutilized and therefore unprofitable. What came of all of this was a qualitatively new brand of territorial economics that was still glaringly incomplete and far from fully systematized, but nevertheless different from the system that came before it.” (pp. 44-45)

Perry lists the main goals and “publick Undertakings” of the tsar at the time, writing, “Such particularly as the erecting and fortifying of new Places on the Frontiers, (whither they with their Families, Gentlemen as well as Soldiers and Peasants, were obliged upon the Czar’s Commands, to remove and inhabit:) As also the building of Fleets, with Works for making Rivers navigable” (pp. 27-28). Among the sources used, this is the first mention of families in the populating of Siberian settlements. In settler studies, the biopolitics and health of the settler population constitutes a major point of emphasis (Veracini, 2014; Cavanagh, 2020). Many settler colonies operated under a gendered logic in which women were valued as a reproductive resource for child production and represented a colony’s intention to stay and reproduce itself. In non-settler colonies, one characteristic is that were inhabited by mostly single, working men. In later settler projects, the introduction of female population into the settlement represented a major turning point in its transition from a mere site of work and extraction to an inwardly-focused and self-sustaining space (Edmonds and Carey, 2020). Although it remains that Siberian settlements were overwhelmingly male and outwardly-oriented as larger pieces in an extractive economy, Perry’s mentioning of this state control of populations and reproduction represents an important development toward something that can be called a settler colonial logic. The mention of

families on its own is not just significant, but the inclusion of state management of these affairs signals a coherent, intentional, and unprecedented project on the part of the Russian state.

This filling and development of Siberia required, first, knowledge of the territories to be developed and utilized. Hence Peter's desire to map and increase knowledge of these areas by his sending out of various explorers and naturalists to map, depict, and detail what they found. Perry writes of Peter's larger intentions and its advantages toward the Russian state,

“I have often heard the Czar say, that he intends to send People on purpose to take a true Map of his Countrey . . . and that then he will search out whether it be possible for Ships to pass by the way of Nova Zembla into the Tartarian Sea; or to find out some Port that falls into the Tartarian Sea to the Eastward of the River Oby, where he may build Ships, and send them, if practicable, to the Coast of China, Japan, &c . . . where Storehouses and a Factory may be settled, and whither European Ships may easily make short Voyages, and receive Goods this way from China and Japan.” (p. 61)

Thus, one of Peter's major motivations for the mapping of Siberia was to find navigable water routes to trade with China and Japan. Under this design, Russia would be the major power and mediator of trade between Europe and East Asia, and Peter could maximize this strategic benefit to the great advantage of the state. He also wished to establish ports for the building of ships, as well as storehouses and factories for the production of goods and ease of facilitating them between Europe and Asia. Siberia and its rivers could be a land of immense trade, ports, ships, and settlements.³⁷ Indeed, throughout much of the early modern period, Russia was the arbiter between Chinese and European goods and helped to facilitate trade between the two regions, which provided the Russian empire a distinct advantage, an advantage that Peter sought to maximize. As Steller, Müller, and Pallas would later note, the monopolies that Russia had on

³⁷ Foucault (2007) writes, “Frederick the Great has some illuminating pages on the subject in his *Anti-Machiavel*, when he says, for example: Compare Holland and Russia. Russia may well have the longest borders of any European state, but what does it consist of? It is mostly marshes, forests, and deserts; it is sparsely populated by bands of poor, miserable people who lack activity and industry. Holland, on the other hand, is quite small and also largely marshland, but Holland has such a population, wealth, commercial activity, and fleet as to ensure that it is an important country in Europe, which Russia is hardly beginning to become. So, to govern means to govern things” (p. 97).

both Chinese rhubarb and tobacco were important benefits of Russia's presence in North Asia (p. 40; p. 92). Another reason for Peter's curiosity in exploration eastward into Siberia and its northern reaches was the potential of its connection to North America. Perry writes of Peter, "He believes his Country joins here to America, and that that Part of the World was first peopled this way, when there was not such vast Quantities of Ice, and the Cold had not so strongly possess'd the Parts near the Pole" (p. 70).³⁸ This was an exciting economic prospect as if Asia was connected to North America, Russian traders could expand rapidly and mostly unheeded as they did into Siberia in the past century.

In Perry's account, there are still references to God and religion as a larger, justifying force, but they are much less central and rather occasional—certainly not the all-encompassing mentality that dominated approaches toward understanding Siberia. All the same, Perry writes of the wildlife in Siberia, "The Countrey abounds in Deer . . . They are a particular sort of Deer, which God and Nature seems to have order'd on purpose for this frozen Countrey, and are abundantly serviceable to the Natives in many respects" (pp. 64-65). Wildlife is made specifically to serve the purposes of humans in this cold environment. In addition, another object of note is Perry's referral to the indigenous Siberians as "Natives" rather than heathens or pagans. This is another important development in early 18th century accounts of Siberia as thinking about indigenous peoples tends to increasingly produce civilizational and ethnic differences rather than religious ones as in centuries prior. Perry then details the ways of the indigenous people and their use of the deer in great detail, saying how they use it for many

³⁸ Peter's beliefs are in contrast to the contemporary understanding that Alaska and Chukotka are in fact separated by water, but he is close in that there was the land bridge ~10,000 years ago, however, for somewhat opposite reasoning. Seemingly counter-intuitively, the Bering land bridge was only existent during the ice age. Once the ice started melting, sea levels rose and covered the land bridge.

applications in their lives, from shelter and food to clothing and sled-driving (pp. 65-66).³⁹ These descriptions of indigenous life, too, constitute some of the first of their kind and a new way of knowledge-gathering that saw indigenous ways as objects of study.⁴⁰ Despite this curiosity toward indigenous peoples, they were fundamentally confined to European understandings of their subjectivity and in some ways still remained incomprehensible. Perry writes of northern Siberia, “Men would not have chosen, or even have been easily driven by any Necessity to inhabit so unfertile and uncouth a Climate” (p. 70). Perry cannot comprehend why a people would voluntarily subject themselves to these inhospitable conditions. In a somewhat contradictory fashion, however, Perry writes earlier, “Yet these people are content with their way of life . . . So has God given every Nation to be content with their lot in life” (p. 66). To Perry, the only way these people could be satisfied with their lives and their ways of life in Siberia was if God placed them there and destined them for such a place. This, too, could be seen as indicative of larger assumptions of space and culture among Europeans at the time; savage peoples inhabited ‘unfertile and uncouth’ places, while great peoples inhabited beautiful, fertile places. This logic of people and place was at play in the mapping and knowledge of Siberia.

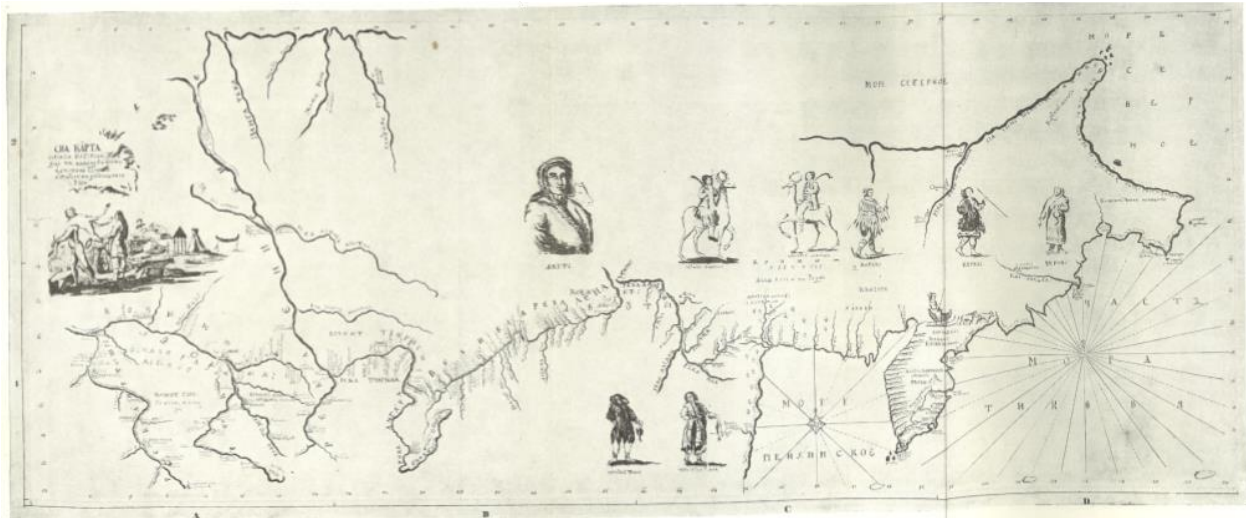
Perry continues,

“But to go on with my intended Description of the Czar’s Dominions: The next People who border to the Eastward of the aforementioned Samoieds, beyond the great River Oby, and inhabit on the back side and to the N E [northeast] of Siberia, beyond the Mouth of Oby, all the way along the Coast of the Tartarian Sea, as far as China, have not yet any of them submitted themselves to the Czar.” (pp. 77-78)

³⁹ Domesticated reindeer were central to many indigenous Siberians’ lifestyles. Things that other cultures would use cows, pigs, horses, and goats for, indigenous Siberians used reindeer to accomplish these needs, including not just sled-driving but even riding among a few Siberian cultures.

⁴⁰ This is not to say European interest in indigenous ways was benevolent, but rather it was often to justify or prove European cultural superiority. Nonetheless, descriptions like those in Perry’s work were some of the first of their kind in a time when, for centuries prior, there was little to no interest in indigenous ways besides slander or myth-making.

Figure 15. Map from Tobolsk to the Chukotskan Peninsula, Compiled in the Burden of the Expedition—1729, Unknown Cartographer



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. At. 490 B 1964.

