Nikolai Kharuzin and the Quest for a Universal Human Science
Anthropological Evolutionism and the Russian Ethnographic Tradition, 1885–1900

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In 1890, the prominent literary historian Aleksandr Pypin published the first volume of his major study on the history of Russian ethnography. It was a formidable undertaking: by the time publication was complete in 1893, the work had stretched to four densely packed volumes chronicling almost 200 years of scholarship on the peoples and cultures of the Russian empire. A decade later, another landmark work in the field of ethnography made its appearance: the first systematic textbook on the subject intended for use in university teaching. Sadly, the textbook was a posthumous edition. Its author, Nikolai Kharuzin, died in 1900 at the age of 34, leaving his sister, Vera Kharuzina, an accomplished writer and ethnographer in her own right, with the task of bringing the project to completion.

Two major works, published a decade apart, both aspiring to present a comprehensive overview of ethnography as a scholarly field to an audience of Russian readers—but there the similarities end. Between Pypin’s detailed intellectual history of Russian scholarship and Kharuzin’s survey of ethnography as an academic field there was little common ground. “Ethnography,” Kharuzin declared at the outset, “is a new science,” so new, in fact, that its leading practitioners could not even agree on what to call it. And who

1 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoj etnografii, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1890–93). Pypin’s study, in fact, was not, and did not pretend to be, a complete history of ethnography throughout the empire. Important regions, most notably Central Asia and the Caucasus, were not covered; and he made no attempt to describe studies of the empire undertaken by foreign scholars. The scale of his study, in spite of these limitations, is testimony to the richness of the ethnographic tradition in Russia as it had developed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

2 Nikolai Nikolaevich Kharuzin, Etnografiia: Lektsii chitannye v Imperatorskom moskovskom universitete, nos. 1–4 (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1901–5).

3 Ibid., 1.
were these practitioners? “The famous Max Müller” began a parade of English, French, and German names: Léon Rosny, Eugène Verrier, Edward Burnett Tylor, Theodor Waitz, Georg Gerland, and so on. Russian scholars made only a brief appearance in connection with the geographical exploration of Siberia.4 The section devoted to the “History of the Development of Ethnography as a Science: Its Tasks, Methods, and Boundaries” was devoid of Russian names entirely. Whatever the virtues of the scholars described in Pypin’s *magnum opus*, they had little to do, it would appear, with the march of ethnographic science.

The differences between Pypin and Kharuzin were by no means personal or even ideological. In many respects, the two were in the same camp. Pypin was anything but a Slavophile. Underlying his endeavor was a quest to demonstrate the role played by Western enlightenment in unlocking the mysteries of Russian national identity.5 Kharuzin, in turn, was well aware of the tradition of Russian ethnography. He wanted nothing more, in fact, than to apply to the laws of science as he understood them to the vast body of Russian ethnographic literature, most of which remained virtually unknown in the West. If anything, the contrast in their views reflected a generational shift—Pypin was a man of the 1860s, shaped by the ethos of service to the *narod*, while Kharuzin, coming of age in the reign of Alexander III, was part of a new generation that looked to science to reveal not just the secrets of nature but also the path of human progress.6 Pypin embarked on his study of ethnography in the 1880s as an established scholar with a distinguished record of publication in philology, literary history, and public affairs. Kharuzin, in contrast, was a relative neophyte aspiring to build a scholarly career in the field of ethnography. But for ethnography to bear the weight of a young man’s ambitions, it had to be cast in a new and properly scientific light.

Ethnography, as it took shape in Russia from the 1840s onward, was, above all, a science of the particular. Central to the ethnographic endeavor was the concept of *narodnost’,* the essence of ethnic distinctiveness. The task of the ethnographer, as set out by Nikolai Nadezhdin in 1846, was to catalogue and describe the features of *narodnost’* in their native setting, “where

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4 Ibid., 17–18. The individuals mentioned are not so much self-identified ethnographers as explorers and geographers whose writings included ethnographic description—Samuel Gmelin, Peter Pallas, Ivan Lepekhin, and Stepan Krasheninnikov for the 18th century, Ferdinand Wrangel, Nikolai Przheval’skii, Grigorii Potanin, Nikolai Iadrintsev, and others for the more recent period.

