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# The Effects of Alcohol Trade among the Samoyeds and Ob-Ugrians in the Russian North and Western Siberia

## Introduction

Since the early modern ethnographic accounts, notions of migrants, travellers and even scholars using alcohol exchange can be found in travelogues and general accounts of the situation in the Russian North as well as in Western Siberia. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these descriptions became rather frequent. Many authors pointed out the predatory economic strategies of traders, as well as indigenous responses to emerging alcohol commerce in the North.

Alcohol has become a powerful and constant symbol of the process of long-term migration into the Russian North and Western Siberia. Indigenous groups have been regularly depicted as helpless victims of alcohol commerce (Pika 1993; Pivneva 2005; Leete 2005, 2015). However the other approach considers the social consequences of drinking and the distinctive rules that shape alcohol consumption (Dudeck 2015: 93, 109).

I aim to discuss this complicated relationship between rather steady ethnographic images of economic migrants and indigenous people, and evidence that indicates a more complex net of ideas and practices related to alcohol in the Russian North and Western Siberia.<sup>1</sup> I concentrate primarily on 19<sup>th</sup> century data as several important developments related to alcohol trade in the North took place during that period. My study remains somehow rough but in order to provide an overall picture of characteristic developments of the period, a certain randomness is inevitable.

I intend to elaborate on analysis of a few ways in which alcohol obtained an obscure pattern of ‘cultural intimacy’ (cf. Dudeck–Liarskaya 2012) for the northern natives in the Russian North and Western Siberia. I approach ‘cultural intimacy’ as a specific privacy of collective religious or ethnic space (cf. Herzfeld 2001). If alcohol transgresses cultural boundaries in the sphere of a worldview and rituals, it indicates that it has become an accepted element of those people’s lives. At the same

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1 This research was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant PUT590, the Estonian Kindred Peoples Programme, project nr. 782 and the University of Tartu, grant PHVKU 19913.

time, this transgression involves the motivations and practices whereby people try to move themselves, or are forced to move, into different cultural contexts.

## **Alcohol as a Necessity in the Arctic**

The historians of Antiquity (Strabo, Tacitus) wrote of the destructive influence of civilisation on barbarians in connection with the spread of alcohol (Tacitus 1877; Strabo 1903; see also Honigmann 1979: 30). Other scholars of the period stressed that alcohol consumption probably spread in the northern areas where climate ('the winds') favoured drinking (Aristotle ICA, Hippocrates ICA). This idea of the inevitability of alcohol consumption in the north was carried over into the Middle Ages. Christian discourse involved the notion of the periphery of the oecumene as a region of sinful conduct, as confirmed, for example, by Eusebius of Caesarea from the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Eusebius of Caesarea 1903).

Principally, Enlightenment thinkers accepted a similar approach. Montesquieu associated alcoholism with colder climates, regarding its occurrence in northern countries as a 'national intemperance' that was warranted by natural laws (Montesquieu 1989: 204). On the other hand, it was also pointed out that the impact of cultural contacts played a considerable role in the spread and cultivation of alcoholism among the northern peoples, in particular towards the end of the period.

In the course the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a more socially complex understanding of indigenous drinking was developed. Many scholars and popular writers articulated the suggestion that alcohol addicted non-Western peoples were martyrs to the colonial relationship (see Honigmann 1979). The authors of the period generally contributed drinking malaise to primordial fondness of the indigenous groups for vodka consumption, according to philosophical framework elaborated over a long period from Antiquity to Montesquieu.

This mode of depiction of the northern indigenous peoples is also grounded in actual field encounter and cannot be considered just a kind of fantasy, repeated only on the basis of theoretical consideration. It is quite complicated to reveal a balance between theory and tangible observation in these accounts of Arctic drinking.<sup>2</sup> It was common knowledge among travellers and ethnographers that trade facilitated alcohol consumption and migration processes in the Russian North and Western Siberia.