Figure 15 shows an expedition map from 1729-1730, producing new knowledge of Siberia and the Russian Far East, depicting indigenous peoples as having particular features, residing in particular lands, and belonging to a certain level of development indicated by their ‘natural’ state and ways. Perry goes on to describe various indigenous groups and their physical features and traits that were thought to distinguish them, relegating them to ages past. He writes of Kalmyk peoples, “They are generally of a swarthy Complexion, black Hair, low Noses, and broad Cheeks, with little or no Beard. I had the Opportunity when I was at Camishinka, to observe much of their Way of Life, which is like that which Moses relates in the first Ages of the World” (p. 83). Physical features, ones that are different from Europeans, begin to be associated with backwardness and lower levels of development. This development was something that Perry felt indigenous peoples lacked. They resided in a rich land but refused to utilize it. Perry writes of Russia’s natural riches, “Russia, to speak of it in general, is a very level and fertile Country, abounding with whatsoever is necessary for human Life” (p. 242).

Under Peter and his successors, this rich land would be developed and modernized. Perry writes later of the grand purpose for these innovations,

“If the Advantage of the Situation be consider’d by Means of those grand Rivers which every where spread their Branches . . . was but Industry cultivated and encouraged as it is in England and other free Countreys, the Product of it might, it is certain, be much farther improv’d. Trade be extended, the People made happy, and the Czars of Muscovy, as the Extent of their Country is very great, might in a short time become equal in Power and Strength to any Monarch on Earth.” (p. 247)

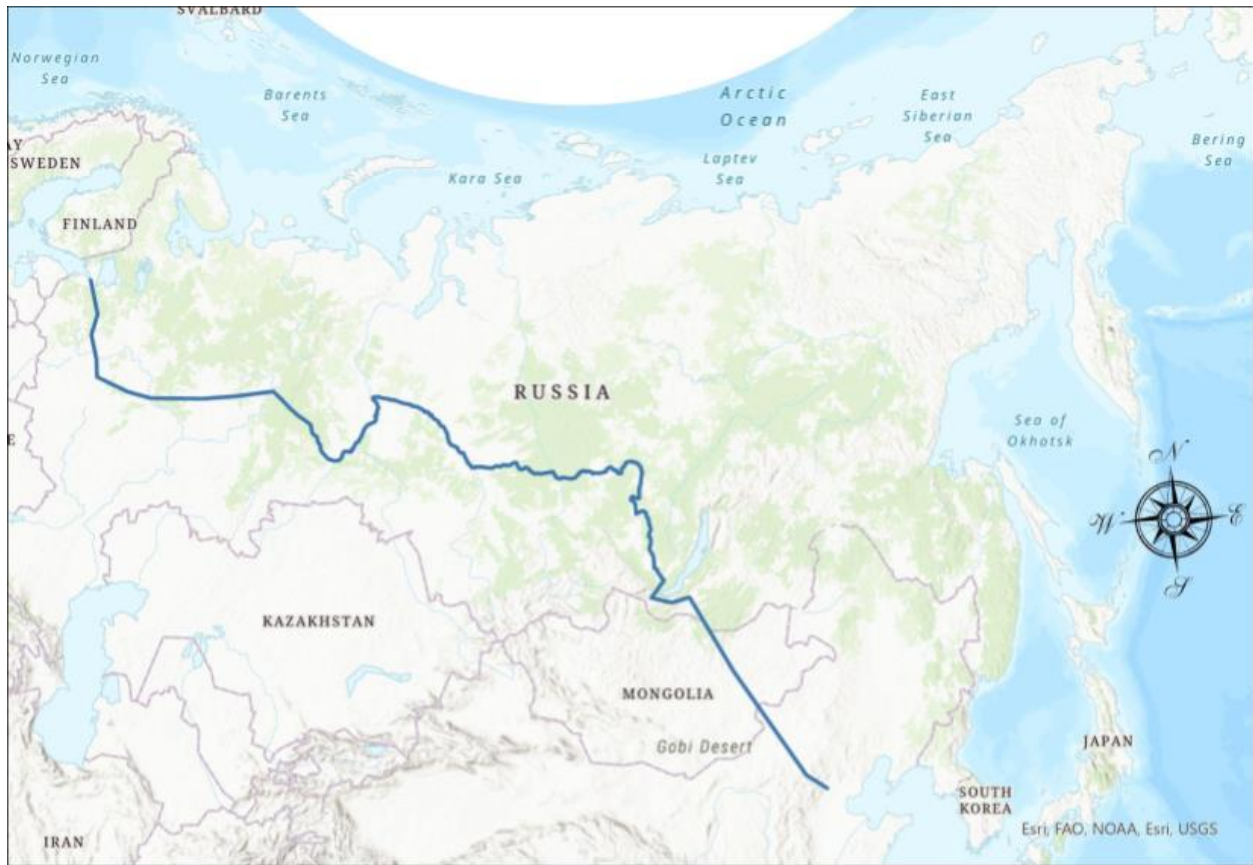
This passage shows Perry’s western European and enlightened dispositions as there are hints of Russian underdevelopment. Elsewhere in Perry’s account he displays a condescending view toward Russian life and their religion as dull, undeveloped, and superstitious (p. 260; p. 64). Peter was of this attitude as well as it was his intention to reverse this perceived backwardness and learn from western Europeans. Perry also makes suggestions about how to incentivize industry and solve corruption problems pervasive in the Russian empire (p. 257). Russia’s possessions and the development of these Siberian territories would help modernize Russia and improve its status and power among competing imperial nations in Europe and Asia. It is in accounts like these that Siberia completes its depiction in discourse and moves from a space for the faithful to a space of concerted knowledge and political-economic hegemony.

John Bell’s Travels: People, Place, and Development in Siberia

John Bell was a Scottish medical doctor who worked with various governments and traveled for his work. He also was known for trading goods in the various places he visited. During John Bell’s journey to Peking beginning in 1721, he also traveled many of the same rivers in central Siberia as other travelers and encountered a number of indigenous groups, describing his interactions with them. The latter part of his account details his stay in Peking,

which is of interest but not particularly relevant, so only his account of traveling to Peking will be the subject of analysis in the following section.

Figure 16. Bell's Travels



— John Bell's Travels, 1721-1722

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system with route data from primary text accounts)

That said, there is one passage from during his stay in Peking that is revealing with regard to thoughts about the poor and what can be called surplus populations. Much of Bell's writing has to do with description of indigenous peoples or different classes in the borderlands between Russia and China. Bell writes, "Trade brings an immense treasure into the country, and affords employment to vast numbers of poor, who, otherwise, would be useless and burdensome to the

publick” (p. 58). This statement not only indicated emerging attitudes toward the poor as dirty, lazy, and useless (Foucault, 1975), but it also brings to light the nature of settlement in Siberia as made up by certain classes. Those employed in the settlements and trade outposts between Russia and China were often poor, single men who had to work hard for a living. Many were wanderers, bandits, criminals, or people not allowed in regular society in European Russia. Along with merchants and soldiers, these classes constituted most of the early settler population in Siberia.

Similarly, although Bell writes of the Chinese a great deal, some of his descriptions are useful as they can be used as a point of comparison in how he speaks of Siberian peoples. He, like other European travelers during this period, shows a great deal of appreciation for China and its people; a sense of awe is apparent throughout his remarks. Bell writes,

“I am of opinion, that no nation in the world was able for such an undertaking [the Great Wall of China], except the Chinese. For though some other kingdom might have furnished a sufficient number of workmen, for such an enterprise, none but the ingenious, sober, and parsimonious Chinese could have preserved order amidst such multitudes, or patiently submitted to the hardships attending such a labour. This surprising piece of work, if not the greatest, may justly be reckoned among the wonders of the world. And the Emperor, who planned and completed it, deserves fame, as much superior to his who built the famous Egyptian pyramids, as a performance of real use excels a work of vanity.” (pp. 89-90)

In this passage, the standard for whether a people is appreciated by Europeans seems to be their level of perceived civilizational development, or cultural achievement rather than their ethnicity or race alone. Bell consequently spends some time detailing how the Manchus ascended to become royalty and the origins of the Qing Dynasty (p. 91). He calls the Chinese “a civilized and hospitable people,” complementing their manners, discipline, and sense of respect toward each other (pp. 103-104). In contrast, he calls the Tungus a “simple people” (p. 130). Though Bell calls indigenous peoples “natives” throughout his account, with regard to their religion, he calls

them “ignorant heathens” (p. 146). Shortly after, he calls them “a superstitious and ignorant people” not capable of understanding higher sciences and knowledge of the Europeans (p. 149).

Nor were these people, in Bell’s view, using Siberian territory in any meaningful way.

Bell writes of Siberia,

“It is by no means as bad as is generally imagined. On the contrary, the country is really excellent, and abounds with all things necessary for the use of man and beast. There is no want of any thing, but people to cultivate a fruitful soil, well watered by many of the noblest rivers in the world; and these stored with variety of such fine fish, as are seldom found in other countries. As to fine woods, furnished with all sorts of game and wild fowl, no country can exceed it . . . Considering the extent of this country, and the many advantages it possesses, I cannot help being of opinion, that it is sufficient to contain all the nations in Europe; where they might enjoy a more comfortable life than many of them do at present.” (p. 159)

To Bell, what would be much better is if such a bountiful, untapped land was filled instead with Europeans who might make use of it unlike its current inhabitants, suggestions that echoed later lebensraum policies of the German empire and Nazi regime in the 20th century. Bell continues, saying that ideally the fertile lands would go to Europeans while indigenous peoples would be displaced to more northerly reaches that were undesirable. “There are also many dreary wastes, and deep woods, terminated only by great rivers, or the ocean; but these I would leave to the present inhabitants, the honest Osteaks and Tonguses, and others like them” (p. 160). In some descriptions, Bell speaks harshly and condescendingly toward indigenous groups; in others, he characterizes them as carefree, blissful yet foolish. He also characterizes them as passive and not active agents under colonialism, “The Russians, after being possessed of Siberia from the latter end of the sixteenth century, began to spread themselves over that vast country; not having met the least resistance from the ancient inhabitants of those parts” (p. 172). Although true for most indigenous groups, some were famously resistant to colonization, including the Chukchi,

Kamchadals, and other northern groups in particular who were decimated by small-pox and a series of violent wars with the Russians (Slezkine, p. 27).