5 Pypin makes this quite clear in his introduction (*Istoriia ruskoi etnografii*, 1: 1–15).

6 It was among Kharuzin’s generation, for example, that Marxism first began to make serious inroads. While Kharuzin himself firmly resisted the radical impulses of Russian Marxism, the underlying ethos—a vision of history driven by the inexorable unfolding of natural law—was very much a part of his psychological makeup.
they are and as they are,” so that out of the seemingly chaotic assemblage of individual traits a harmonious picture would emerge, revealing the connections among the individual, the nation, and all of humanity. While Nadezhdin’s interests lay primarily with Russian folk, his methods were equally applicable to the various peoples of the empire. Thus, as ethnography took deeper root from the 1850s onward, its classic genre became the free-standing ethnographic portrait of an individual national group. Nikolai Kharuzin himself was the author of just such a study. His monograph on the Russian Lapps (or Saami—known in Kharuzin’s time as the Lopari), published in 1890, is held up to this day as a model of scrupulous and detailed ethnographic investigation. For larger and more dispersed peoples such as the Russians themselves, it was not always possible to encompass all components of the national lifestyle within a single work—hence the emergence of more specialized studies, organized either by region or by topic, but staying within the confines of a single ethnic group. Here, too, Kharuzin had tried his hand. His early works include surveys of peasants in Olonetsk province, juridical customs of the Chechens and Ingush, and religious beliefs among the peasants of Kaluga province. But by the 1890s, particularly for a young man with Kharuzin’s talent and energy, a field that limited itself to the elucidation of the particular had little right to claim the mantle of science. For ethnography to stand on its own, its facts and observations needed to be drawn into a comprehensive system of universally applicable truths. Thus by the time he wrote his textbook, Kharuzin had arrived at a twofold definition of the field: “Ethnography ... is


8 N. N. Kharuzin, Russkie Lopari (Moscow: A. A. Levenson, 1890). Vladimir Charnoluskii, a prominent Soviet specialist on the Saami, paid tribute to Kharuzin in his memoirs, recalling his days at the public library in St. Petersburg: “The working conditions there were wonderful—very comfortable and quiet. On the wall on special pedestals were the busts of great scholars. Among them, I imagined (or at least wished that I could see) my learned “Loparologists”—I. Schefferus, who back in the 17th century wrote the famous book on the Saami “Lapponia,” and our own Russian ethnographer, N. Kharuzin, author of the well-known monograph Russkie Lopari.” Quoted in T. V. Luk’ianchenko, “V. V. Charnoluskii: Pevets Zemli Saamskoi,” in Repressirovannye etnografy, no. 2, ed. D. D. Turarkin (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2003), 130.

the science which, in studying the way of life of individual tribes and peoples, strives to search out the laws in accordance with which the development of mankind advances at the lower stages of culture." Like others of his generation, Kharuzin found the key to the laws guiding the advancement of culture in the writings of such scholars as Auguste Comte, Edward Tylor, Henry Lewis Morgan, John McLennan, and James Frazer—a body of theory now referred to as anthropological or socio-cultural evolutionism. The advent of evolutionist theory was just one of a series of developments throughout the 1890s, from the creation of new scholarly journals to the introduction of university courses in ethnography, that served to place the field on a more solid footing as an established scholarly discipline. Kharuzin was deeply involved in these efforts. Advancing the science of ethnography was a labor of love to which he devoted his entire life. In the pages that follow, we examine more closely Kharuzin's intellectual journey as an evolutionist ethnographer—how he came to adopt ethnography as his scholarly vocation, what drew him to evolutionism as a guiding theoretical construct, how he endeavored to apply evolutionist concepts in his own scholarship and why, in the end, his attempts to propagate a model of ethnography as a science based on evolutionist precepts may not have enjoyed the success to which he aspired.

Nikolai Kharuzin's efforts to graft evolutionism onto the tradition of Russian ethnography raise a number of questions regarding the flow of scholarly ideas across the borders of nation-states and cultures. Kharuzin proceeded from a firm assumption that science was a unified and universal endeavor representing the pinnacle of human achievement. Yet science in late 19th-century Europe was practiced largely within the confines of the nation-state by communities of scholars sharing common languages and common ideas that often distinguished them from their colleagues abroad. How, then, did

10 Kharuzin, Etnografiia, 37.

11 Kharuzin, in his discussion of the development of the field, singled out Comte as the pioneer whose method of comparative inductive analysis led to the essential insight: "independent of racial features, differences in climatic conditions, independent of the environment in which human groups are obliged to live, mankind passes through identical stages of development" (ibid., 29). He also noted the importance of Tylor as the first scholar to employ the notion of "survivals."

