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**THE EMPIRE ON DISPLAY:  
ETHNOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION AND THE  
CONCEPTUALIZATION OF HUMAN DIVERSITY IN POST-  
EMANCIPATION RUSSIA**

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## **Abstract**

In 1867, Russia's first major ethnographic exhibition was held in Moscow. The exhibition consisted of dioramas with at least 300 mannequins portraying over 60 ethnic groups, and a wide range of additional displays representing the material culture and physical features of the peoples of the Russian Empire. This paper focuses on three interrelated problems connected with the exhibition and its reception: first, the narrative frameworks articulated by exhibition planners and observers as a means to impart order and meaning to the collection of peoples assembled in the exhibition; second, the place of ethnic Russians within the broader frameworks of the Empire and the family of Slavic peoples; and third, the possibilities and limitations inherent in the use of science as a means to articulate programs of ethnic and political hegemony.

This paper sheds light on a critical period in the transition between the imperial dynastic conception of "Official Nationality" characteristic of the reign of Nicholas I and the more conventional Great Russian nationalism that prevailed from the 1880s onward. The Ethnographic Exhibition shows how ethnic nationalism was becoming the dominant ethos within Russian society, but it also illustrates difficulties inherent in attempts to apply the stamp of Russian ethnic identity to the Empire as a whole. Given that the tensions between Russia as a state and Russia as a nation continue to shape Russian politics and culture, the Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867 raises issues of relevance to the present day.

## Introduction

From April to June of 1867, Moscow's main exhibit hall, the Manezh, was home to a novel and engaging spectacle – a major ethnographic exhibition, the first of its kind ever undertaken in Russia. Entering the Manezh, the visitor was transported into a virtual Empire, a symbolic space defined by the diversity its inhabitants. From the Aleuts of Alaska to the Mazurs of Central Poland, the peoples of the Empire were laid out like tiles in a mosaic depicting Russia's vast expanse and human variation. Over 300 mannequins, meticulously rendered to convey characteristic physical features, constituted the focal point of the exhibition. Divided into almost sixty national and regional groups, the mannequins were adorned in genuine native costumes and surrounded by artifacts of everyday life, most sent directly from the regions by local enthusiasts.

Enveloping the whole was a veritable sea of greenery carefully chosen in accordance with the native climactic conditions, giving the entire exhibition the feel of an indoor botanical garden. Numerous model dwellings and a mock volcano added to the variety and color of the display. And for those whose curiosity was not satiated by the dioramas, an extensive collection of ethnographic objects, photographs, and physical specimens afforded the opportunity for more detailed investigation. With extensive press coverage, stimulated in part by the patronage of the Imperial family and the presence of a large delegation of Slavic scholars and activists from Eastern Europe, the All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition attracted thousands of visitors and was widely acknowledged as one of the preeminent public events of the season.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most important source on the ethnographic exhibition of 1867 remains the documents published in connection with the event itself. Around the time of the exhibition two collections and a catalog were published: *Vserossiiskaia etnograficheskaia vystavka, ustroennaia Imperatorskim Obshchestvom liubitel'ei estestvoznaniia v 1867 goda* (Moscow, 1867); *Vserossiiskaia etnograficheskaia vystavka i slavianskii s'ezd v Mae 1867*. (Moscow, 1867) and *Ukazatal' russkoi etnograficheskoi vystavki, ustroennaia Imperatorskim Obshchestvom liubitel'ei estestvoznaniia v 1867 goda* (Moscow, 1967). The first volume is essentially a compilation of documents, instructions in preparation for the exhibition, accounts of meetings and banquets apparently culled from newspaper reports, and digests of press coverage both in Russia and abroad. An analysis of the sources of this text and the manner in which it was compiled can be found in S. A. Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety v Rossii* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 162-166. The second volume reproduced the text of the first in its entirety and added a detailed description of the visit of a delegation of Slavic scholars and political leaders to Moscow in honor of the exhibition. In 1878 an additional volume was produced which combined the first volume in its entirety with the catalog, photographs of some of the displays and the minutes of the meetings of the exhibition planning committee. *Etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda. Izvestiia Imperatorskogo obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia antropologii i etnografii*, t. XXIX, (Moscow, 1878). I have relied on this volume primarily. To my knowledge, the archival records related to the organization of the exhibition have not survived. When OLEAE was liquidated in the early 1930s its archives were divided among several repositories and apparently many of the files were discarded.

But for all its success, the Ethnographic Exhibition was not devoid of controversy. The very format of the exhibit seemed to demand some kind of overarching narrative, a unifying idea, without which the exhibition would appear little more than a formless amalgam of disparate peoples. But while the need for a unifying narrative was universally felt, there was no clear consensus as to what that narrative should be. From the first stages of planning a variety of conceptual frameworks were articulated by organizers and observers alike. And while some potential narratives clearly evoked a deeper resonance than others, no single framework enjoyed absolute dominance. The task of this paper is to sort through these competing narratives. In recounting the story of the exhibition, I will focus on the ways in which organizers and observers sought to frame the raw ethnographic facts on display within broader conceptions of the Empire and its human diversity.

The narratives arising out of the Ethnographic Exhibition are particularly noteworthy in that they help illuminate a critical turning point in conceptions about the nature of the Empire and its Russian identity. If, in the reign of Nicholas I, the identity of the state, and hence conceptions of “Russianness” derived, from the standpoint of the regime, from the principle of dynastic rule – the divinely sanctioned power of the Autocrat and his heirs over an ethnically, culturally and religiously heterogeneous population, by the reign of Alexander III, the autocracy had embraced a more conventional nationalism in which the greatness of the Empire was directly associated with the particular ethnic identity of the Great Russian people.

In the 1860s and 1870s, however, these two contrasting conceptions remained blurred and interwoven. While the regime of Alexander II continued to cling to a largely dynastic conception of power, and visions of civic inclusion transcending ethnicity continued to be articulated within the state bureaucracy, nationalistic patterns of thought were permeating ever deeper into Russian society.<sup>2</sup>

Spurred on by events such as the Polish rebellion of 1863 and the unification of Italy and Germany,

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<sup>2</sup> On the character of Alexander II and his regime see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, Volume Two. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) pp. 19-57. On the concept of civic inclusion see Dov Yaroshevski, “Empire and Citizenship,” and Austin Lee Jersild, “From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire,” both of which appear in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, Daniel Brower, Edward Lazzarini, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Russians across the political spectrum felt ever more acutely an imperative to envision the Empire as essentially coterminous with the Russian nation.

Coming in the midst of this shift in awareness, the All-Russian Ethnographic exhibition took on an almost provocative edge. Through its graphic display of the ineffaceable diversity of the Empire, the exhibition engendered an imperative to frame this ethnic diversity in a reaffirmation of the preeminent status of the ethnic Russian nation. The organizers of the exhibit were not opposed to such an interpretation and took steps to embed the notion of Russian hegemony into physical arrangements of the displays. However, the language and practices of science, the primary vehicle through which the knowledge conveyed in the displays was validated, presented real and substantial limitations on the degree to which the exhibition could express explicitly narratives of hegemony. The resulting tension between ends and means, despite the intentions of the organizers, reveals significant ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the question of Russian identity in the context of the Empire.