The final considerations of Bell include the nature of Sino-Russian rivalry in North Asia and the southern steppe of Siberia. He portrays the two powers as competing in something of a larger cold war for competition over indigenous groups in Siberia and control of their tribute. Though Russia and China profited greatly from each other's trade, there was a bitter rivalry over Siberian territories and peoples that sometimes erupted into open hostilities, the capturing of settlements, and the rapid establishment of new settlements to outpace the other (pp. 172-177). A series of disagreements and subsequent treaties were made from the 1690s to 1710s, which—though tense—culminated in the establishment of the current border between Russia and Mongolia as well as Russia and China in the north (p. 177).

Bell's account in particular is unique in its consistent focus on people and place, the geopolitics between competing empires, and the lands and peoples caught in the middle as each sought to gain advantage over the other. Furthermore, his emphasis on the movement and displacement of peoples is noteworthy as well. His suggestions of indigenous simplicity, foolishness, and carefreeness provide a pretext for his larger wistings for a European-populated, developed Siberia, one that could fully make use of its vast wealth and resources, a notion reminiscent of settler discourses of indigenous disappearance and replacement.

Steller's Taxonomy of Siberia

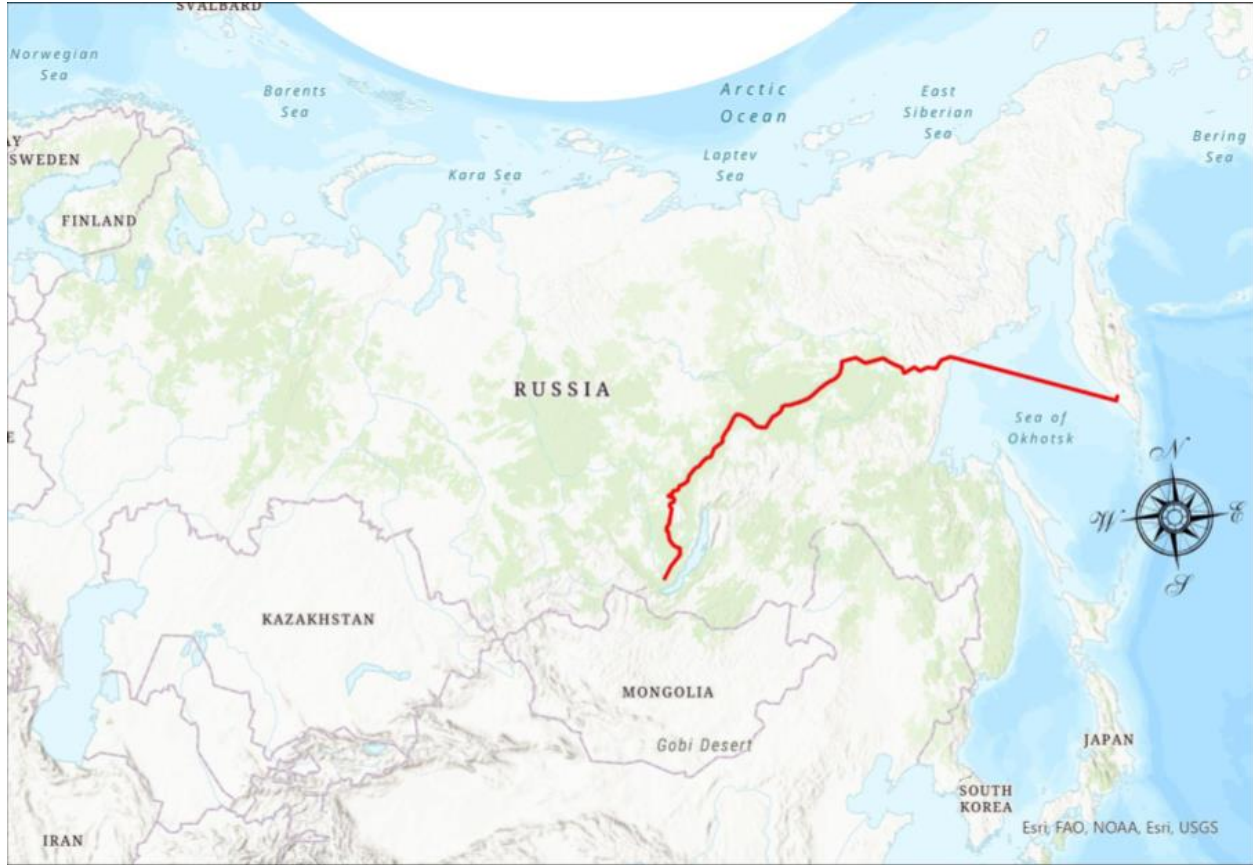
Georg Steller's account is perhaps the most detailed and comprehensive traveler account from this period. The first section is solely his instructions from the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1739, comprising more than 10 pages of specific things he was to accomplish on

his journey.⁴¹ This indicates a more concerted effort at knowledge production via the exploration of territory, and a culture of ‘high territoriality’ emerging as a result of Peter and his successors. Sunderland writes, “‘Instructions’ under Peter tended to be brief and/or vague, but by the 1730s and 1740s, they were much more detailed, showing the government’s rising territorial culture” (p. 40). Steller’s tale is the most intensively descriptive account from his time as it was his task and entire purpose to go to Siberia to describe, chart, and discover attributes of the animal and plant life there, in addition to the rivers and general climate. Previous travelers were typically in Siberia as a byproduct of their travel to China. Their descriptions of Siberia were not the main purpose of their travels, which is the main aspect that makes Steller’s account unique. His journey was among the first if not the first concerted effort to catalog, describe, and understand Siberia in and of itself.⁴² This effort was famously known as the Second Kamchatka Expedition or Great Northern Expedition, under which Vitus Bering would later famously cross what came to be called the Bering Strait for the first time, confirming to western knowledge that North America and Asia were indeed separated by a body of water. In addition to this advancement in western geographic knowledge, the lands around Alaska and the Russian Far East were charted and mapped for the first time. Steller’s account covers his role in the expedition before his meeting with Bering and his departure from Kamchatka; in fact, the last thing that occurs in Steller’s account is his entry into Kamchatka—shortly before his meeting with Bering and the famous voyage from Kamchatka to Alaska.

⁴¹ One of the professors from the Academy of Sciences who gave Steller instructions was Gerhard Friedrich Müller, considered the father of modern ethnography and a figure who wrote a later account to be discussed shortly.

⁴² As a result of this journey, more than a dozen types of mineral, animal, and plant species of Siberia and Alaska are named after Steller.

Figure 17. Steller's Expedition



— Steller's Travels, 1739-1741

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system with route data from primary text accounts)

In his instructions, he was to “investigate and describe—en route as well as on Kamchatka—everything concerning natural as well as political history” (p. 9). In addition, Steller was to “interview them [indigenous peoples] about their faith, customs, and ways of life” (p. 10). Furthermore, with Steller to accompany him are a painter to paint the landscapes, a student of geography and history, a prospector to look for ores, a hunter to provide food, and a Yakut translator to translate indigenous language (p. 10). Thus far in the accounts used, this was the first concerted effort to assemble a party and expedition for purposes of scientific study. Previous accounts lacked the preparation, expertise, and intention to provide a fully detailed

picture of Siberia at the time. Steller, too, was to gather a great deal of samples of plant life and seeds, and drop them off at various government offices throughout his route, many of which were to undergo further study at the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg once shipped back.⁴³ Most of Steller's instructions included things such as those detailed in orders 32. and 33., which state,

“32. While you are in Okhotsk, you will find out everything about the religious beliefs of the local Lamut and Koryak peoples; about their customs, their way of life, their hunting and fishing practices; and about their weddings, burial, birth, and rearing of children, oaths and vows, dispositions, virtues and vices, and anything else concerning them.
33. While in Okhotsk, you will find out to the best of your ability the rivers and streams south and north of the Okhota River that flow into the Sea of Okhotsk, describing the width, depth, and flow rate of each, as well as the condition of their banks, the trees and brush, and the animals and birds found along their banks and the fish in their waters.” (p. 19)

The purpose of Steller's journey shows the increased consciousness of the Russian state as a producer of knowledge and a keeper of that knowledge, recognizing that knowledge of territory could be used to more effectively govern, administer, and populate certain regions to the benefit of the state.

Hence among his final instructions, Steller was to keep his findings highly secret. Order 48. states “You must absolutely not write about them to anybody in your private letters, and you can write in official reports only to those who have sent you on your way . . . You must—under threat of penalty through Crown ukases—not write about your actual assignments” (p. 22). As Gregory Afinogenov (2020) details in his work, *Spies and Scholars: Chinese Secrets and Russia's Imperial Russia's Quest for World Power*, relations between Russia and China and their

⁴³ Interestingly, this included, in one order, to attempt to uncover fairly-preserved mammoth remains, taking note of the soils surrounding the deposit, and ship the remains back to St. Petersburg (p. 16). This mammoth would be displayed in the infamous *Kunstammer*, Peter's public collection of oddities and rarities in St. Petersburg. The collection of such exotic objects was often a colonial affair. In Okhotsk, Steller was to order local Koryaks to hunt a whale and dissect it himself (p. 18).

various disputes over North Asian peoples and territories in the late 1600s and early 1700s were a primary force in the shaping of knowledge and space in the borderlands between these empires. Thus, mapping and knowledge of these territories was often secret and crucial. Kivelson (2006) writes,

“Muscovite rulers recognized the power of maps and of the knowledge and information that they contained. Michel Foucault was not the first to recognize the equation of knowledge with power. According to official tsarist policy, maps were to remain a monopoly of the state authorities, and possession of contraband maps was considered an egregious offense . . . In their silences, as well as in the information they contained, maps served the interests of the state.” (pp. 26-27)

Thus, forms of geographic knowledge—which is what maps are in a pure sense—were neither immune to politics, objective, or separated from the state influences that funded and provided the impetus for these forms of knowledge about Siberia. In a more revealing light, these maps can be viewed as documents produced by state-affiliated actors *for* the purposes of the state. They show the state what it wishes to see, and they produce only a piece of reality conducive to state interests. This is not to say maps are not useful pieces of knowledge, but rather that it is helpful to view them in context of their designed audience and with the biases and the desires that the audience brought with it as part of the process of producing knowledge. By the same token, the silences and unrepresented/unexplored perspectives are left out in the maps as well.