12 It is no accident that the historiography of anthropology in the late 19th century, despite the universalistic aspirations of theorists at the time, has tended to focus on specific national communities. See, for example, Andrew Zimmerman, Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jennifer Michael Hecht, The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Even George Stocking, whose magisterial works Victorian Anthropology (New York: Free Press, 1987) and After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) are indispensable to the study of any anthropological tradition, rarely strays beyond the British tradition. Of course, ideas and influences passed readily from one national milieu to another. Perhaps the most famous
the Russian intellectual and social milieu shape the reception of evolutionist ideas? What aspects of evolutionist theory resonated most (or least) strongly with the practices and ideas of Russian ethnography? What sorts of complexities and limitations arise in applying a body of theory in the social sciences and the humanities as a ready-made product in a new and different milieu? A comprehensive discussion of evolutionism in Russia, necessary to address these questions fully, would be beyond the scope of this article, but I hope that an examination of Kharuzin's life and career will begin to shed some light on evolutionism in general, its role in the development of Russian ethnography, and the dilemmas inherent in the transplantation of theory into a new national milieu.

The Path to Ethnography

Nikolai Kharuzin's background and upbringing prepared him well for a role as a cultural intermediary conveying the fruits of international scholarship to a Russian audience. Nikolai came from a large family of over-achievers: of his four siblings all but one became published scholars in the field of ethnography.13 The family had its roots in the Moscow merchantry at a time when the merchant soslovie was beginning to undergo a significant cultural transformation. Nikolai's father, Nikolai Ivanovich Kharuzin, orphaned at a young age, was able to build up his family's textile trading business and rise to the status of a merchant of the first guild. Coming of age in the 1850s and 1860s, however, the elder Kharuzin and his wife turned away from the insular patriarchal ways of their social milieu and set out to embrace a new identity centered on industriousness, cultural refinement, and enlightenment.14 Public lectures, exhibitions, and museums were a regular part of the example can be seen in the way in which Franz Boas drew on his roots in German geography and ethnology to lay the foundation for a new American school of anthropology. Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of the various national schools remained clearly articulated throughout.


14 The Kharuzin family fits very well the general pattern described by Alfred Rieber in which a small but significant number of merchant families from the 1860s onward embraced Western learning without necessarily breaking ties with the merchant milieu. Rieber describes this process in terms of a “quest for identity,” which in the case of the Kharuzins is
family's cultural life; and the family made a point of subscribing to an opera box each season and renting a summer dacha on the prestigious Iusupov estate of Arkhangelskoe. Most of all, however, the cultural ambitions of the Kharuzin family were manifested in the education of their children. In her memoirs, Vera Kharuzina recalls from an early age the presence of a German governess, Anna Martynovna, who directed her and Nikolai's upbringing with a strict Teutonic rigor. Soon "Mademoiselle" made her appearance in the household to instruct the children in French, while the Russian language was relegated (initially at least) to an elderly aunt. As a result, Vera and Nikolai grew up with the ability to read and speak French and German with equal if not greater fluency than Russian. A classical gymnasium education with its large obligatory doses of Greek and Latin filled in whatever gaps remained.

Nikolai Kharuzin's interest in ethnography also grew out of his family circle. It was his eldest brother Mikhail who led the way. In the summer of 1879, Mikhail drew the family's attention to the newly opened Anthropological Exhibition put on by the Society of Friends of Natural History, Anthropology, and Ethnography (known by its Russian initials as OLEAE), a major scientific event that made a powerful impression on Vera Kharuzina and almost certainly on her brothers as well. Mikhail's ethnographic interests intensified in the years that followed, amplified perhaps by his Slavophile sympathies—he was an acquaintance and ardent admirer of Ivan Aksakov and the poet Afanasii Fet. As a student in the Juridical Faculty of Moscow University, Mikhail studied under the pioneering Russian sociologist and legal scholar Maksim Kovalevskii and developed close ties with the linguist and folklorist Vsevolod Miller. Miller was the chair of the Ethnographic Division of the OLEAE, and with his support Mikhail became an active member of the society and by 1885 secretary of the division. Mikhail undertook his first ethnographic expedition to the Russian North in the summer of 1881. Vera Kharuzina writes, "He wanted to become acquainted directly with the life of the people [narod], which he knew only from books and in which he was deeply interested and fervently loved." In certainly apt. See Alfred J. Rieber, Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 133–77.

On the family's life at Arkhangelskoe, see Kharuzina, Proshloe, 265–336.