## **Alcohol Trade in the North as a Vice of Civilisation**

Accounts of alcohol as a characteristic article of trade in the Russian North and Western Siberia can be traced back to the early modern period. Alcohol reflects the side of commerce that was unbalanced and opened up the northern indigenous

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2 For a more detailed analysis of Arctic drinking stereotypes, see Leete 2015.

communities to specific forms of exploitation. The French explorer Pierre-Martin de la Martiniere reports in his travelogue that in 1653 he traded furs for vodka among the Nenets (la Martinière 1911: 59). In the 1660s, Dutch diplomat and traveller Nicolaes Witsen complains that the Russian officials, *voyevodas*<sup>3</sup>, entertained the Khanty people with vodka and received in return “a few pieces of fur”. Moreover, Witsen noticed that it was also a common practice among travellers to exchange tobacco and vodka for fish among the Siberian natives (see Kopaneva 2006: 262–263).

Several scholars and writers describe a specific process of infiltration of the Izhma Komi into the tundra area of the Russian North and to the Western Siberia. Travellers and ethnographers express anxiety at how, since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Izhma had taken over large herds of reindeer and acquired furs from the Nenets and Khanty, especially through vodka trade (Latkin 1844: 33–34, 1853a: 106–107, 150, 1853b: 100; Castrén 1860: 146–147; Ermilov 1888: 77–79; Maksimov 1909 [1859]; Kozmin 1913: 15–18; Abramov 1914: 13–14). Vasilii Latkin even argues that vodka was “the most profitable currency” for Izhma Komi traders among the Tundra Nenets of the Russian North (Latkin 1853a: 121–122).

However, the problem was not related only to this specific case of Izhma Komi penetration into the tundra. The spread of alcohol was generally connected with professional traders who made dealt extensively in vodka. This caused various survival problems for the northern tribes, such as the escalation of debts to traders, regular instances of starvation and alcohol problems (see Slezkine 1994: 108–110).

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the northernmost point of legitimate alcohol trade was Berezovo, while further north the trading centre in Obdorsk was established at the end of the century (Bartenev 1896: 31). Despite this, illegal trade flourishing everywhere as well as stories about the northern peoples as heavy drinkers who were exploited by Russian traders. Russians managed to deliver huge quantities of vodka to the tundra or trade it secretly during fairs and exchange it for anything they desired (Sno 1904: 10, 13; Castrén 1860: 135, 144–145, 180–182; Maksimov 1909 [1859]; Kozmin 1913: 16–20).

In 1822 the Russian government issued the Statue on the Inorodtsy for administering all indigenous peoples in Russia, and in 1835 a more specific Statue About the Samoyeds. However, despite this the Russians and Komi found ways to get around the legal obstacles established by these laws, and essentially uncontrollable exploitation of the Nenets continued. Local officials admitted that it was impossible to control the actual conditions of trade across the whole vast tundra region (Latkin 1844: 16–19, 32–33; Castrén 1860: 146–148; Kozmin 1913: 18–20).

3 *Voyevoda* – local official, holding both military and administrative power in Russian municipalities during the Tsarist period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. From 1620 *voyevodas* were prohibited from making trade arrangements, means that Witsen was describing illegal business deals.

Finnish ethnographer Uno Taavi Sirelius offered an aphorism that he contributed to the local Russians: “An Ostyak<sup>4</sup> will sell his soul for liquor” (Sirelius 1900: 13). In several ethnographic accounts it was noticed that between the Khanty, Mansi and Nenets, men and women, as well as old women, young girls and small children, were all fond of alcohol (Zuev 1947: 23; Islavin 1847: 21–22; Vereshchagin 1849: 263; Schrenk 1855: 283, 388–389; Veniamin 1858: 82; Castrén 1860: 118–119, 134–136, 148, 155, 194, 285; Maksimov 1909 [1859]; Sorokin 1873: 33, 50; Ahlqvist 1885: 171; Jacobi 1896: 268; Karjalainen 1983: 32–33; Sno 1904: 13; Dunin-Gorkavich 1995 [1903]: 84, 130–139; Anuchin 1916: 23; see also Lehtonen 1974: 41–43). This can all be summarised by Castrén’s statement that “a general drinking malaise has taken hold of these poor people” (Castrén 1860: 118).

The indigenous inhabitants of the region were witnessed predominantly in bigger settlements, and those locations were the primary drinking scenes for the Nenets, Khanty and Mansi (when in the forest or tundra, alcohol was inaccessible – Ahlqvist 1885: 171). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, descriptions of the natives’ inclination for drinking were also associated with the overall idea that the northern indigenous tribes were facing extinction – alcoholism became a suitable element to illustrate this inescapable destiny.