Similarly indicative of his perspective, Steller’s journey begins and he spends a great deal of time describing the icy frosts and cold of the rivers in Siberia. Like his predecessors, he describes natural features systematically, with an eye toward measurement and common standards of comparison such that readers can understand and imagine the surroundings. To give one an idea, Steller writes,

“The severest cold happens between Christmas and about the twentieth of January . . . This river’s name, Angara, is a proper name in the language of the Buryat and Tungus, and until now I have not been able to ascertain what it actually means or why it is applied

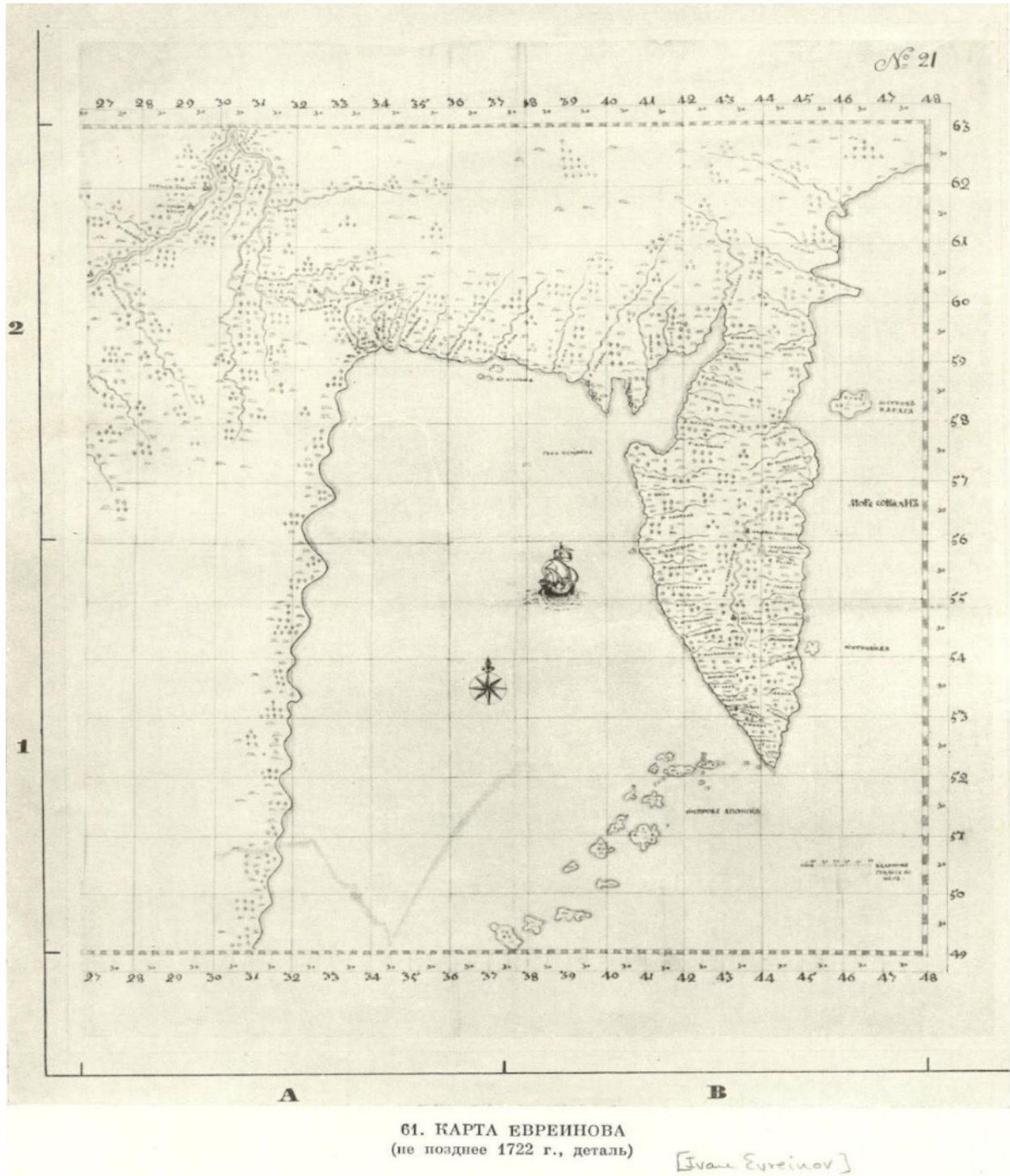
to large rivers. One Angara River flows into one end of Lake Baikal in a delta with three arms; the other flows from the lake's other end and past Irkutsk. This latter Angara does not, like other rivers, flood in spring but instead floods in the fall even though the weather is the most constant then. As wet as the spring is, the fall is dry—entirely free of rain; so heavy rains cannot, as in other places, cause the strong increase in water flow . . . For two hundred kilometers below Irkutsk, near Balaganskoi Ostrog, it freezes a month earlier than at Irkutsk.” (p. 30)

He gives a linguistic description of the river's name and describes a number of its branches, where they lead, and how they connect to other rivers. In addition, he gives important information regarding the coldness of the area and how the Angara freezes. This may not seem significant, but the Angara was one of the main branches of the larger Yenisei river, one of the main waterways through Siberia to Irkutsk, the most used at this time. This kind of information was critical to keeping supplies flowing and the maintenance of state control over the fur trade. In this sense, knowledge about territory, how it connects to other territories as well as its local conditions, were critical for ensuring smooth operations and steady profits in the empire. Shortly after his description of the river itself, he describes its contents and availability of fish, including naming every species, their Latin names, and the locations in the river where they may be found and caught (p. 33). He also notes the times of year that these fish are more plentiful in the river for the most yield. Later, he writes of other animals, including Siberia's plentiful deer population and the different species as well as their locations.

Most importantly, he also writes of the sable, a small animal often hunted to extinction in parts of Siberia due to its highly-prized pelt, “About eighty years ago, this area was famous for hunting sable, but for many years now not a single one has been seen here” (p. 36). Steller, too, describes the prominent tree species in the area, many of which were being chopped and utilized for firewood and construction in the area at the time (p. 36). Steller's account tends to read as a guide book for Siberia's wildlife and environment, written especially for those who would follow

in Steller's footsteps and come to inhabit the land. He lists specific areas as good for settlement, rich in resources, and what climatic conditions were like. This information was not merely descriptive but also a piece in a larger effort by the state to know and utilize Siberian territories to full effect. Descriptions and accounts like these provided the knowledge framework for those in St. Petersburg and the Siberian Office—the administrative body that governed Siberia at this time—to make later decisions about what the best routes were, where the best areas for settlement were, and where the most resources could be found. Figure 19 shows a 1722 map of Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands by Ivan Evreinov that illustrates recent developments in Russian map-making as a form of state knowledge. Particularly as they relate to nautical travel, standardized projections and the use of coordinates helped the state understand its territories and send naturalists to document what they found in those lands as objects of study. Peter the Great in particular was interested in nautical travel and potential water routes to Asia for maximizing trade.

Figure 18. Map of Evreinov—1722



Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. At. 490 B 1964.

Figure 19. Map of Russia by Kirilov—1733



72. КАРТА РОССИИ КИРИЛОВА, 1733 г.

Map used with permission from the American Geographic Society Library at UW Milwaukee. At. 490 B 1964.

Similar to Figure 19 in its embrace of western map-making, Figure 20 shows a map of all of Russia from 1733. This map by Ivan Kirilov was one of the first maps of the whole Russian empire made by a Russian fully utilizing western European map-making techniques. The map represents the large change in knowledge production that the Russian state had undergone in just a few decades. Only a few decades ago, maps like those pictured on pages 19 and 20 were the standard for visual depictions of Siberian territory. Sunderland writes, “In the course of Russia’s Westernizing century, geography became a scientific discipline” in and of itself as before this, “they did not have a coherent state ideology that valued territory as an intrinsic good” (pp. 34-35). These maps emerged alongside concerted expeditions to Siberia to account for what could be made use of in its territory.

Steller goes on to describe Irkutsk, the capital of Eastern Siberia, which was the principal site for the facilitation of the fur trade in Eastern Siberia and trade between Russia and China. Irkutsk was one of the biggest settlements in Siberia, and it boasted seven different churches and a number of reasonably well-established market sectors including grain, brandy, meat, fish, and of course, fur (p. 41). Due to the prominent single male population in the city, Steller is surprised at the squalor of Irkutsk, which was a problem among many Russian settlements at this time. Alcoholism, corruption, thievery, abortion, prostitution, and other crimes were common in these frontier settlements, with syphilis—by Steller’s claim—affecting a third of the population (p. 43).