### **The age of exhibitions**

The second half of the nineteenth century was the quintessential era of the grand international exhibition. From the seminal Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851 through the Parisian Expositions Universelles of 1867, 1878, 1889 and 1900 and American World Fairs in Philadelphia, Chicago and St. Louis in 1876, 1893 and 1904, the half-century was marked by a veritable parade of lavish public spectacles celebrating the triumphs of European civilization.<sup>3</sup> Alongside displays of technological innovations, industrial feats and scientific advancements, human cultures were a prominent feature of the late nineteenth century exhibitions. In displaying the bodies and material artifacts of non-European peoples, the exhibitions articulated a distinct cultural narrative.<sup>4</sup> While the scientific and technological

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> In the earlier exhibitions primitive peoples were most commonly displayed using mannequins and dioramas, but later exhibitions often featured live subjects dressed in native clothing, living in recreated villages, and going about their "authentic" day to day lives under the voyeuristic gaze of visitors. For a description of one such exhibit and its impact on the young T. S. Eliot see Ronald Bush, "The Presence of the Past: Ethnographic Thinking/Literary Politics." in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, Elazar Barkan and

aspects of the exhibitions dramatized the power and scope of European achievements, the ethnographic displays underscored the inherent superiority of European civilization by illustrating, through the portrayal of primitive peoples, just how far the European races had advanced. In so doing, the displays reflected quite accurately fundamental assumptions underlying European colonial expansion during the age of imperialism.

Russians did not host any major international exhibitions of their own, although they contributed pavilions to most of the larger events. However, the practice of putting cultural artifacts on display was a well-established feature of Russian academic life. Throughout the eighteenth century, for example, Peter the Great's *Kunstkamera* housed a wide variety of materials representing the exoticism and diversity of the Empire.<sup>5</sup> In 1830, the collection of the *Kunstkamera* was combined with materials from more recent expeditions to form an ethnographic museum of the Academy of Science.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the Russian Geographical Society, almost from its inception in 1845, began receiving artifacts, and by 1848, a proposal by the noted naturalist Karl von Baer to establish a "collection of ethnographic objects" had been approved.<sup>7</sup> But neither the Academy of Science nor the Russian Geographical Society attempted to display their artifacts in a holistic fashion so as to depict the character and attributes of entire peoples.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, both collections remained, at least until the 1860s, largely

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Ronald Bush, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) pp. 23-41. For a general overview of human displays see Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> T. V. Staniukovich, *Etnograficheskaia nauka i muzei* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> On the formal establishment of the museum see "Publichnoe zasedanie imp. Akademii nauk," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, no. 1 (1831), p. 6. In 1836 plans for the museum were still under discussion. See *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshchevnie*, ch. 12 (1836), pp. 322, 325. I am indebted to Natalia Georgevna Sukhova for bringing these materials to my attention.

<sup>7</sup> *Geograficheskie izvestiia*, vyp. 2 (1848), p. 35; Arkhiv Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva, f. 1-1846, op. 1, ed. kh. 4, l. 74. Apparently Baer's initiative brought few results. Nine years later the issue was raised again leading to extensive discussion of a proposal by Baer for a national ethnographic museum. Ultimately, however, the proposal was tabled by the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, president of the Society, who approved of the idea but noted that "it would be best to wait for favorable circumstances" for its realization. ARGO, f. 1-1857, op. 1, ed. kh. 28.

<sup>8</sup> There was, to be sure, a fascinating proposal for such a display in the early nineteenth century which was never brought to fruition. See Kevin Tyner Thomas, "Collecting the Fatherland: Early-Nineteenth Century Proposals for a Russian National Museum," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 91-107.

beyond the reach of the general public. The Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867 was, therefore, a fundamentally new type of event, a display designed with an explicitly didactic intent, legitimized by its demonstrative self-presentation as science, intended to display the cultures and physiognomies of the peoples of the Empire to a large and socially diverse Russian public.

#### **A. P. Bogdanov and the anthropological vision**

The impulse behind the creation of the 1867 Ethnographic Exhibition was directly connected with the great exhibitions of Western Europe. Anatolii Petrovich Bogdanov a young Russian zoologist, had first conceived of the event in 1859 while viewing the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, the suburb of London to which the exhibition had been transported after the original event closed in 1851. Bogdanov was particularly taken by the ethnological displays, which had been considerably expanded at Sydenham.<sup>9</sup> The ethnological exhibit at Sydenham was organized to encompass the entire non-European world, with separate sections representing continents laid out roughly in accordance with their geographical positioning. Mannequins representing indigenous inhabitants were depicted amidst native flora and fauna surrounded by the characteristic accouterments of their everyday lives.<sup>10</sup>

Bogdanov seems to have been inspired in general by the possibilities of such a format, but two points in particular motivated him to action. First, was the total absence of the peoples of the Russian Empire, many of whom were easily as primitive and exotic as the natives on display in the Crystal Palace. Including these peoples within the general framework of the Sydenham exhibition could only enhance its value from the point of view of science. Second, was the fact that nothing like the Sydenham exhibition had ever been produced on Russian soil. A similar exhibit in Russia, displaying the numerous peoples of

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<sup>9</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, (New York: The Free Press, 1987) p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> A diagram of the ethnological exhibit at the Crystal Palace is reproduced in Michael T. Bravo, "Ethnological Encounters," in *Cultures of Natural History*, N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 354. For a detailed description see S. Philips, *Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1854).



the Russian Empire alongside the exotic denizens of Sydenham, would almost certainly elicit great interest and would serve as a powerful tool for the popularization of science.<sup>11</sup>

However enticing Bogdanov's vision of a Russian Crystal Palace may have been, it was one plan among many and would have to wait several years for its realization. A young man not yet thirty, Bogdanov had been appointed in the early 1860s to a chair at Moscow University and was brimming with energy and ideas. He had a solid scholarly training in zoology – his dissertation was devoted to coloration in birds, and he had published several translations of French and German textbooks on butterflies, beetles, netwings and comparative anatomy<sup>12</sup> – but his greatest talent was as an organizer, someone who could inspire, motivate and mobilize the often inert scientific community into action. He had played a key role in the creation of the Moscow Zoo in the late 1850s, and by 1863, he was ready to apply his organizational skills on a new project – the establishment of a new learned society devoted to the natural sciences.<sup>13</sup> He began discussing the idea among a small circle of his students and friends, and by October 1863, the group was ready to make a formal proposal to the Ministry of Education.

Six months later, official approval was received, and on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1864 the Society of Friends of Natural History (*Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia*) of Moscow University celebrated its inaugural meeting. From the start, Bogdanov and his supporters insisted that the new society should make education and popularization a key component of its mission. The inclusion of the rather awkward and archaic term “liubitel” (encompassing both the ideas of admirer and amateur) in the society's title was a conscious gesture reflecting the society's orientation. This was not to be an elite guild of master scientists pursuing their esoteric truths in a rarefied atmosphere of exclusionary rigor. The new society was to be a

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<sup>11</sup> Bogdanov's response to viewing the Sydenham Crystal Palace is briefly described in *Piatidesiatiletie Imperatorskogo Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii*, (Moscow: tip. t-ovo Riabushinskikh, 1914), pp. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> D. N. Anuchin, *O liudiakh russkoi nauki i kul'tury* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1952), pp. 237-238.

<sup>13</sup> Bogdanov's initiative seems to have been prompted by the newly promulgated university charter of 1863, which gave universities the right to establish learned societies. See *Piatidesiatiletie IOLEAE*, p. 6.

tool for the spread of knowledge, bringing science to the masses and creating an environment in which professionals and amateurs could be united in their common love of the natural world.<sup>14</sup>

Founding a new learned society was one thing, but earning the recognition and respect of the scholarly community and the educated public was a more difficult task. Bogdanov had addressed this challenge from the outset by drawing in authoritative senior scholars whose participation could endow the new society with academic legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> With a sufficiently eminent leadership in place, Bogdanov contented himself with a modest official role, preferring to lead from behind the scenes through his charisma and powers of persuasion. But the support of prominent scholars would ultimately be of little use if the society did not make an impression through its practical activities. With this in mind, Bogdanov returned in 1864 to his idea of recreating on Russian soil the ethnological exhibits of the Crystal Palace.