In general, these relationships between the indigenous population and migrants form a background that has facilitated increasing consumption of alcohol among the northern peoples (Istomin 2016: 34). Over the centuries, alcohol trade has been part of relationship between state officials, traders, travellers, migrants and indigenous people in the Russian North and Western Siberia. Although considered generally undesirable, alcohol consumption was seen as usual practice for the Arctic Finno-Ugrians. It was considered normal to trade vodka with the indigenous population for anything local officials and travellers needed.

## **Alcohol Trade as Part of Academic Practice**

Although in ethnographies the distribution of drinking was generally criticised as an evil among the northern Finno-Ugric tribes in the North, pre-World War I scholars also started to handle alcohol as a suitable article of trade that could be used to help achieve academic goals. Vodka enabled researchers to receive practical services and to document valuable ethnographic evidence that the Khanty, Mansi or Nenets revealed more willingly while intoxicated or when hoping to receive alcohol as a reward for sharing indigenous knowledge.

For example, botanist Alexander Schrenk travelled through the Russian North in 1837 and hired a group of Nenets to help him with his travel arrangements,

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4 Formerly, several indigenous peoples of Siberia (Selkup, Ket, Khanty and Mansi) were referred as the Ostyaks. In his remark, Sirelius points to the Khanty. In this article, I use the term ‘Ostyak’ as a synonym for the ‘Khanty’.

offering them alcohol to motivate them to collaborate with him. Schrenk sees this as a normal practice that was justified by a practical need:

“We travelled already three days since the last Samoyed campsite. We were not able to meet any wandering reindeer breeders and our Samoyeds began to worry about their exhausted reindeer. In order to calm them down and let them feel that I am satisfied with their service, I arranged a feast. I entertained them with vodka and distributed some cheap items among them as gifts. My Samoyeds appreciated this and soon became amused.” (Schrenk 1855: 347.)

Organising local transport in the tundra with the help of vodka was also a technique occasionally used by another scholars (see Castrén 1860: 134–135, 145–146; Maksimov 1909 [1859]). Moreover, Castrén paid one of his Nenets language guides in vodka every day of their linguistic work. Castrén allowed his Nenets co-worker to get drunk every time the fellow desired. If his Nenets interpreter continued to work poorly, Castrén also provided vodka to his wife (Castrén 1860: 139). In another cases as well, Castrén paid for his language guides in vodka for their services (Castrén 1860: 145).

Vodka was also used in other kinds of scientific exchange. On one occasion, Schrenk detected a chance to hear a Nenets songs and enticed local men to sing. After vodka was served, Schrenk’s indigenous companions agreed to perform without hesitation (Schrenk 1855: 347–348). Schrenk also writes about a situation in which he used alcohol to entice a Nenets shaman to perform a ritual. Vodka was not part of the ritual: a shaman got a drink only after the ceremony (Schrenk 1855: 349–356). But this case indicates one more time that vodka was an item of academically applied spiritual trade. In another incident, Schrenk provides a description of a situation in which he manages to receive a Nenets idol for a single glass of vodka:

“I asked the Samoyed to give me the idol. Initially, he appeared not to understand me. But when a glass of alluring vodka twinkled in front of his eyes, he thought it over, scratched his ear and finally, as if he had managed to vanquish himself, said with confidence, ‘take him!’ At the same moment he reached out for the glass. [...] So that stupid Samoyed cheats his idol and sells himself, his freedom, for a tiny glass of vodka!” (Schrenk 1855: 317.)

For Schrenk, trading a spiritual figure for vodka is legitimate as the Nenets must take all the blame in this situation. However, not every traveller considered it appropriate to involve alcohol in ethnographic enterprises. If one accepts indigenous rules of spirituality, this practice turns into an academically doubtful exercise. For example, Ivan Ostroumov notices that it is impossible to obtain figures of Mansi spirits because people simply do not give them away. The possible ways in which Mansi ‘idols’ have ended up in museums were theft or trade for alcohol. Ostroumov describes a particular case of an Orthodox missionary, Pozdnyakov, obtaining a Mansi spirit-figure of a reindeer for vodka. The missionary gave that particular item to Perm Scientific Museum (Ostroumov 1904: 22).

The authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century denounce the vodka trade carried out by traders and officials. But for scholars’ and travellers’ own academic purposes, similar

exchange was acceptable. In the framework of 19<sup>th</sup> century academic standards, it seemed that it was justified way to make a trade in the name of science. Castrén even calls vodka “a Siberian talisman” that helps the scholar get along among the indigenous inhabitants of the region (Castrén 1860: 325).

As we can see, 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarly practice involved trading alcohol for indigenous objects, faith, knowledge and friendship in the North. But it was not the only way in which alcohol was related to the indigenous cultural intimacy. Also to be found in the ethnographic literature are descriptions that connect alcohol and ritual behaviour in a culturally adapted mode.

## Ritual Use of Alcohol

Alcohol trade had an effect on indigenous ritual practices, an example of which is how, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or possibly before, vodka was used during calendar celebrations and sacrificial rituals. This process indicates that from a certain period, vodka became culturally domesticated and was no longer only an indication of addiction.

Bartenev claims at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that “[...] nowadays the religious imagination of the Ostyaks is moving towards monotheism” (Bartenev 1895: 490). Bartenev illustrates his point with the argument that “modern, more ideal gods” can do without tea drinking during a wake (Bartenev 1895: 490–491). At the same time, Khanty make sure to sacrifice vodka during a wake, and not only to their own gods, but also to the Christian god:

“On a summer’s day, a group of Ostyaks, including men and women, are sitting on the grass by the church and drinking vodka. One Ostyak woman departs from the crowd and approaches the church fence, with the bottle in her hand. There she began bowing and crossing herself while pouring some vodka on the ground.” (Bartenev 1896: 93, and also 1895: 491.)

This amalgamation of Christian and animist elements during prayer indicates that by that time, vodka had been firmly adopted into Khanty ritual practice. More recent ethnographic evidence confirms that similar use of alcohol has become common in Khanty sacrificial rituals (see, for example, Leete 1997, Balalajeva–Wiget 2004) proving that the example given is not random.

Schrenk (Schrenk 1855: 360–362) does not mention any consumption of alcohol during reindeer sacrifice among the Nenets in the 1830s.<sup>5</sup> Castrén describes Khanty collective reindeer sacrifice where the only drink offered to the gods and consumed later by participants was water (Castrén 1860: 131–132, 188–189). But Castrén describes a Nenets wedding where people did get drunk, sacrificed a reindeer, and continued drinking (Castrén 1860: 142–144). Latkin claims that the Nenets randomly

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5 Today, every reindeer killing is considered a ritual. Although during individual killings no alcohol is used in normal circumstances (Niglas 1997) alcohol has become an element of collective sacrificial ceremonies. The 19<sup>th</sup> century authors do not always specify what kind of sacrificial ritual they are referring to.

drank vodka during the feast that followed a reindeer sacrifice, although (Latkin 1853a: 118). These random notes seem to reflect the beginning of a change connected with reindeer sacrifice. Earlier, the reindeer killing ritual was performed without using vodka, while by the 19<sup>th</sup> century alcohol was slowly becoming part of these ceremonies.

Evidence of vodka use during shamanic séances is rather patchy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnographies. For example, Maksimov claims that the Nenets shamans ask for vodka when performing healing rituals. And before a particular ritual, performed for Maksimov, a shaman consumed several glasses on vodka, received from Maksimov himself (Maksimov 1909 [1859]).

In the early descriptions there is also some data about a looser connection between religious practice and drinking (or avoiding drink). Kozmin reports the case of a wealthy Nenets from the Russian North who spent a month in Solovetsky Monastery, not drinking any vodka during that time (Kozmin 1913: 37). This indicates that sometimes the Nenets connected sobriety with Christianity, although it could also be read in the opposite way. Martynov writes about an Orthodox monk who was living in a lonely habitation (*skit*)<sup>6</sup> for a long time. He provided vodka (that he kept in his storehouse in huge quantities) to the Nenets who happened to visit his residence (Martynov 1905: 216).

Although the evidence presented is scattered, it still illustrates the emerging role of vodka in the Nenets and Ob-Ugrian religious practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The infusion of alcohol into the indigenous religious sphere was possible only in conditions where alcohol trade functioned and vodka was available for negotiating rituals or other religion-related issues. Taken as a whole this reflects the embracing of vodka not only as substance of pleasure by the indigenous population of the North but also the adoption of alcohol as an accepted component of local cultural practice.