In the next chapter, Steller goes on to describe potential solutions as well as the economic aspects of Siberian settlements, including the role of the state and merchant class in facilitating these settlements’ livelihood. He also characterizes the inequality that comes with this control by certain actors. He writes,

“Thus, people are driven into poverty, first, by the grain buyers and the high price of the brandy nobody wants to do without. The more so since the tavern keepers, who in turn have leased the taverns at a high price, dilute the brandy with water in order to cover their costs and make a profit. Second, people do not plant more grain than they absolutely have to for their own consumption and sale because more work does not benefit them; rather, it does them harm because the grain would become ever cheaper while the brandy stays at the same high price.” (p. 48)

Steller sees the economy of such settlements as unnecessarily inefficient and monopolistic. He makes various recommendations to alleviate problems of corruption and poor planning that benefited only the established classes. He, too, notes how settlements experienced famines because there was no incentive to maintain a surplus of grain among peasants. In years of poor yield, there would be no extra food to go around and support the settlement as a result. Northern settlements such as Yakutsk and Okhotsk, which were too cold to grow their own grain, were

dependent on other grain-growing settlements. When these grain-growing settlements encountered famine, cities like Yakutsk and Okhotsk experienced the famine twofold to devastating effect. Beyond discussing these problems, he writes shortly after,

“But if Professor Müller’s suggestions were followed and everybody were allowed to distill brandy, a tax could be collected according to the amount of brandy produced and consumed, just as head taxes are levied according to the number of persons in each household. Some merchants would not have as high an income, but the country as a whole would benefit, and people would not have to fear such poverty. They would then like their work better if they themselves were to benefit from it, and the sums raised might well be doubled.” (p. 48)

To Steller, this is a relatively simple matter of fighting the corruption and unnecessarily despotic nature of the settlement economy. There are also hints of enlightened market notions in his arguments and suggestions, as he suggests that freeing up the trade of these items and allowing producers to work for their own self-interest would benefit the settlements as a whole. Steller also makes suggestions about freeing up the Chinese tobacco trade, which would break the state monopoly on the good and be better managed through the means of individual merchants (p. 50). Later on, he notes the corruption in the clergy and how clergy salary was dependent on relations with merchants (p. 52). Another aspect of the settler economy he discusses is the boom and bust nature of early trading in the settlement, which were characterized by extreme inequality and great fluctuation in prices of goods (p. 53). The trends in the local economy have settled, however, and those who made it big are now rich and established, while those who are poor must continue to bear the brunt of this inequality.

In a similar theme to his recommendations to help the Siberian frontier economy, Steller also discusses his recommendations to increase statistical and state knowledge of Siberia. He writes,

“It occurs to me how necessary and useful it would be in the whole Russian empire and especially in Siberia to have an accurate description of all the places in every province

and voevodship, listing the advantage of each over the others, its special natural advantages or flaws, and the inhabitants' wealth or poverty resulting from them. Also the population in each. With the frequent change and replacement of governors and voevods, each newcomer would—when extraordinary levies were imposed—immediately see on such a roster which place should proportionately be more or less imposed on.”⁴⁴ (p. 91)

This suggestion takes on a similar spirit as the larger purpose of his expedition: to document, describe, and increase knowledge of particular regions for the purposes of statecraft and effective administration. Certain areas and spaces are to be regarded as having advantages or flaws, which would lead to decision-making at an administrative level about those territories. Particular areas may be more or less wealthy in terms of varying resources, and those areas would be developed according to what resources were most available and conducive, rather than leaving it up to independent actors and settlers. This type of knowledge lended itself to state planning and administration, paving the way for increased state management as the 18th century went on, including the direction of people, of populations, of which settlers would make up a significant amount.

Steller does not extend as much sympathy toward indigenous peoples, however, as they are often characterized in terms of their inferior development, savagery, or foolishness of character. Steller writes of the Yakut and their practices of burial and infanticide,

“The Yakuts bury only their rich; the poor are flung into the snow or put out somewhere in the woods a few kilometers from the yurt. They throw away small children when they are too poor to raise them. Once two brothers would have buried their mother alive had the Russians not stopped them . . . When people get too sick to walk, they put them on a sled and pull them out into the snow to freeze to death, not even turning to take a last look. Or they leave them lying there in the yurt to starve to death while they build themselves a new one. Deformed babies are placed live in a lidded birch bark basket and hung on trees to die there. In Yakutsk many people starved to death in 1739 and were simply thrown to the bottom of a hill.” (p. 77)

⁴⁴ Voevodship in basic terms refers to an administrated region, while voevod refers to the military/colonial governor of said region (Engel and Willmore, 2020, p. 193).

Beyond implied notions, however, Steller does not state these ways are barbaric. He aims to be more descriptive in this passage than moralizing or judging. That said, he is still critical of their ways and believes indigenous peoples to be at a lower stage of development. Those who do not comply with the imposed Russian tribute, Steller portrays as “rebellious” troublemakers, the implication in this being that it is the natural and just state of the indigenous that they remain subjected to Russians in this tributary relationship—this is the ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ situation through which indigenous opposition is weighed; thus, indigenous resistance or noncompliance is perceived as wrong, stupid, and unnecessarily problematic or burdensome to the Russians. Steller goes on to write that “The Gilyaks have oxen, thus cattle and husbandry, yet do not know how to make butter, a sign of their stupidity” (p. 114). Steller often frames his views of indigenous peoples through his descriptive observations which are intended to describe the state of things as they are but also constitute strong statements about the objects of his discourse. Similar descriptions are found later, as indigenous peoples are implied to be untrustworthy, superstitious, and wild. Steller writes, comparing what he sees as objective, scientific European forms of knowledge to indigenous forms of knowledge, “The fantasizing Yakut inhabitants . . . have no insight into physical phenomena” (p. 142). He says this after dismissing a prominent site among the Yakut as nothing special but a simple lake.

Despite some of his comments about indigenous peoples, he generally does not actively deride them in a direct manner. However, he puts his own form of knowledge production on a pedestal and universalizes it to other cultures, subjecting indigenous knowledge and experience to a lower position, associating it with backwardness and superstition. Of an indigenous companion and servant, he writes, “I had a driver called Uthghysaeh, which is Yakut for daughter of a dog. Because he was also a shaman, he sometimes—falsely—pretended to have

fanciful revelations all night long” (p. 146). What is often not realized about so-called cultural clashes and interactions between peoples of different cultures is that there can also be another dimension of difference. What are called cultural differences can also be considered differences in knowledge production, differences in the very perception of reality, and differences in the categories they are employed to understand reality. Steller’s was one of 18th century European inquiry, rationalism, and early modernity, while indigenous knowledge was rooted in what Europeans would call mythology and cultural traditions going back at least hundreds of years when the Yakut migrated to the lands around the Lena River.⁴⁵ Like all knowledges, they are situated to particular purposes and contexts that help produce them.

Steller’s observations are highly detailed, and among the most detailed of descriptions of Siberia, its peoples, and environment, but they were also produced for a specific purpose: to increase knowledge for the state and future endeavors in the territory. Like his predecessors, Steller, though relatively progressive for his time in some manners, cannot be separated from the larger flow of discourse, categories, and knowledge production that informed his worldview and the kinds of observations he made and prioritized. These discourses competed with others, such as indigenous ones, and actively produced Siberia as a territory and how it came to be viewed by those with the power to extract, fill, and dominate it.

Müller’s Histories

As referenced in Steller’s writings, Müller played a significant role in the Great Northern Expedition and was one of the leading advisors directing it. He also participated in it himself and

⁴⁵ The Yakut *olonkhos*, their mythological tales of how they came to be as a people, are rich resources for understanding their worldview and culture. Interestingly, one *olonkho* entitled *Nurgun Botur the Swift* portrays the Yakut as a destined people and one blessed to inhabit the lands around the Lena River. Non-Yakuts were viewed as foreigners, monsters, and devils.

was in the Far East for a number of years during the time of the expedition, which lasted in total from 1733 to 1743. A professor at Peter's Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Müller gave instructions on what details to include and what courses to take during the expedition, including the demand for systematic geographic knowledge of areas of the empire that largely had yet to be mapped and understood by Europeans and the Russian state. Published in English in 1842, *The Conquest of Siberia* serves as a general overview of Russian activity in Siberia, a brief history, and the ongoing exploratory and mercantile efforts in the region. Peter Pallas' experiences are also accounted for in this volume, however, his work came much later than Müller's, despite their work being compiled into a single work. Therefore, only observations recorded in the 1740s and earlier will be subject to analysis. Until his death, Müller would spend the rest of his life writing historical and geographical volumes about Russia and Siberia. It is significant, also, that due to his extensive work on Siberia, he is known as the father of the discipline of ethnography due to his detailed and systematic efforts to document and produce knowledge about indigenous peoples in Siberia.

In his writings, Müller, like his enlightenment colleagues, refers to indigenous peoples in ethnic terms, using the term "Native" or referring to the specific people groups by name (p. 6). Similarly, though indigenous peoples came to be known in more specific terms, this was often accompanied by language that labeled them as "uncivilized" and "superstitious" (p. 25). Though knowledge of Siberian peoples increased in a certain regard, it was also part of a larger context and project that saw various peoples as belonging to certain regions, the geography of which in turn helped relegate them to a certain level of civilization. Due to this perceived inferiority and disadvantage, Müller writes that the Russians viewed them as "easy prey" (p. 27). At the same time, Müller advances a caricature of Siberians as all too happy to be in their tributary

relationship with a more developed people, the Russians. “Many of the tribes who had been rendered tributary by Yermac, had testified a cheerful acquiescence under the sovereignty of the Czar; and were inclined to renew their allegiance upon the first opportunity” (p. 27). Some of the tumultuous and violent first interactions between Russians and indigenous Alaskans are also noted. During the first forays into the Aleutian islands, it is written, “For the purpose therefore of learning this language, they carried back with them one of the islanders” (p. 134).

Misunderstandings resulting in unproportional violence toward indigenous peoples were common in these interactions, who are referred to here as “savages” (p. 137). Another encounter is detailed by Müller, “They defended themselves as well as they could with their bone lances. This resistance gave him a pretext for firing; and accordingly he shot the whole number, amounting to fifteen men, in order to get at their wives” (p. 140). Despite the violence, some interactions did go well, as Müller refers to one encounter: “In this interview the natives behaved in the most friendly manner, and exchanged a baidar and some skins for two shirts” (p. 139). Amid these dealings, Müller details the habits, clothing, and attitudes of the indigenous peoples.