Bogdanov was attracted to the idea of undertaking an exhibition in part because it would serve to advance his most cherished scholarly goal, the development in Russia of anthropology as an academic field. Like its close relative, ethnography, anthropology was a new science, the conceptual boundaries and scholarly mission of which were still poorly defined. In Russia at the time, there was no university instruction in anthropology, and only a handful of scholars, of whom Karl Von Baer was the most prominent, could claim any expertise in the field. But for Bogdanov, who had traveled extensively abroad and was extremely well-informed about scholarly trends in Western Europe, anthropology was science on the cutting edge. "In Anthropology," he wrote, "one can lay down new paths everywhere. Therefore, people who are bolder prefer to follow this route rather than the ready-made, cultivated and less dangerous paths of the firmly established sciences."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Anuchin, p. 178.

<sup>15</sup>. Most significant in this regard were G. E. Shchurovskii, an eminent professor of geology at Moscow University, and A. Iu. Davydov, a famous mathematician. The two served as President and Vice-President respectively. See *ibid.*, p. 180-181.

<sup>16</sup>. Quoted in M. G. Levin, *Ocherki po istorii antropologii v Rossii*, (Moscow: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), pp. 82-83.

In his writings from this period, Bogdanov strove to define the specific character and goals of anthropology as an academic discipline, particularly in relation to the related field of ethnography. European scholars, Bogdanov noted, tended to see anthropology and ethnography (or ethnology as it was generally referred to in the West) either as interchangeable terms or, more commonly, as elements in a hierarchy – anthropology was the all encompassing science of mankind, while ethnography was the subfield that dealt with ethnic or tribal groupings.

Bogdanov, however, argued that the two fields were best viewed as independent and parallel realms of knowledge. Both studied mankind, but while ethnography approached the topic from a humanistic perspective focusing on such features as folk traditions, daily life and language, anthropology viewed mankind strictly from the perspective of the natural sciences.<sup>17</sup> While Bogdanov was sympathetic to the interests and concerns of ethnographers, his own predilection was clear – the key to the understanding the nature of mankind lay in the physical structures of the human organism, especially the size and shape of the skull.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1864, Bogdanov submitted to the Society his proposal for an exhibition. His rationale illustrates quite clearly his methods and goals:

There is no aspect of natural science that is as deserving as anthropology of great efforts on the part of the Society for the dissemination of fundamental information among the mass of the public. No one would likely dispute that the public is more familiar with the main features of the tribes of Africa and Australia than with the tribes inhabiting Russia. Therefore nothing can be as fitting to the goals of our Society as a serious introduction of these tribes to the masses. Furthermore, there is no state in the world that is of such interest to science in the study of the skulls of various tribes... It would be desirable, therefore, that the Society assemble an anthropological and craniological collection accessible to the public and fit to serve as a study guide for the society itself... We think that this can be achieved by arranging an anthropological

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<sup>17</sup> A. P. Bogdanov, "Materialy dlia antropologii kurgannogo perioda v Moskovskoi gubernii," *Izvestiia obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia*, t. 3, 1867, pp. 2-6. See also A. Bogdanov, "Antropologiiia i etnografiia," *Naturalist*, no. 20-21 (November, 1866).

<sup>18</sup> See especially the article A. P. Bogdanov, "Znachenie kranologii," in *Antropologicheskie i etnograficheskie stat'i o Rossii i stranakh, ei prinallezhashchikh*, v. 1, (Moscow, 1868). Bogdanov's own study of skeletal remains unearthed in the ancient burial mounds of Moscow Province is based on the clear assumption that historically significant groups could be identified on the basis of shared craniological characteristics.

exhibition, primarily of Russian tribes, in accordance with the program, or better to say, in the same form as the anthropological section of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.<sup>19</sup>

As we see, for Bogdanov, the purpose of the exhibition would be to represent through visual display the ethnicities (“tribes”) of the Russian Empire.<sup>20</sup> The audience would be a vaguely defined “public” or “masses” with little or no previous knowledge of the peoples on display. Assuming that such an audience would consist largely of ethnic Russians of the educated classes, we can deduce an initial orientation away from “Russianness” as such, toward the representation in a broader sense of the human diversity of the Empire. The breadth of Bogdanov’s vision is further illustrated by his intention to include replicas of the Crystal Palace mannequins in the exhibition.<sup>21</sup> In Bogdanov’s anthropological narrative, the peoples of the Russian Empire were to be placed within the overall framework of the total diversity of the human race, within which distinctions were to be drawn primarily, if not exclusively, on the basis of the physical features of the human organism.

But how was this display of human diversity to be organized? Bogdanov proposed that the exhibition be divided into two sections, one purely anthropological and the other ethnographic. The ethnographic section followed fairly closely the Sydenham model. “At such a exhibition,” Bogdanov wrote, “the representatives of the main tribes should be arranged as much as possible in their natural settings with the attributes of their domestic life, and each group should be arranged in such a way as to express some sort of characteristic trait of their way of life.”<sup>22</sup>

Bogdanov’s vision for the anthropological section was less clearly defined. On the one hand, he hoped that the exhibition would result in the creation of a new craniological collection, which might

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<sup>19</sup>. “Etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda Imperatorskago Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia antropologii i etnografii sostoishchago pri Imperatorskom Moskovskom universitete.” *Izvestiia Imperatorskago Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia antropologii i emografii* t. XXIX, (Moscow: tip. M. N. Lavrova i ko., 1878), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>. A note on terminology: throughout Bogdanov’s proposal and in much of the writings connected with the exhibition, the word “*plemia*” is used as the primary means to denote distinct peoples. Generally “*plemia*” is translated into English as “tribe”; I would argue however, that the usage of “*plemia*” is closer to the contemporary meaning of “ethnicity” or “ethnic groups.” Unlike “tribe” which evokes a clear association with primitive cultures, *plemia* seems to have been used more widely without distinction between gradations of civilization.

<sup>21</sup>. In his proposal he notes that “representatives (*tipy*) of the American, African and other tribes can be copies from the groups at the Sydenham Palace.” See “Etnograficheskaia vystavka...,” p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>. *Ibid.*

serve, among other things, to support the introduction of anthropology courses at Moscow University.<sup>23</sup>

But large numbers of skulls are not particularly interesting to look at, and the unenlightened viewer could hardly be expected to grasp the subtle nuances of measurement from which mid-nineteenth century anthropologists drew their conclusions.

Still, Bodganov kept faith in the expedience of visual display: "Experience has shown," he wrote, "that neither public lectures nor popular writings are able to acquaint the public with essential anthropological data and interest them in anthropological facts as well as an elegant and well-displayed collection."<sup>24</sup> The final exhibition did, in fact, include a sizable anthropological component, consisting of as many as 500 skulls, brains pickled in formaldehyde and a wide assortment of craniological measuring instruments.<sup>25</sup> But the anthropological section was separated from the main exhibit and distinctly overshadowed by the more engaging ethnographic displays. As one reviewer put it, for those without professional background in the field, "the entire section has lost its significance within the exhibition and for the vast majority of the public remains a mystery."<sup>26</sup>

Although Bogdanov was an early and fervent proponent of Darwinian evolution, notions of anthropological evolutionism emerging at the time in the writings of English scholars like Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor do not seem to have influenced his thinking.<sup>27</sup> Rather than arranging objects and displays to express a universal evolutionary hierarchy, Bogdanov chose a system based on geography. "The groups of tribes," he wrote, "should be situated in their geographical order so that the viewer, having begun with the inhabitants of the polar regions and gradually moving toward the tropics can come to an understanding of the positioning of tribes throughout the globe. Groups of various tribes could be

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<sup>23</sup> N. G. Zalkind, *Moskovskaia shkola antropologov v razvitii otechestvennoi nauki o cheloveke*. (Moscow: izd. Nauka, 1974), pp. 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> "Etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda.." p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> A detailed listing of the displays in the anthropological section can be found in *ibid*, p. 67-69.