## Discussion

At least since early modern times, alcohol trade has had an effect on Ob-Ugrian and Samoyed daily behaviour. Indigenous groups adopted vodka into their ritual practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alcohol also reconfigured local social scenes in the North. Officials and professional traders arranged the commerce, although at the same time travellers and scholars exchanged vodka in order to facilitate their own goals.

In earlier times, the reason for indigenous northern alcohol addiction was seen as the cultural backwardness of native peoples, while focus also fell on the syncretistic world picture of the northern peoples. Another way of looking at the topic of alcohol in the North was to emphasise the way in which officials and traders purposefully facilitate the spread of vodka drinking among the Arctic peoples in order to increase profit.

A number of scholars stress the special role of alcohol trade in infiltrating the Izhma Komi and Russians into indigenous areas during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

6 *Skit* – individual residence of the Russian Orthodox monks, established away from settlements. Historically, *skits* appeared before monasteries as places for collective spiritual seclusion.

Particularly in the case of the Izhma Komi, vodka trade helped when negotiating property rights, enabling the Izhma Komi to take over the Nenets reindeer herds and thus establish a foundation for Izhma Komi economic growth in the tundra.

Notwithstanding the above, it is complicated to estimate the actual importance of alcohol trade in these economic and demographic processes. It is highly probable that the alcohol addiction of the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians was exaggerated in early ethnographies. This distortion of impressions was caused by the fact that travellers mainly met the indigenous people in larger settlements where the northern natives drank much more often than in their tundra or forest camps. Short periods of intense drinking caught the writers' attention and these impressions became fixed in travel literature. Secondly, the stereotype of the drinking native of the North, supported by long philosophical tradition, also justified alcohol trade and perpetuated descriptions of drinking in the Arctic.

In addition to this, ethnographers followed the conviction that the Izhma Komi and Russians were spoiling the authentic culture of the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians. Although the Komi also belong to the family of the Finno-Ugric peoples, in literature they were commonly treated as the most Russian-like (i.e. 'civilised') group with the smallest proportion of genuine Finno-Ugric cultural elements extant among them (see Sirelius 1998, Zagrebin–Sharapov 2008: 114). This principal idea could also promote the stream of reports about evils of alcohol trade in the area.

Despite these exaggerations, travellers and scholars still revealed the serious problem of alcohol addiction in the area and treated it as a possibility for the Izhma Komi and Russians to migrate into the Russian North and Western Siberia. However, one also needs to consider general economic processes in the area. In the case of the Izhma Komi, strategic circumstances (developing a more effective economic model for reindeer breeding) supported migration more profoundly and alcohol trade was just a tactical device used to achieve economic goals.

Although alcohol was adopted into several indigenous rituals and accepted into the Nenets and Ob-Ugrian worldview, it somehow still has an indefinite role in indigenous culture. Cultural intimacy, if it is reached through alcohol, maintains a kind of hesitant condition (for example in the case of rituals). There will always be an uncertain limit of absorption into wider society that indigenous people cannot transgress if alcohol is also attached to cultural practices.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, alcohol trade had become a widespread and established practice in the indigenous areas of the Russian North and Western Siberia. Vodka commerce induced change in the everyday lives of the Nenets, Khanty and Mansi as well as ritual customs. Over time, supplies of alcohol became regular and ever more extensive, causing indigenous alcohol addiction and facilitating a shift on the regional economic scene. At the same time, adopting alcohol as an element of indigenous ritual practice enabled some cultural adaptation by the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians and provided a way of coping with vodka commerce.