Besides descriptions of Siberia and surrounding areas as being places where uncivilized indigenous Siberians resided, Müller also discusses the economic incentives for Russian habitation in this territory. He details at great length the lively trade between Russia and China as well as a number of charts for various goods and their current prices that could be had amongst Russian and Chinese merchants (pp. 75-80). Müller pays particular attention to what goods fetch the most value, among which are the various, highly-prized furs. He also assesses the profitability of industries in Siberia, particularly the seabound voyages organized around the fur trade that were financed by investors. These voyages were dangerous and a risky investment, but Müller writes, “In return, the profits arising from these voyages are very considerable, and

compensate the inconveniences and dangers attending them” (p. 116). The success of the voyage would be split up into different shares, each accompanied by a division of the furs accrued on the voyage as a form of payment to those who invested in that ship (pp. 116-117). To Müller, these regions, newly charted, mapped, and filled, were regions of great wealth and posed the potential for “very considerable profit” (p. 119). In Müller’s characterizations and like those of his colleagues, Siberia is a separate, undeveloped space where profitable economic activities can take place amid the backdrop of ambivalent indigenous Siberians who though at times are harmful are largely unfit to fully govern and develop the lands they inhabit. As his detailed accounts of the trade between Russia and China show, the development and use of Siberian territories by these powers was the primary purpose for this land’s existence and its main use. If violence and kidnapping were necessary to achieve these objectives for Siberia, then those actions were deemed appropriate and justified. Violence or ill treatment of indigenous peoples is at best depicted as a slight shame but more often as the management of unruly peoples or objects in the way of larger, enlightened goals.

Both texts and maps like those of Müller and others helped to complete the shift of Siberia in discourse. What was once a holy wilderness of God’s creation in less than 70 years became a site of explicit knowledge collection, understanding, and documentation. The production of Siberia during the 17th century and prior was also a form of knowledge, another situated one that highlighted one aspect of Siberia, its religion. However, as the Russian state modernized, different knowledges were required by the Petrine state to support the modernization of Russia. Strict measurements of distance, identification of indigenous peoples and their ways, locations of resources, prices for goods, and suggestions for how to improve Siberia to make it efficient as a territory became commonplace. If Siberia was administered

under a feudal, undeveloped mode of colonialism and labor exploitation in the 1600s, then as the state modernized in the early 1700s, the exercise of Russian colonialism in Siberia and its accompanying discourses showed an increasingly intentional and concerted rational and enlightened colonial project and management of territory and its population. However, some questions remain unanswered. Did this increasingly central and managed effort in Siberian territory of the Russian state constitute a settler colonial project? Is settler colonialism a useful framework for understanding Siberia in the early modern period?

Chapter 5: Conclusion—Assessing Settler Logics in Russia and Colonized Territory

As a number of scholars in settler studies have pointed out and brought to light, settler colonialism is a separate and distinctive process from colonialism. It is distinguished by a focus on portrayals of empty land and its potential improvement; erasure, minimization, displacement, or genocide of indigenous peoples, and the permanency of the colonizer; internally-oriented political economy; settler consciousness, settler nationalism, the biopolitics of the settler community and the management and health of its population; and a lack of decolonization. Many of these logics of settler colonialism appear in discourse about ‘unexplored’ lands and ‘unknown’ or ‘shadow’ indigenous peoples. Thus to assess whether settler logics were deployed in the literature and knowledge about the colonization of Siberia, one may look to the primary texts of that time to analyze and conclude whether the discourses in these texts contain settler logics.

Regarding the first theme, the perception and justification of Siberia as empty, untamed land was dominant throughout both eras explored in this piece—the pre-Petrine time, 1670 to 1696, and the Petrine and immediate post-Petrine times, 1696 to 1740. However, one caveat that is attached to the perception of Siberia as empty land comes out in later texts. Siberia was perceived as empty and beautiful land in the 1600s, but this discourse did not serve as the justification for larger projects or actions that the state took. With the new knowledge regime that began to exercise knowledge production over Siberia from 1696 or so onwards, these discourses of empty lands began to be operationalized so as to justify Russian presence and extraction in a manner that was unparalleled in the 1600s. Hence the shift from what has been called a crude form of medieval colonialism to a more rational, knowledge-based, and enlightened form that

sought to understand Siberian territories in terms of its resources, wealth, numbers, and characteristics. Although the logic of empty land was at play as far back as the Yesipov, Stroganov, and Remezov chronicles of Siberia, it was not operationalized in a significant manner beyond the establishment of trading outposts, churches, and settlements that would grow into larger cities as the century wore on. Siberia, prior to the 1690s, was seen in discourse as a beautiful land that was to belong to Russia, but not necessarily one that was to be the object of greater understanding, knowledge, and organized development. It was seen as a wondrous, mythological wilderness, a ‘New Eden’ that existed outside the walls of early Russian settlements, one to be filled with God’s radiance, glory and his word. As Remezov writes, “Siberia was darkened by idolatry but today the Siberian land and country, and above all the principal city of Tobolesk, under God’s protection, have become filled with the holy glory of divine manifestations” (p. 249).

The larger shift then in the discourse is not that of the emptiness of Siberian territory itself, but that Siberia was indeed empty in addition to the view that untapped territory must be *utilized* for maximum benefit and could be *known* by the latest methods in European science and taxonomic description, the use of which would transform Siberia into a materially useful space, providing the Russian state with a distinct imperial advantage, both materially and in terms of global prestige. Of this more ‘enlightened,’ extractive, and knowledge-based view, Perry writes,

“If the Advantage of the Situation be consider’d by Means of those grand Rivers which every where spread their Branches . . . was but Industry cultivated and encouraged as it is in England and other free Countreys, the Product of it might, it is certain, be much farther improv’d. Trade be extended, the People made happy, and the Czars of Muscovy, as the Extent of their Countrey is very great, might in a short time become equal in Power and Strength to any Monarch on Earth.” (p. 247)

The logic of empty land and its potential was indeed present in approaches to understanding Siberia as a territory. As scholars have mentioned, the labeling of indigenous land as empty often

serves as a justification for and preludes white settlement of a territory. Logically, this would be the next step, however, the Russian experience and settlement of Siberia is considerably more complex—even contradictory—than other, somewhat formulaic progressions of colonial settlement.

Though in discourse Siberia appeared to be a heavily Christianized territory, as Slezkine and Kivelson note, Christianization of Siberia and its peoples was a largely discursive phenomenon rather than a fulfilled one. Conversions were rare before the late 18th century, when the Russian state under Catherine fully embraced its enlightened civilizing mission; this was also when concerted efforts were made to settle Russians and other ethnic groups throughout the empire.⁴⁶ Until that time and in certain cases later,⁴⁷ the Russian state did not explicitly encourage settlement in Siberia because it wished to protect its indigenous labor system upon which the lucrative fur trade rested. Slezkine notes how the Russian state made laws that forbade against treating indigenous peoples unfairly and harming them (p. 31). However, due to the conflicting interests of the state, clergy, settlers, merchants, and indigenous peoples in Siberia, these laws were not always well-respected, especially in distant regions where the state effectively had little authority and ability to protect indigenous peoples from encroachment. Given that the significant population in Siberia of *promyshlenniks* and their status as upwardly-mobile single males—much of whose purpose in Siberia was to extract, hunt, and accrue wealth from its natural resources—encroachments against indigenous peoples were a predictable byproduct.⁴⁸ This said, indigenous peoples were not the subject of large extermination

⁴⁶ Catherine in particular was fond of Germans who, being one herself, thought them to be hard-working and reliable—of ideal stock for independent settler communities and the concomitant hardships of the frontier (Kivelson and Suny, p. 129).

⁴⁷ The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway from 1891 to 1916 helped facilitate the settlement of millions of ethnic Russians in Central Asia and Siberia (Sunderland, 2001).

⁴⁸ Engel and Willmore define *promyshlenniks* as “men who worked for themselves and exploited the natural resources of the land” in Siberia (p. 192).

campaigns, neither by the state nor rogue settlers, as was the case in North American settler colonies some decades later and elsewhere, where entire wars were waged for the explicit purpose of rooting out indigenous peoples from lands that were desired by settlers (Losurdo, 2005, p. 331). Still, if indigenous peoples got in the way of state interests, they were overridden. If indigenous peoples got in the way of settler interests, official decree was often not strong enough or observed enough to protect them fully. Despite this, Slezkine describes notable contradictions to this where indigenous peoples were in fact defended under the law with a degree of fairness and equal protection that would take western colonial nations some centuries to approach in their dealings with indigenous peoples.

This said, violence against Tatars and Siberian indigenous peoples should not be understated. If tribes refused to partake in the *iasak* fur tribute to the Russians, they were punished severely. For tribes that dissented to the state, killings, theft, and kidnapping were the norm and state decree. Slezkine notes how some more northern groups resisted Russian fur tribute payments and were the subject of a multi-year campaign of violence, in addition to existing struggles against the smallpox that Russians brought with them that devastated some indigenous populations (p. 27). Müller and Pallas note the effect of smallpox among indigenous in Kamchatka, writing, “That country was greatly depopulated by the ravages of the small-pox, by which disorder five-thousand, three hundred, and sixty-eight persons were carried off. There are now only seven hundred and six males in the whole peninsula” (p. 111). The necropolitics of Siberians was not always dictated by passive biological warfare and Russians attempting to meet their immediate goals and short-term interests. Within the literature, especially with regard to the Siberian Tatars, it is often communicated that these peoples were killed in scores wherever they got in the way of Russians. Müller and Pallas write, “The Russians pushed their conquest far and

wide: wherever they appeared, the Tartars were either reduced or exterminated. New towns were built, and colonies were planted on all sides” (p. 28). The question of Tatar indigenity in Siberia is a complex one depending how one poses the question, but given the prevalence of discourses of annihilation on Tatars, especially in the Siberian chronicles, it may be difficult to not label this language as intensely settler colonial if one considers the Tatars to be indigenous.