<sup>26</sup> [N. Ch.], "Russkaia etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve. (Pis'ma v redaktsiiu Sankt Peterburgskikh vedomostei). *Sankt Peterburgskie vedomosti*, no. 141, 24 May 1867.

<sup>27</sup> On Bodganov's support of Darwin see Zalkind, *Moskovskaia shkola...*, pp. 36-38; Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 68-69.

surrounded with typical plants and animals from these same localities.”<sup>28</sup> Bodganov’s organizational scheme reflected above all the principles of Karl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt’s geography, which viewed human cultures as an integral part of a total environment playing the critical role in determining their character.<sup>29</sup> Framing the features of individual “tribes” within a global continuum of environmentally shaped diversity was clearly Bogdanov’s intent.

In his emphasis on geography, Bogdanov was once again following the model of the Crystal Palace. But in the Russian context, a significant point of divergence emerged. The Crystal Palace exhibit did indeed present a global microcosm of human diversity presented as an integral part of a larger natural environment. But one piece of the picture was conspicuously absent: there was no display for Europe. Indeed to present European man with all his wondrous achievements in the same physical expanse as the primitive inhabitants of Borneo and Patagonia would have undermined the fundamental message of the exhibition: the liberation of civilized man from the determinative force of nature.

In contrast, the planners of the Russian exhibition did not have the luxury of making such clear distinctions. With the main emphasis on the peoples of the Russian Empire, it was next to impossible to justify excluding the ethnic Russian nation, particularly given the prominence that studies of ethnic Russians had enjoyed in Russian ethnography up to that point.<sup>30</sup> Surle enough, as planning for the exhibition began, it became clear that many members of the planning committees had a particular interest in the Great Russian component to the exhibit, and by the third meeting Bogdanov was obliged to concede that “for the sake of clarity” (*dlia nagliadnosti*) it would be best if a group of two Russian figures

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<sup>28</sup>. “Etnograficheskaia vystavka, 1867 goda,” p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>. For a good example of geographical determinism in Russian science see Karl Von Baer, “O vliianii vneshnei prirody na sotsial’nye otnosheniia otdel’nykh narodov i istoriiu cheloveka,” in *Karmannaia kniga dlia liubiteli zemlevedeniia* (St. Petersburg, 1848). See also Natalia Georgevna Sukhova, *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990).

<sup>30</sup>. For an overview see Nathaniel Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality: Ethnography in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia,” Ph.D Dissertation, Columbia University, 1995; and idem, “Science, Empire and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855,” in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, Jane Burbank, David Ransel, eds. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998).

be included in the exhibit.<sup>31</sup> Thus it was clear from the start that the fundamental binary opposition (humanity subservient to nature versus humanity transcending nature) generating the narrative that gave meaning to the Crystal Palace exhibition could not be transferred unaltered into the Russian context.

Whether or not Bogdanov acknowledged the need to include ethnic Russians as a setback, he did not give up easily on his ambition to recreate the displays from the Crystal Palace. From the first meetings of the planning committee in 1864-65, he initiated attempts to obtain photographs of the Crystal Palace displays, and inquired into the cost of sending an artist to London to make direct copies of the 30 “tropical” figures in the exhibition. When these efforts failed to produce the desired results, he dispatched his friend and protégé A. P. Fedchenko to London to survey the collection and negotiate their reproduction.<sup>32</sup> Fedchenko returned in August with photographs and news that the figures could be copied only with the permission of the Crystal Palace director. Bogdanov promptly applied for permission, and, finally, in March 1866, received a reply: the models from the ethnographic groups could not be used due to their poor condition. At that point, the entire question of the “foreign” exhibits was tabled and never raised again.<sup>33</sup>

### **A microcosm of Empire**

While Bogdanov’s particular vision of the Exhibition was running into difficulties, plans for the event itself were proceeding rapidly and taking on a life of their own. In July 1865, the exhibition received an important boost when V. A. Dashkov, an amateur ethnographer and assistant director of the Rumiantsev museum, came forward with an offer to provide the full sum of twenty thousand rubles needed to fund the exhibition.<sup>34</sup> In return he asked that the collection created by the exhibition would be

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<sup>31</sup> *Etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda...*, p. 73. Needless to say, the Russian display was expanded considerably from Bogdanov’s original suggestion. The exhibition catalog lists 71 mannequins portraying Great Russians. See *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> *Etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda.*, pp. 74, 76-77.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Biographical data on Dashkov is rather scant. It appears that he was a wealthy nobleman wishing to leave his imprint of science through patronage. In the early 1840s he had published an ethnographic and statistical survey of Olonets province. By the mid-1860s he was vice-curator of the Moscow Educational District and assistant director

used to create a new ethnographic museum of which he would be the director. Dashkov's generosity did not, at least initially, change fundamentally the substance of the plans for the exhibition. Nonetheless his plan for an ethnographic museum was one factor in a broader shift in the orientation of the exhibition.

With the collapse of plans to include the Crystal Palace collection, Bogdanov and his colleagues were left with an exhibition whose scope, with one significant exception to be discussed below, was limited to the confines of the Russian Empire. Bogdanov's vision of the event as a microcosm of the human race displaying the full range of global diversity gave way to a exhibition that functioned as a microcosm of the Russian Empire. While the peoples portrayed in the displays might be wild and exotic "others," they remained Russia's others, internal aliens whose character and lifestyles constituted a part of the overall might and diversity of the Empire. In one respect, however, Bogdanov's original anthropological focus continued to inform the exhibition throughout. Bogdanov brought to the planning process the basic assumption that the groups on display could be identified as distinctive through their physical features. It was essential, therefore, that the mannequins to be put on display portray in a clear and accurate manner the distinctive features that characterized each unique "national type."

But how were these national types to be defined in the first place? Bogdanov's first proposal was to make numerous plaster casts of the heads of inmates from various parts of the Empire passing through the Moscow transit prison en route to Siberia. But in discussion, numerous practical objections to the scheme were raised, and the committee settled on photography as a more workable tool for the documentation of national types.<sup>35</sup> A carefully chosen set of photographs showing full face and profile

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of the Rumiantsev Museum. After the 1867 exhibition, in which he recouped his investment completely, he devoted his entire professional career to the museum he had founded, which came to be known as the Dashkov Ethnographic Museum. The Dashkov Museum continued to function apparently up until the 1930s when its contents were transferred to the Museum of the Peoples of the USSR. Eventually the collection was moved to the State Museum of Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR in Leningrad. See R. S. Lipets, T. S. Makashina, "Rol' Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii v organizatsii russkoi etnograficheskoi nauki." *Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol'kloristiki i antropologii*, vyp. 3, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup>. "Etnograficheskaia vystavka..." pp. 72-73.



would be sufficient, the planning committee decided, for the artists to render an accurate likeness of “typical” features.<sup>36</sup>

The view of the exhibition as a microcosm of the Empire was manifested particularly clearly in the patronage of the Imperial Family. Not only did Alexander II personally approve plans to hold the event, various members of the Imperial family presented costumes and artifacts for the displays, and, as a sign of particular favor, the Grand Duke Vladimir Aleksandrovich was permitted to serve as honorary chairman of the exhibition.<sup>37</sup> Finally, on April 23, 1867, immediately following the opening of the exhibition, Alexander II himself, accompanied by the Grand Duke Aleksandr Aleksandrovich (the future Alexander III), his wife Maria Fedorovna, and Vladimir Aleksandrovich, spent the better part of an afternoon examining the collection.<sup>38</sup>

During his tour Alexander recalled on several occasions his own travels through the Empire and seemed to take pride in his detailed knowledge of the peoples and regions on display.<sup>39</sup> He also went out of his way to point out features of interest to the Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna, who had been recently married to the heir to the throne and was in Moscow for the first time.<sup>40</sup> For her, viewing the exhibition was part of the process of becoming acquainted with the vast Empire over which she would eventually be Empress.