*Translated by the author*



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### **Az alkoholkereskedelem hatása a szamojédoakra és obi-ugorokra az oroszországi Észak- és Nyugat-Szibériában**

A tanulmány célja, hogy feltárja, hogyan kapcsolódott az alkoholkereskedelem az oroszországi Észak- és Nyugat-Szibéria területén élő őslakosokról alkotott kép változásához a 19. század során. Néprajzi leírások és népszerű írók útirajzai tanulmányozása alapján mutatja be a szerző ezt a jelenséget, az időszak meghatározó beszédmódja tükrében. Az alkohol okozta társadalmi lecsúszásra vonatkozó leírásokra koncentrált; arra, hogy a terepmunkára érkező kutatók hogyan használták a vodkát, hogy közelebb kerülhessenek az őslakosokhoz és azok tudásához, valamint arra, hogy a nyenyecék, hantik és mansik rituális gyakorlatára hogyan hatott a vodka megjelenése. Eredményei alátámasztják azt a következtetést, mely szerint az őslakosok esetében az alkoholkereskedelem leírása a regresszió diskurzusához kapcsolódik. Ez várható volt, mivel az evolucionista felfogás terjedése elősegítette az eltűnőben lévő „vademberek” néprajzi leírását. Az alkoholkereskedelem, mint a gonoszság egyik forrása, jól illik ebbe a rendszerbe. Ugyanakkor, bár a néprajzkutatók elítélték az alkoholkereskedelmet, nem láttak semmi rosszat abban, hogy az alkoholt az északi népek körében végzett tudományos kutatás előmozdítására használják. Fontos újítást jelentett, hogy az őslakosok rítusainak gyakorlatában a 19. században megjelent a vodka. Mindezek azt jelzik, hogy az alkoholkereskedelmet az előfeltételezett elméleti keretek alapján írták le az adott korszakban, de ezek a megállapítások ambivalenssé váltak az utazók helyszíni tapasztalatairól szóló leírások hatására.

### **Efectele comerțului cu alcool asupra samoiezilor și populației ob-ugrice din nordul și vestul Siberiei rusești**

Scopul autorului a fost de a descoperi cum a influențat comerțul cu alcool imaginea populațiilor indigene din nordul și vestul Siberiei rusești de-a lungul secolului al XIX-lea. Bazându-se pe analiza descrierilor etnografice și a jurnalelor de călătorie populare, autorul prezintă acest fenomen prin prisma discursurilor dominante a perioadei respective. El focusează pe descrierile legate de degradarea socială datorată alcoolului, respectiv pe practica oamenilor de știință de a utiliza alcoolul pentru a facilita accesul la cunoștințele localnicilor, dar și introducerea vodcii în practicile rituale ale populațiilor nenet, hanti și mansi. Rezultatele sale vin să susțină concluzia că în cazul localnicilor descrierea comerțului cu alcool se încadrează în discursul regresivității. Este un lucru de așteptat, căci abordarea evoluționistă a susținut descrierile etnografice despre „sălbaticii” pe cale de dispariție. Comerțul cu alcool, ca o sursă a răutății, se încadrează perfect în acest sistem. De asemenea, deși etnografii au condamnat comerțul cu alcool, nu au văzut nici o problemă în folosirea acestuia pentru înlesnirea activităților academice în regiune. O altă inovație importantă a fost faptul că în secolul al XIX-lea băștinașii au început să folosească vodca în cadrul ritualurilor. Toate acestea indică faptul că comerțul cu alcool fusese descris conform abordărilor teoretice dominante ale perioadei respective, dar aceste descrieri au devenit ambivalente datorită impactului descrierilor imediate ale călătorilor.

### **The Effects of Alcohol Trade among the Samoyeds and Ob-Ugrians in the Russian North and Western Siberia**

The author's aim was to explore the ways alcohol trade was connected to changing images of indigenous people of the Russian North and Western Siberia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He studied ethnographic accounts as well as popular writers' travelogues and analysed his findings in the light of dominating discourses of the period. He concentrated on descriptions of alcohol-induced social degradation, use of vodka by scholars during their field trips for gaining better access

to indigenous knowledge and infusion of alcohol-related elements into ritual practice of the Nenets, Khanty and Mansi. His findings support the conclusion that discourse of regression is dominating descriptions of alcohol trade among the indigenous population. This was rather expected as emerging evolutionist approach supported ethnographic impressions about 'savages' who were supposed to die out soon. Alcohol trade as the decisive source of evil fits well with this vision about the order of things. At the same time, although ethnographers condemned alcohol trade, they did not see anything wrong in usage of alcohol as a facilitator of academic endeavour among the northern groups. Another important innovation was that indigenous people started to use vodka within their rituals during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All this indicates that alcohol trade was described according to predominant theoretical approaches of the period but these reports remained ambivalent under the influence of travellers' immediate impressions.