In addition, discourses in the literature on settlement and sense of permanency seem to suggest a more settler colonial dynamic present in Siberia. Müller and Pallas write, “Strogonoff, in recompense for having first opened a trade with the inhabitants of Siberia, obtained from the Czar large grants of land; accordingly he founded colonies upon the banks of the rivers Kama and Tchussovaia; and these settlements gave rise to the entire subjection of Siberia” (p. 9). This granting of land in spite of indigenous and Tatar presence is reminiscent of other settler colonies where white governments gave land away to companies or settlers that was not truly theirs to dole out. Furthermore, a passage from Kivelson (2006) is revealing in this regard. She writes,

“Guaranteed empty, the land should be promptly filled and put to productive use, like any land in the Muscovite realm. ‘Grigorii [Stroganov] should build an outpost and arm it with cannon and guns and fill it with soldiers to defend it and cut down the woods and clear the fields and plow them and build houses. And he should summon people who are not officially registered anywhere and are not taxpayers to seek out salt deposits and set up salt works.’ Land grants to these settlers presumably followed some of the same guidelines as those established farther into Siberia later in the century, where newcomers were granted land ‘where appropriate for plow and pasture,’ and given seed grain to get themselves started, and a ten-year tax exemption.” (p. 201)

Aspects of discourses like this appear to be classic examples of settler colonial policy— incentivizing settlement via land grants and tax breaks, even giving settlers seed and equipment for their journey. However, scale is important as settler policy was not intensive or widespread nor did it displace indigenous peoples. In passages like this, land grants and similar focuses on land as a precursor to settlement are the foundational steps toward indigenous displacement and

later subjection into later regimes of labor, but their limited scale remains a decisive factor in the shape that Russian colonialism took. Simply, in order to set up the outposts and settlements required for the Russian fur trade, land that was not previously Russian had to be conquered and incorporated under Russian administration. After this, outposts were organized with fairly similar population demographics and economic activities, including—in most areas not affected by permafrost—agricultural self-sufficiency for each town, necessitating a certain degree of spatial expansion so as to have room for large fields and harvests (Remnev, 2007, p. 430). Steller writes, “The Russians have chosen [these places] as suitable for growing grain, and that’s where they’ve built small settlements and larger villages” (p. 88). Despite the need for colonies to be self-sufficient in terms of food produced for their population, land expansion for agriculture—though almost certainly encroaching on nearby indigenous peoples—was neither systematic nor unnecessarily expansive as, again, indigenous populations needed to be maintained for their valuable labor in the fur trade, at which they were most skilled and of most valuable to the Russian state, its economic activities, statebuilding, and development.

Overall, it is clear that Russians in the early Siberian settlements ‘meant to stay’ as the settler colonial discourse goes, but this permanence was not always at odds with or predicated upon indigenous erasure; in fact, they depended on indigenous labor to facilitate the fur trade, which was the primary purpose of the Russian settlements. This contradictory feature of Russian colonialism is one of its central aspects. As Slezkine writes, “The continuation of the fur trade required more peasant settlement, but the spread of peasant settlement undermined the fur trade” (p. 24). Though Russians had to displace some indigenous peoples that got in their way in order to establish settlements and keep them safe, they were simultaneously dependent on the skilled labor of indigenous peoples as fur tributary subjects. Therefore, the Russian state had a strong

interest in keeping indigenous populations sufficient enough to gather tribute, but it also had to balance protections of indigenous peoples with the interests of Russian settlers and merchants who often had conflicting interests with indigenous peoples near their settlements. Remezov writes in his chronicle, “After the baptism of many infidels Sibir’ expanded, and towns and monasteries were built with everything necessary to their subsistence” (p. 239). These towns and the support required for self-sufficiency would cause incursions onto indigenous land. However, as Kivelson (2006) writes,

“Muscovite ideological armature supported a course of incorporation that did not require complete dispossession of the natives. They could stay more or less where they were, under the overlay of encroaching Russian claims. Like the serfs and other subordinated landholders in the Russian heartlands, native claimants were forced to accept new limits and conditions on land that had once been theirs alone. They found themselves restricted in movement and portions of their lands parceled out to the constantly arriving Russian settlers. Significantly, however, their claims to land were never categorically erased and their form of land use never ideologically invalidated with a stroke of a philosophical or cartographic pen.” (p. 192)

Thus, although Russian settlements in Siberia were often self-sufficient, this did not translate to a wholesale genocide of indigenous peoples. In addition, for most of the early period, they were not solely internally-focused as many settler colonies were. Their overwhelming purpose was to set up small, self-sufficient outposts to smoothly aggregate furs and the profits of furs to urban areas for the purposes of trade and state tax, an external orientation. Siberian settlements would later come into their own and become more internally-oriented, but that is well beyond the eras explored in this study. For much of the early period, they existed to export and facilitate resources and profit *elsewhere*, a distinguishing aspect of regular colonialism rather than settler colonialism. Insofar as settler nationalism and settler consciousness, though settlers in Siberia

had differing interests than their western Russian counterparts, there was not a sense of separate community or independent nationality until the 19th century, after the time of this study.⁴⁹

Decolonization and Indigenous Modes of Production

What areas were colonized by Russians in Siberia, namely the southern and fertile provinces near the border that stretch eastward across Russia, have yet to undergo significant decolonization, and there has been little acknowledgement of indigenous sovereignty. With regard to the discursive texts analyzed, a silence is that of the utter lack of indigenous perspectives and the constant positioning of indigenous peoples as at best objects of study or at worst victims of near-genocide. To this end, indigenous scholars have recently reframed issues of settler colonialism to be about indigenous survival and resistance in the midst of these projects. Thus, the final section of this project will be dedicated to indigenous perspectives, decolonization, and alternative modes of production. In Russia, some of the best lands and areas most rich in resources were taken by settlers, and they remain in the hands of oil, mineral, and timber companies, some of contemporary Russia's main economic exports. Indigenous activists have taken issue with these colonized spaces and their maintenance. Like some indigenous activists in North America, indigenous Siberian activists have emphasized their differing relationships to the land that once rightly belonged to them and the theft of its wealth. As a result, today indigenous activists express understandable frustration at the state of what were

⁴⁹ Later Russian settlers in Siberia would develop a distinct identity and sense of nationhood in the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. Many took inspiration from the United States and its stereotype of rugged frontier individuality, hoping that Siberia could become an independent, democratic state akin to the US. In addition, Siberia was seen by these Siberian nationalists as a regenerative space in which the white race and superior traits were tested and articulated, proving their race's vitality, distinction from other Russians, and their perceived deservedness for a separate state (Yadrintsev, 1892).

once their lands. Highlighting the unfairness of this exploitation of Khanty lands, one Khanty journalist aptly said,

“The capitals of Arab states have used their petrodollars to build marble palaces. Envy is not a nice sentiment, but what is a Nenets supposed to feel if he knows that every year, every month, every day millions of tons of oil and billions of cubic meters of gas are being pumped out of his native soil? What is a Khanty supposed to think, if he knows that under different circumstances this oil and this gas could drastically change the life of his people?” (in Slezkine, p. 379)

To review, discourses of Siberian territory in the 17th century produced Siberia through an Orthodox logic that was not in step with the reality and experience of those who lived on the frontier. It saw indigenous peoples only as enemies and heathens, Siberia as a land of simultaneous Edenic beauty and pagan darkness. However, once Russian forces began to conquer and settle Siberia, discourses emphasized its richness, its beauty, and the territory’s Christian nature and destiny. In discourse, Siberia was a land where God’s radiance shined brightest, but this did not reflect the colonial reality. Indigenous peoples were subject to a complex regime of violence and forced labor that though interested in preserving them for their labor value to the state and the fur trade. Siberia, though a land of God’s providence and righteous Christian piety in discourse, did not experience significant or widespread intentional Christianization for many decades. Thus, this discourse served a particular purpose: to rationalize the conquest of Siberia to Russian Christians and the state. So long as Tatars and indigenous Siberians remained unchristianized, much could be done to them, including what was seen as God’s will for them to be tributary laborers to the Russian state. Siberia as a sacred space, then, was a discourse that did not represent the colonial reality occurring in geographic space, whose significant feature was the incorporation of previously-Mongol tributaries into the Russian state such that the profits of the fur trade would be accrued by Russians rather than previous empires and states that ruled in Siberia.

As the Russian state developed and engaged more with Europe, it sought to increase its knowledge of Siberia and maximize its dominion over these territories. Geographic knowledge became an end in itself rather than an accompanying benefit to what was once a quasi-feudal form of colonialism and forced tribute. What is seen in the literature on Siberian territory after 1696 going into the 18th century is the production of Siberia as a site of knowledge and knowing, one that could be understood by those with the proper methods, categories, and mindsets. Simpson and Bagelman (2018) write of British colonialism and geographic knowledge,

“By rendering Native lands and waters objects of colonial knowledge, and thus colonizable territory, these cartographic representations create an ‘imaginative geography’ with ‘practical performative force’ (Gregory 2001). These depictions anticipated colonization, serving as the basis of claims to sovereignty and setting the stage for a future British settlement.” (p. 561)

In the same way, the concerted drive toward attaining geographic knowledge about Siberia and its inhabitants by Peter the Great and his successors signaled a new paradigm in how territory was perceived and acted upon by the state. This is signaled in a number of themes in the naturalist accounts of Siberia which begin to refer to indigenous peoples not as ‘pagans’ but as ‘natives’ or their ethnic group names. Flora, fauna, land, water, and people alike begin to become the objects of observational, surveying knowledge thought to be able to describe the true nature of what it studied. Siberia was seen as an untapped, extractive space that would give the Russian state the edge it needed to compete with other empires. Projects on the landscape could be pursued, mercantile policy perfected, and indigenous culture described and undermined—all in order to justify a larger project of making a previously-unused Siberia productive and useful to the state.