Another individual for whom the exhibition brought back memories of past travels through the Empire was Sergei Maksimov, a prominent ethnographer who wrote an extensive five-part review of the exhibition for the newspaper *Golos*. For the previous 12 years, Maksimov had traveled almost

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<sup>36</sup> These decisions were reflected in the extremely detailed instructions drawn up for contributing artists and photographers. See *ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, 14.

<sup>38</sup> A detailed account of the Imperial family’s visit is included in *ibid.*, pp. 17-22.

<sup>39</sup> On Alexander’s travels see Richard Wortman, “Rule by Sentiment: Alexander II’s Journeys through the Russian Empire,” *American Historical Review*, v. 95, no. 3 (June 1990), pp. 745-771.

<sup>40</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power v. II*, p. 173.

uninterruptedly, crisscrossing the Empire in a long series of grueling expeditions. For him the ethnographic exhibition seemed to evoke a wave of impressions and associations from his journeys.

In his first report, he launched immediately into a rhapsodic and detailed account of the diverse peoples of the Empire conjuring up a rich array of colorful images and scenes from his travel to convey the intricate connections linking together the peoples of the Empire.<sup>41</sup> The ability of the exhibition to embody the diversity and interconnectedness of the Empire was, in Maksimov's assessment, its greatest strength. Maksimov also viewed the pedagogical value of the exhibition in relation to its ability to embody the Empire. The exhibition, Maksimov wrote, "must strive for and attain one fundamental goal; to awaken in a society, slumbering... in the monotonous circumstances of everyday life, a new interest which is called the quest to learn about the motherland."<sup>42</sup>

But for Maksimov and the Moscow intellectuals who were the driving force behind the event, a view of the exhibition solely as a display of the population of the Empire was not entirely satisfying. Merely presenting the Empire as a conglomeration of diverse peoples ruled over by the Tsar left unresolved the role and status of the Russian people itself. Was the Great Russian nation really just one individual piece in the vast ethnic mosaic of the Empire? Maksimov, for one, opposed such a view. The Russian people, he argued, was the "single force" that was able to "organize a state and rule over such a multitude of ethnically diverse peoples."<sup>43</sup> But how could the primacy of the Russian people be expressed through the visual medium of three-dimensional display, while maintaining the narrative of the exhibition as a microcosm of the Empire? For the exhibition planners this was a compelling challenge.

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<sup>41</sup> S. Maksimov, "Etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve, I." *Golos*, no. 117, April 29, 1867.

<sup>42</sup> S. Maksimov, "Etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve, II." *Golos*, no. 122, May 4, 1867, p. 1. Maksimov's views on the pedagogical goals of the exhibition were also expressed by the organizers. Note, for example the remarks of G. E. Shchurovskii at the banquet marking the opening of the event in which he places the exhibition in the context of a "turn from west to east" in which Russians were abandoning their infatuation with Western Europe and making the study of Russia their first priority. *Etnograficheskaia vystavka*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> S. Maksimov, "Etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve, I." *Golos*, no. 117, April 29, 1867.

### **A showcase of Slavic unity**

In November 1865, the Moscow University history professor, Nil Popov, submitted to the Society of Friends of Natural History a memorandum concerning the participation of Slavic peoples outside the Russian Empire in the exhibition. In justifying the inclusion of the Slavs, Popov appealed both to the Imperial vision underlying the exhibition and the desire to assert a distinctively Russian identity. It would be impossible to study the Russian people proper, Popov suggested, without turning to the Slavs as the most direct and immediate point of comparison. Furthermore, he added, numerous and diverse groups of Slavs resided within the Empire -- from Poles, to Serbs, Bulgarians and even Slovaks. Thus, the Empire could not be properly represented without acknowledging its diverse Slavic inhabitants. These factors, Popov argued, made a Slavic section of the exhibition a clear necessity.<sup>44</sup>

Popov himself had recently returned from two years of travel throughout the Slavic lands of East Central Europe. During his travels he had cultivated close ties with Slavic scholars passionately absorbed in the task of documenting their national histories and folk cultures.<sup>45</sup> Popov emphasized the impressive achievement of his Slavic colleagues: "In the main cities of the Western and Southern Slavs living in Austria, quite marvelous public museums have been formed in which ethnographic sections occupy a prominent place... The production of various samples of urban and rural clothing, tools for the household and workplace, photographic images of typical faces among the current generation and copies of the remnants of the past lives of Slavic tribes -- all these pursuits are quite widespread among the friends of Slavic ethnography."<sup>46</sup> It was precisely these individuals, Popov noted, who were now bombarding him with inquiries about the Moscow exhibition -- not only regarding its program and scope, but also with concrete questions about how and when they might contribute materials.

The implication of Popov's presentation was to suggest a vast wealth of ethnographic material that could be placed at the Society's disposal almost immediately. Not surprisingly, the organizers were

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<sup>44</sup>. "Etnograficheskaia vystavka..." p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>. For background on Nil Popov see *Slavianovedenie v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii: izucheniie iuzhnykh i zapadnykh Slavian*. D. F. Markov, V. A. D'iakov, eds., (Moscow: Nauka, 1988) pp. 197-199.

<sup>46</sup>. Ibid.

quick to agree to the proposal. Popov was invited to join the organizing committee with primary responsibility for the Slavic section and was instructed to enter into contact with Slavic museums, learned societies and individual scholars.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently the committee allocated a generous sum to support the Slavic section, apparently drawing from funds that had been originally allocated to reproduce the Crystal Palace collection. M. F. Raevskii, a priest well known for his Pan-Slavic sympathies who served in the Russian Embassy in Vienna, took on a key role as the intermediary between the organizing committee in Moscow and the Slavic contributors. With his assistance and Popov's energetic activity, preparation for the Slavic section progressed rapidly.

With the creation of the Slavic section, Bogdanov's original narrative centered around the anthropological diversity of the human race was definitively superceded. But the new narrative implicit in the idea of a Slavic sector was fraught with symbolic implications. If the exhibit as a whole could be seen as a microcosm of the Russian Empire, then including the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe would inevitably create the impression that the Slavs were part of this microcosm and should ultimately be integrated, at the very least culturally and perhaps even politically, into the Empire.

Such an idea was not necessarily as far-fetched as it might appear with historical hindsight. As Eric Hobsbawm points out, nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century was predominantly a project of consolidation and integration, with little stake in promoting the particularistic interests and aspirations of small ethnicities. As John Stuart Mill put it:

Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial for a Breton or a Basque of French Navarre to be... a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French Citizenship...than to sulk on his own rocks, the half savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish highlander as members of the British nation.<sup>48</sup>

Given this mindset, it was natural to see the ethnic makeup of Europe in terms of a small number of super-ethnicities consolidating a number of discrete ethnic units around a single core group. Such had

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 34.

been the case with Italian unification around the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, and would be with Prussian-lead German unification, which had entered its critical phase precisely as plans for exhibition reached their climax. In both cases, it was Austria that paid the price for the national unification of its neighbors.