Not just narratively, but graphically as well can one see the shift in discourse as maps of Siberia constitute one of the most apparent examples of this discursive shift. In the late 17th century, maps produced Siberia as a blessed, godly space that was made Russian by the construction of churches and conquest of heathens who dared resist God's plan for Siberia. As Russians adopted European mapmaking techniques in the late 17th and early 18th century, Siberian territory becomes depicted not as a sacred space of Christian destiny but one of measure, of description, and of precision. These new maps helped produce an enlightened technocratic view of Siberia, one that sought to locate indigenous inhabitants, define the landscape, and chart as accurately as possible so as to maximize efficiency and profit. In the manner of a few decades, Russian mapmaking practices changed dramatically, and these changes in geographic depiction represent a larger shift in the nature of knowledge production in the Russian empire, an episteme that revolutionized Russian perceptions of and approaches to the administration of its territory in Siberia.

As for the framework of settler colonialism, Russian colonialism prior to Catherine's reign and its attributes remain somewhat tangled and difficult to tease apart, though some insights have been refined and point the way for future studies. Because the Russian state had a vested interest in protecting indigenous populations generally for the purpose of surplus labor in the fur trade, indigenous extermination did not occur on a widespread or concerted scale. Despite the lack of a large scale and concerted effort at indigenous dispossession, there were still tensions between settlers and indigenous peoples around the sites of settlement, and increased self-sufficiency in agriculture for these booming settlements entailed spatial expansion on the part of settlers and seizure of arable lands. The Russian state had to attempt to manage both of these dynamics at the same time—wishing to preserve its indigenous labor regime and therefore the

indigenous population as well as the autonomy and economic activities of Russian settlers, hunters, and merchants. Often these groups were at odds, and violence did occur, but it was not state-sanctioned or on a trajectory that would result in indigenous extermination. However, if indigenous populations did not submit to Russian state rule and the fur trade, they were indeed the subject of violence that could very much be considered intentional, concerted, and extinctive toward those who resisted. However, as many indigenous groups were tributary under Mongol kingdoms and their descendents, most opted to remain in servitude but this time under the Russian state. This said, violence toward the prior Tatar kingdoms that administered Siberia was totalizing and ruthless. If the Siberian Tatars are to be considered indigenous, then the settler colonial logic of indigenous erasure and extermination remains a potent category for use in analysis. On this subject, further inquiry and studies may provide insights. For now, however, Edward Cavanagh's discussion of settler colonial nuance proves highly applicable to notions of Russian settler colonialism before the late 18th century. He speaks of South African settler colonialism's 'particular character' in that it was a settler colony based upon a seemingly contradictory mixture of both indigenous land and labor. Cavanagh (2020) writes, explaining his disagreements with those in the field and imparting advice to reconsider complex dynamics in settler societies:

“My approach here takes a departure from the recent formulations of Patrick Wolfe, who maintains that we see settler colonialism primarily as a contest over land rather than labour – a social formation embodying ‘a logic of elimination’ at its core. If we follow this lead to its logical conclusion, as he and others have, South Africa starts to appear less like a settler colony and more like a classically exploitative colonial formation. Its rancid elements of slavery merely superseded by the mass-proletarianisation of a subordinated population after industrialisation, South Africa was different from other settler societies because its colonisers asked very different things of the colonised: settlers were always a minority dependent on ‘native labor’; the ‘natives’, for their part, were ultimately contained by segregation rather than targeted for destruction, and today they have reached a kind of political independence that settler-colonised peoples elsewhere are

unlikely to attain. According to [Wolfe's] reading, South Africa was 'just a colony that happens to have settlers in it', but was never a 'settler colony.'" (pp. 292)

Similarly, indigenous peoples in Russia were contained by segregation outside of cities, and Russian settlements were largely initially organized around the indigenous labor of the fur trade. This did not make the settlers in Siberia somehow not settlers. Despite that destruction of indigenous peoples was not the goal of the colonies in Siberia, settler presence was in large part dependent on the fur trade sustained by indigenous labor.

Furthermore, a settler colonial framework as a consideration in analysis of early modern Russia, particularly the period of this study which is 1670-1740, remains a potent one for recognizing the evolutions colonialisms can undergo and their independent nature that is difficult to reduce to one framework or mode of being. Howe (2020) writes of the settler colonial framework in Northern Ireland,

"We might usefully think, more specifically for Northern Ireland, in terms of graduations and degrees of settler-coloniality . . . A closely related alternative perspective would be to seek to place Ulster history in relation not to one single pattern or model of settler colonialism but rather to multiple forms of settler expansion. We might suggest that across modern global history at least two broad patterns of settlerdom may be identified. One is naturally that which has mainly preoccupied contemporary settler colonial studies: long-distance, especially Anglophone movement, following or accompanying colonial conquest, heavily dependent on metropolitan state power and often largely state-sponsored, and typically resulting in a starkly-divided strongly ethnically ranked society characterised by either the elimination or the complete marginalisation of the 'native.' The other has been widespread across Eurasia and has been characteristic of much settlement by people defined as ethnic Russians, Germans, and on a smaller scale numerous other peoples. It has typically involved shorter-distance and landward rather than seaborne migrations, has not always or even mostly followed military conquest or depended fully and directly on state sponsorship, and has usually resulted in societies where ethnic ranking is less acute and ethnic-cultural frontiers more blurred than in the 'classic' extra-European settler colonies." (pp. 72-73)

In this regard, it can be seen how changing logics toward territory and the rational knowledge production associated with modern statecraft and geographic knowledge—which is often really

colonizer knowledge—helps *act as a prelude* to later colonial projects in space that may become genocidal, settler-intensive, and hegemonic. Quickly, rationalizations of territorial expansion can change, evolve, and help form the discursive bedrock for what become fully fledged wars and colonial projects. The increased emphasis on knowledge production and geographic description in the early 1700s began under Peter and continued by others helped to form the knowledge required for a later biopolitics under Catherine that was increasingly active and thus *acted* on the knowledge of Siberia produced by prior generations by managing populations, inserting colonists, and facilitating settler colonies in Siberia. Critically, throughout the discourses on Siberian territory, the conditions and knowledge that allowed for and helped justify later, more active colonial projects were formulated and established.

Therefore, now as ever remains the critical need for examination of not just logics and patterns in discourses, but also silences in discourses, especially ones that have geopolitical consequences and erase the perspectives of those who are the objects of formed knowledges and truths. Often in texts like these, indigenous and minority voices are silenced because they are a threat to the knowledge and discourse of the colonizer. One Koriak laborer, quoted by Slezkine in *Arctic Mirrors*, relates the following sentiment that was popular among indigenous activists during his time: “We don’t have people [in our communities] who don’t help the poor; if they see that you’re hungry, they feed you” (p. 200). This sentiment relates well to what Manu Karuka (2019) discusses as an ‘indigenous mode of relationship’ in his book *Empire’s Tracks*. Karuka says of indigenous modes of relationship that “A Dakota mode of relationship, as Deloria presented it, is oriented around the creation of life, the expansion of kinship relations, and the establishment and maintenance of peace” (p. 23). One piece of Nanai poetry emphasizes this, conceptualizing their ancestors and nature as one and as forces to learn from and respect:

My father is a Nanai maple—
I have his loyalty.
My mother is a Nanai birch—
I have her eyes and braids.
My grandmother, the stern taiga,
Albeit harsh and strict,
Taught me how to be agile,
Courageous, firm, and tough. (in Slezkine, p. 368)

Indigenous modes of relationship tend to be about stewardship of resources, learning from nature, and maintaining peace and life; these modes of relationship do not require endless expansion and ecological destruction as colonialism does. In contrast to indigenous modes of relationship that focus on care and community welfare, the colonial mode of relationship is an ever-expanding and cannibalizing force that destroys everything in its way. This logic of territory, environment, and resources is in utter contrast to both the Orthodox conquest narrative explored in the 17th century and the extractive, technocratic, modern-state logic in the 18th century.⁵⁰ Moving forward into the 21st century and current problems of consumption, climate change, and lack of decolonization, the centering of indigenous perspectives and indigenous knowledge remains of utmost importance, especially as much of Siberia remains ethnically indigenous. In other settler colonies, indigenous activists have stressed the importance of ‘land back’ and indigenous control over unceded lands. Rather than settling for token gestures and watered-down compromises, land back movements demand indigenous sovereignty on indigenous territory. In the closing section of the long-celebrated Yakut oral tradition, *Nurgun Botur the Swift* (Oyunsky, 2014), the narrator emphasizes indigenous connection to their homeland, and their own sovereignty over it. The speaker says,

⁵⁰ This is another avenue for further studies. Fairly little work has been done recently on indigenous perspectives in Russia and their advocacy for decolonization, at least in the Anglophone world.

They were destined
To be Urankhais [great Yakut]
And live a great life,
They were fated
To be human beings

...

That was what
Our *Olonkho* was all about,
The life and adventures of
The best Urankhais
Whose wealth
Was inexhaustible
Whose future
Was unshakeable. (p. 447)

In colonial territory, indigenous peoples were erased, minimized, killed en masse, displaced, or subject to restrictive labor regimes from which there was little escape. However, indigenous peoples did survive, and their knowledges constitute sites of resistance that allow territory to be conceptualized for the good of their community and controlled by members of their community, an alternative approach much-needed in an era of neoliberal austerity.


Figure 20. Map of Listed Locations in Russia



(graphic illustrated and labeled by author)

Figure 21. Map of Indigenous Peoples Mentioned in Texts



-  Khanate of Sibir Approximate Boundaries, 1580
-  Khanty and Selkup
-  Tungus
-  Chukchi
-  Koryaks
-  Kamchadals
-  Yakuts
-  Buryats
-  Tatars

(graphic generated by author using ArcGIS and ESRI's Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic coordinate system)

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