Given this context, even the slightest implication of impending Slavic unification led by Russia appeared from the Austrian perspective as a threatening provocation. It is not surprising, therefore, that this was precisely how the exhibition was perceived in the mainstream Austrian press. The Viennese newspaper *Debatte* wrote in response to the published notice inviting contributions to the exhibition: "Brotherhood on the basis of Pan-Slavism is a conspiracy against Austria. Anyone who participates in this is challenging all of Austria. Howls of indignation are the only response that the peoples of Austria can give to those who join in with this criminal attack on its very existence."<sup>49</sup>

The organizers, for the most part, attempted to sidestep the political implications of the Slavic participation by emphasizing the strictly scientific principles and goals behind the exhibition. But the implicit ramifications of the Slavic section could hardly be concealed. The decision to invite a large delegation of prominent Slavic scholars and politicians to Moscow to view the exhibition accentuated still more the political resonance of the event. Almost inevitably, expressions of Pan-Slavic fervor began to burst through the veneer of scientific impartiality. Here too, the issue of greatest contention concerned the place of ethnic Russians within the larger family of Slavic nations. In the atmosphere of excitement surrounding the opening of the exhibition and the arrival of the Slavic delegation the implicit scenario of Russia as the political and cultural nucleus around which the Slavs would unify came to be expressed more and more explicitly.

At the banquet commemorating the opening of the exhibition, for example, V. I. Lamanskii, chairman of the Ethnographic Section of the Russian Geographical Society, gave a rousing toast ending with a call to make Russian the common Slavic tongue.<sup>50</sup> Pan-Slavic enthusiasts in the press echoed

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<sup>49</sup> Etnografichskaia vystavka..., pp. 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 28. For examples of similar rhetoric from the Slavic Congress see Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1953) pp. 143-144.

Lamansky's sentiment in only slightly more restrained tones. "In vain," the Kharkov professor P. A. Lavrovskii wrote in *Sovremennyi letopis'*, "will the Slavic gaze search out in the immeasurable space of Slavic habitation a land that is as free, a land that could with greater masterly self-confidence, with greater deserving majesty, shelter openly, unconcealed from the keen eyes of alien, hateful men, any kind of broad public expression of conscious [Slavic] unity, than Russia."<sup>51</sup> For Lamanskii and Lavrovskii, the message of the exhibition was clear: Russia's greatness displayed in its vast Empire gave it the undisputed right to lead the entire Slavic race.

### **Science and the ambiguities of Russianness**

Both organizers and observers alike, whether they viewed the exhibition as microcosm of the Russian Empire or as a showcase of Slavic unity, converged around the need to articulate the preeminent status of the Great Russian people. Often they alluded to Russian powers of assimilation to account for ethnic Russian dominance. Sergei Maksimov, wrote: "at the heart of the matter, even after an attentive, detailed viewing of the exhibition, one point emerges: that over all that has been seen a single tribe rules, precisely the one that has long been able to reconstitute (*pererozhdat'*) in itself all the alien and neighboring peoples and force them to serve a common enterprise for the sake of the Russian name, the Russian land and the Russian cause..."<sup>52</sup>

Others were still more forthright in their dismissals of the "*inorodtsy*." Popov, in arguing for the expansion of the Russian and Slavic sections referred to the "alien tribes" as "tributaries (*pridatochnye*) doomed to Russification."<sup>53</sup> Mikhail Katkov, in a lead article in *Moskovskii vedomost'*, referred with his characteristic bile to the inhabitants of the tundra and northern forests as "savages" whose relationship to Russia was little different from that of Australian aborigines to the British Empire. But he concluded his

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> S. M. Maksimov, "Etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve, I." *Golos*, no. 117, 29 April 1867, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in S. A. Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety v Rossii*, p. 169. Popov's position is strikingly similar to the ideas of Nikolai Danilevskii who classified Russia's Finnic peoples and other *inorodtsy* as mere "ethnographic material" deprived of any historical agency and destined at best for assimilation. See his *Rossia i Evropa*, (Moscow: Kniga, 1991) pp. 89-90.

discussion by echoing Maksimov's point of strength through diversity. "The diversity of the elements entering into the composition of the Russian population, in no way violates its national unity and can, given a healthy policy, only facilitate the richness of its development and the strength of the composition of the state. As history bears witness, peoples consisting of a single consolidated ethnicity that do not accept an alien ferment have always been powerless and incapable of strong state organization..."<sup>54</sup>

But if the Russian people were the undisputed master ethnicity of the Empire, how could this be illustrated through the visual medium of ethnographic display? The fact that both Maksimov and Katkov felt the need to explicitly emphasize ethnic Russian preeminence in their descriptions of the exhibition suggests that the displays themselves may have either failed to articulate this point with sufficient clarity or perhaps even raised doubts. In fact, the format of the exhibition, itself, served in subtle but significant ways to undermine comfortable assumptions about natural Russian hegemony. Lamansky, himself, noted the significance of the Slavs coming together on the occasion of an ethnographic exhibition.

Calling together the Slavic representatives in the name of science, Moscow is therefore assembling the Slavs under the banner of freedom. It is also important that she is assembling them specifically in the name of ethnographic science which lingers with love on local particularities, studies with love every ethnic unit (*plemennaia osob'*), however small it may be. In convening a Slavic congress on the occasion of the ethnographic exhibition, Moscow is uniting the Slavs not by wiping away or eliminating their ethnic distinctiveness and local diversity but on the contrary, by acknowledging their national and historic rights.<sup>55</sup>

As Lamanskii sensed, the very format of the exhibition with its aura of positivist science, had the effect of solidifying the phenomenon of particularistic ethnicity by giving physical expression to the abstract concept of national identity. Thus, the physical presence of the displays symbolically subverted the hegemonic agendas of many of the organizers. This was especially true, as Daniel Brower has shown, for the Ukrainian displays.<sup>56</sup> At a time when the very existence of a Ukrainian language had been

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<sup>54</sup> M. N. Katkov, *Sobranie peredovykh statei Moskovskikh vedomostei 1867 god* (Moscow: izdanie C. P. Katkovoii, 1897) p. 205.

<sup>55</sup> "Vserossiiskaia etnograficheskaia vystavka...", p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Brower, "Representing the Maloruss: Ethnography and Ethnic Identity in the Reform Era," Conference paper presented at "Peoples, Nations, Identities: the Russian-Ukrainian Encounter." Columbia University, November 1994.

forthrightly dismissed at the highest levels of government, and the “little Russian question” was deemed a malevolent fantasy of the western press, the mannequins at the exhibition were eloquent in their silent assertion of Ukrainian distinctiveness.<sup>57</sup>

In part, the difficulties in giving visual expression to the idea of Russian preeminence stemmed from the scientific framework in which the exhibition was presented. The planners, while clearly concerned with expressing Great Russian hegemony, were also constrained by limited means of expression and the imperative of authenticity. For the exhibition to maintain its credibility as a scientific endeavor it needed to uphold the positivistic assumption that the figures and objects presented were precise renditions encapsulating what was most distinctive or characteristic in the populations they represented. Accuracy and essence were the prerequisites of scientific validity. In the case of the Great Russians, it was natural and in fact inevitable that the organizers would turn to the groups that had preserved most completely the essential features of ethnic distinctiveness – the peasantry and urban lower classes. But these were the precisely the groups that manifested least of all any kind of innate superiority over their Slavic and “alien” neighbors. Often, in fact, the reverse was true.<sup>58</sup>

The tension between the premise of Great Russian superiority and the realism of the displays was a common theme in the responses to the exhibition. Even Alexander II in his visit to the exhibition, while devoting considerable attention to the Great Russian displays, could not help but note the crumpled clothing (“this costume has clearly been worn,” he remarked), the unattractive faces of the women, and the chimney-less “smoky” hut, symbolizing the misery of the rural poor.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>. On the “Valuev circular” of 1863 denying the existence of a “Little Russian” language see Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb, 1996) pp. 123-125. The dismissal of the “little Russian question” can be found in the article by P. A. Lavrovskii quoted above. See “Etnografichskaia vystavka...” p. 32.

<sup>58</sup>. Anatole Leroy Beaulieu, for example, in his description of the Dashkov Ethnographic Museum in which the displays from the exhibition were permanently housed, noted the “more refined features” of the “Little Russians” and their “garments of more elegant cut and material.” Going purely on the basis of visual information, it is hard to see how the Great Russians could be construed as superior. A. Leroy-Beaulieu, *Empire of the Tsars and the Russians* (New York: AMS Press Reprint, 1969), p. 58.

<sup>59</sup>. “Etnografichskaia vystavka...,” p. 19.



Hints of displeasure in the Emperor's remarks were amplified in the press, which found the contrast between the Slavic section and the Great Russian displays particularly shameful. The reviewer for *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* referred to the Slavic section as a "lively rebuke" to the rest of the exhibit. "One only has to contrast [the Slavic section] with the section on the Russian tribes to see the profound difference between the colorless, lifeless ethnography of doll shows and the living ethnography of science."<sup>60</sup> Sergei Maksimov, while favorably disposed to the exhibition as a whole, noted numerous ethnographic errors and lamented above all the absence of "correct, true scenes and genuine representatives of the Great Russian nationality."<sup>61</sup>

The most heated response to the exhibition, however, came from Mikhail Katkov who devoted an entire lead article in *Moskovskie vedomosti* to the inadequacies of the Russian displays. The exhibition, Katkov contended, was yet another example of the Russian propensity for self-denigration, arising, in this instance, from a misguided quest for realism. Of course, he wrote, there can be no place in a scholarly collection for theatrical "paysans" and costume ball outfits, "but we see no need for the peasant clothing intended for preservation in a museum to be the very same clothing in which the peasants worked for the entire summer. Surely the Croatians, Dalmatians, Slovaks and Czechs do not manure their fields, sow and reap in the stockings and slippers, in the clothing of fine red, scarlet and white cloth in which we see them in the Moscow Exhibition House."<sup>62</sup>

Turning to the Russian displays, Katkov cut to the heart of the dilemma. The organizers, he noted, were right to allocate extensive space to these displays:

This group...should display the entire strength of the Russian Empire. But we would have to search painstakingly in the Great Russian group for the symptoms of these strengths which draw together all the otherwise disparate parts of the Russian people and which mightily assimilate the surrounding aliens. We stop in confusion before this faceless mass, before these faces without expression or sense. How could this be! Not one, not a single beautiful woman's face from among at least thirty female figures assembled here. One sees nothing but bulging senseless eyes

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<sup>60</sup> [N. Ch.], "Russkaia etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, no. 141, 24 May 1867.

<sup>61</sup> S. V. Maksimov, "Etnograficheskaia vystavka v Moskve, IV," *Golos*, #137, 19 May 1867, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> M. N. Katkov, *Sobranie peredovykh statei...*, p. 214.

and potato noses... The Little-Russian group is incomparably better in its [representative] types and in its decorations. But it is very incomplete and you will meet there with the magnificent, painstakingly crafted figure of a carter [*chumak*] in a shirt that is not simply stained but positively splattered with dirt and tar. All that remains would be to go one step further and show a muzhik in the costume in which he steams himself at the baths. The point was to show representative types in the population not figurines of the working man in his various guises. A chimneysweep covered in soot would be a figure in accordance with reality, but would this be an ethnographic type?<sup>63</sup>

If the Russian displays were indeed as deficient as Katkov suggests, it was certainly not for lack of effort. The minutes of the planning committee meetings reveal far more discussion of the Russian display than of any other component of the exhibition.<sup>64</sup> Preparation of the mannequins had been entrusted to N. A. Ramazanov, professor of Art at Moscow University, who was clearly regarded as the most competent and experienced artist involved in the project. The historian I. D. Beliaev worked closely with Ramazanov in the arrangement of the clothing and artifacts. Initially, Beliaev had proposed a market scene incorporating a variety of Russian “types” and occupations.<sup>65</sup> Later the market was placed against the backdrop of a church and expanded considerably to include displays representing peasant households from various regions.<sup>66</sup> To emphasize its prominence the Russian section was located in a central position in the hall on a slightly raised platform.<sup>67</sup>

Why, then, did the Russian display create such an unfavorable impression? It may be that in their quest for accuracy, the organizers themselves contributed to the negative impression. Certainly Ramazanov, with a long and distinguished career behind him, was perfectly capable of depicting

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 215.

<sup>64</sup> “Etnograficheskaia vystavka...,” p. 73, 79, 80, 81, 88, 89, 90

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 73. Bogdanov, who at this early point in the planning process was still intent on an anthropological focus agreed on a single Russian display “for the sake of appearances.” (*Dlia nagliadnosti*).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>67</sup> The location of the Russian display was the subject of disagreement during the planning meetings. Bogdanov had originally suggested that the market scene be placed slightly to the side in the central expanse of the hall. At a meeting in which Bogdanov was absent, I. D. Beliaev, a prominent slavophile historian, objected to Bogdanov’s plan and proposed that the Russian display should be placed in the exact center of the hall. At the next meeting Bogdanov presented a special memorandum defending his original plan which, under the force of his arguments, was restored. It should be noted that while Bogdanov and Beliaev disagreed over how best to execute the display, Bogdanov did not dispute that the Russian group, which he referred to as the “center of gravity of the exhibition,” should be given special prominence. See *ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

attractive Russian faces. But this was not his task. Working from photographs of “typical” individuals, he sought to produce models illustrating the characteristic craniological features of the Russian skull. But how does one illustrate “typicality” while still capturing the diversity naturally evident in any group of individuals? It may be that Ramazanov’s failure to resolve this dilemma led to the dull monotonous quality that so disturbed many observers from the Emperor on down.

But regardless of the artistic merits of Ramazanov’s models, it may be that any Russian display would have failed to satisfy the nationalistic aspirations of the Russian press and public. In his report on the exhibition to the Russian Geographical Society, the orientalist V. V. Grigor’ev summed up the dilemma. While complementing the depiction of many of the non-Russian peoples, and noting with approval the popularizing mission of the exhibition, Grigor’ev could not help but sound a note of regret:

It would be a pity if the exhibition, which can teach so much to so many, at the same time facilitates and disseminates among the uninformed masses one extremely mistaken conception about a matter of primary importance, i.e, the notion that the Russian Tsardom is some kind of jumble of tribes, more motley than the Austrian or the Turkish [Empires]. An impression disadvantageous to Russia proper (Rus’), could very easily be derived from the exhibition as a result of the fact that the groups representing the Russian population do not by any means occupy the numerical position in comparison to the alien (*inorodcheskii*) [groups] that the 50 million strong Russian people occupies amidst the ten million or so of various aliens that the Russians have conquered and accepted into their midst.<sup>68</sup>

Leaving aside Grigor’ev’s questionable demographics, the fact remains that the exhibition, by its very nature, could not help but give voice to the idea of the Empire as a conglomerate of numerous diverse and distinctive ethnicities. However much the organizers may have wished to impose upon the whole the imprint of ethnic Russianness, there was no way to get around the fact that the Great Russians were indeed one “tribe” among many with little grounds to claim unambiguous technical and cultural superiority over their neighbors.

In effect, the Empire defined Russian national identity far more than Russian national identity defined the Empire. This is not to say, however, that nationalistically inclined organizers and observers would have drawn any humbling lessons from the exhibition. If anything, the discomfort apparent in the

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<sup>68</sup> “Obshchee sobranie imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, 3-go maia 1867,” *Golos*, no. 133, 15 May 1867, p. 1.

responses to the Russian display would seem to have acted in a dialectical fashion, driving nationalist intellectuals to assert the greatness of the Russian people with ever more zeal. In this regard, by raising in the public sphere the issues of Russian identity in relation to Slavdom and the Empire as a whole, the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition and the events surrounding it sounded a pivotal note in the crescendo of patriotism and Pan-Slavic fervor leading to the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War ten years later.<sup>69</sup>

The Ethnographic Exhibition closed its doors on June 18th 1867. Looking back on the event has a whole, A. P. Bogdanov, the man most responsible for its realization, must have felt a combination of satisfaction and regret. By all external indications, the exhibition had been extraordinarily successful. Most astonishing of all is the fact that the event actually made a profit. During its 56-day run, just over 83 thousand people paid admission fees ranging from 3 rubles to 25 kopeks to see the spectacle. The admission receipts, supplemented by contributions from the state and private individuals easily covered the 40 thousand rubles expended to produce the exhibition and brought an additional 4,600 rubles in clear profit.<sup>70</sup> Dashkov's initial support had paid off handsomely: not only did he get his museum – the displays were reassembled in a permanent location under the title of the Dashkov Ethnographic Museum – but he got his money back as well. The extensive publicity and financial success of the exhibition helped to establish the new society, now known as the Imperial Society of Friends of Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography, as a powerful and respected presence in Russian science. For this alone, Bogdanov must have felt that his efforts had been worthwhile.

From a scientific perspective, however, Bogdanov had reason to be dissatisfied. Like the organizers of English and French exhibitions, he and his colleagues found themselves torn between a didactic quest to enlighten the masses and the need to entertain and impress.<sup>71</sup> Bogdanov's original plan for an exhibition that would teach the fundamental principles underlying the scientific study of the human

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the ethnographic exhibition and Slavic congress in the context of the Pan-Slavist movement as a whole see Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953).

<sup>70</sup> "Etnograficheskaia vystavka..." p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, pp. 18-22.

species gave way to the less rigorous, but visually more engaging medium of an ethnographic exhibit displaying the diversity of the Empire.<sup>72</sup>

But while ethnography proved to be dominant medium of display, the voice of ethnography as a scholarly discourse was notably muted. Throughout the course of the extensive preparations, there is no indication of any serious discussion of the underlying ethnographic principles informing the displays. The organizers, it would appear, understood ethnography as a self-evident endeavor requiring little reflection. Above all, ethnography focused on the phenomenon of ethnicity, a fundamental principle through which populations were aggregated and ascribed identity.<sup>73</sup> But the concept of ethnicity, expressed most often in the words *plemia*, *narod* and *narodnost*, provided little guidance in establishing an overall framework of relations among ethnic groups. There was no overarching self-evident principle in ethnography through which the peoples on display could coalesce into a cohesive narrative.

Two potential organizing principles, notable for their absence in the ethnographic exhibition of 1867, are evolution and race. Granted the classical anthropological evolutionism of Tylor and Morgan remained in its formative stages in the 1860s, hence this was not a case of Russian backwardness.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Subsequent events sponsored by the Society under Bodganov's leadership can almost be seen as correctives to the shortcomings of the 1867 exhibition. The Polytechnical Exhibition of 1872 fulfilled in a broader and more systematic manner the pedagogical goals underlying the Ethnographic Exhibition. Bodganov's specific scientific goals were addressed by the Anthropological Exhibition of 1879 and the accompanying Anthropological Congress which, in contrast to the Slavic extravaganza of 1867, was of a strictly apolitical nature and attracted many of the leading figures in European anthropology. See Piatidesiatiletie IOLEAE, p. 16-17. On the 1879 exhibition see T. C. Gladkova, "Antropologicheskaia vystavka 1879 i osnovanie Muzeia Antropologii," *Sovetskaia Antropologii*, no. 2, 1959; M. G. Levin, *Ocherki po istorii antropologii v Rossii*, pp. 86-90

<sup>73</sup> Of course, one should not be too quick to assume that ethnicity was universally accepted as the primary means of aggregating the population. The Imperial government, as is well know, tenaciously clung to the principle of *soslovie* and resisted the use of ethnicity even in the census of 1897. Recent studies, however, have begun to show how the concept of ethnicity was penetrating both official and unofficial discourse throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Peter Holquist has shown, for example, how ethnic categories were used in military statistics to classify the relative reliability of various groups long before the concept was accepted in other areas of administration. See his, "To Count, to Extract, to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in Terry Martin, Ron Suny, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Soviet Union, 1917-1953*. Chuck Steinwedel has also shown how ethnicity was penetrating into the discourse of provincial administration. See his "To Make a Difference: The Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics" in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, Yanni Kotsonis, David Hoffmann, eds., (London, New York: MacMillin Press, 2000), pp. 67-86. The impulse to ascribe ethnicity to newly conquered populations was widespread in Russian Turkestan under the administration of General Kaufmann, and in some cases led to considerable confusion. See Daniel Brower, "Ethnicity and Islam" in *Russia's Orient*.

<sup>74</sup> In fact almost twenty years earlier Konstantin Kavelin had expounded a theory of cultural development that anticipated in a remarkable way some of the key premises of anthropological evolutionism. See K. D. Kavelin,

Moreover, there is every indication that organizers and observers thought quite naturally in terms of cultural divisions between civilized and uncivilized peoples. Nonetheless, Bogdanov and his colleagues made no attempt to organize the displays in such a way as to illustrate a uniform succession of cultural stages through which all peoples would eventually pass. Geographical determinism seems to have remained the primary model through which to explain the differing levels of culture among the peoples of the Empire.

But if the “psychic unity of mankind” posited by evolutionary theory was not a concern to the organizers, we also see little of the notions of radical disunity posited by European racial theory. The very notion of race – ineffaceable divisions in humanity based on innate biological differences – rarely appeared at all in the discussions of the exhibition. Instead, there was an emphasis on integration and assimilation. What is distinctively great about the Russian people, critics such as Katkov and Maksimov suggested, is precisely their ability to absorb alien peoples and integrate them into the national organism. Clearly racial purity and the prevention of miscegenation was not a matter of great concern.

The Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867 reveals a disparity between means and ends implicit in the relationship between knowledge and power. As a public event speaking with the authoritative voice of science about an issue central to contemporary social discourse, the exhibition inevitably served as a vehicle for the expression of broader ideological agendas. Bogdanov’s vision of a neutral endeavor propagating universal scientific truths about mankind as a whole was untenable from the start. The very idea of an ethnographic display touched a sensitive nerve by calling into question the Russian identity of the Empire. Displaying the peoples of the Empire with all their characteristic features, created for the organizers an ideological imperative to emphasize what was, for the ethnic Russians, the most characteristic feature of all, their preeminence with regard to the Empire as a whole. Including the Slavic peoples created an additional imperative to show the position of the Russians as the strongest, most viable member of the Slavic family, and hence the nucleus around which Slavic unification would take place.

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“Byt’ russkogo naroda. Sochinenie A. Tereshchenko v semi chastiakh.” *Sovremennik*, 1848, t. 11-1, pp. 1-49; t. 11-2, pp. 85-139; t. 12-2, pp. 96-139. For analysis see M. Kulisher, “Kavelin i russkaia etnografiia,” *Vestnik Evropy*, Aug. 1885, pp. 657-665; and S. A. Tokarev, “Vklad russkikh uchenykh v mirovuiu etnograficheskuiu nauku.,” *Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol’kloristiki i antropologii*, vyp 1.(Moscow, 1956), pp. 14-15.

Yet it was precisely the theme of ethnic Russian preeminence that ethnographic display as a medium of representation was least able to convey.

The example of the ethnographic exhibition of 1867 highlights the complex dialogue inherent in the relationship between science, society and the state. The apparent hijacking of the exhibition to serve as a vehicle for the expression of Russian nationalism and Pan-Slavism, illustrates the difficulty, perhaps even the futility, of maintaining a position of scientific isolation above the fray of contemporary political and ideological concerns. But in adopting a vocabulary of science as a tool of legitimation, purveyors of ideological agendas also assent to a range of constraints limiting the manner and extent to which these agendas can be articulated. Thus science, in the hand of power, proved to be a two-edged sword.