Ibid., 342.

Mikhail Kharuzin's Slavophile sympathies, while setting him at odds with his university friends, are actually not surprising given his social background. Rieber notes how educated merchants were frequently drawn to Slavophilism. See Merchants and Entrepreneurs, 146–47 and passim. It does not appear, however, that Mikhail's views spread to his younger siblings. Vera describes a conversation in which she admitted, to her elder brother's chagrin, that she was not a Slavophile (Proshloe, 466).

Kharuzina, Proshloe, 431.
the following two summers, he traveled to the Votiaks (Udmurts) of Viatka province and the Don Cossacks. Mikhail's intellectual drive and charismatic presence served as an inspiration for his younger siblings—Aleksei, Nikolai, and Vera—all of whom went on to become ethnographers.

For Nikolai, following in the footsteps of his brother seems to have been a natural decision. He, too, became a member of the Ethnographic Division of the OLEAE and enrolled in the Juridical Faculty of Moscow University. In the summer of 1886, he participated in a major expedition organized by Vsevolod Miller, first to undertake archeological excavations in Crimea and then to conduct ethnographic and linguistic research among the peoples of the North Caucasus. Kharuzin's intelligence, energy, and capacity for hard work impressed Miller greatly; and he cemented a relationship with the young man as friend and mentor that would last until the end of Kharuzin's life. The following summer, Nikolai and Vera, sponsored by the Ethnographic Division of OLEAE, traveled north on their own to conduct fieldwork, first among the Russian peasants of Olonets province and then among the Lapps of the Kola peninsula, generating the core materials for his monograph *Russkie Lopari*, which came out in 1890.

By the time his monograph appeared, Kharuzin had settled firmly on scholarship as a career and ethnography as his field of choice. It may be that the death of Mikhail Kharuzin in 1888 strengthened all the more his resolve to carry on his brother's legacy. But building a career as a professional ethnographer in the 1890s was no simple proposition. Most of the individuals who participated in the activities of ethnographic institutions such as OLEAE and the Russian Geographical Society were either dedicated amateurs or, like Miller, specialists trained in related fields. Ethnography was not recognized as a separate field within the system of Russian university education, the curriculum of which in the wake of the university counter-reform of 1884 was strictly overseen by the Ministry of Education.

In the mid-1880s, an extensive set of discussions took place within the ministry concerning the teaching of geography and ethnography within Russian universities. All the major universities were consulted regarding the

19 In 1885, Mikhail published his results of his research among the Don Cossacks: M. N. Kharuzin, *Svedeniia o kazatskikh obshchinaakh na Donu* (Moscow: M. P. Shchepkin, 1885). The book was dedicated to the "tireless fighter for Russian national consciousness, I. S. Aksakov." Aksakov returned the complement by presenting Kharuzin with an edition of his works with the inscription: "To the last Slavophile, M. N. Kharuzin" (Kharuzina, *Proshloe*, 7, 467).

place of geography within the larger structure of university education. Few of the participants in these discussions ever questioned the assumption that ethnography should be treated as a subfield of geography. Conceptions of ethnography in Russia continued to be shaped well into the 1880s by the views of the early 19th-century German geographers Alexander von Humboldt and Karl Ritter, who posited the close interdependence between human culture and the surrounding environment and advocated an all-encompassing "earth science" (Erdfunde, zemlevedenie) examining humanity in the context of its interactions with the natural world. Humboldt and Ritter's ideas were quite productive for their time, especially when juxtaposed to the racial theories that dominated the human sciences in other parts of Europe. But the geographical determinism inherent in the earth science paradigm, in reducing human culture to the status of a dependent variable, tended to stifle the development of ethnography as an independent field. Earth science, moreover, had little to offer regarding the methods of ethnographic research and analysis. Thus, while lip service was often paid to the ideas of Humboldt and Ritter, their direct impact on the practice of ethnography had been relatively insignificant.

Subsuming ethnography into geography led to considerable confusion when it came time to decide where to place the field within the university. Some argued that geography should concentrate on the physical features of the earth's surface and therefore that the field unquestionably belonged within the physical-mathematical faculty of the university—the realm of the hard sciences. Others pointed to the widespread teaching of geography by history faculty in secondary schools and the common focus on human interaction with the environment as evidence of the need to place geography within the historical-philological faculty. Faced with this divergence of opinions, the ministry wavered. Initially it agreed to establish a chair in geography and ethnography within the historical-philological faculties as part of the reforms of 1884. However, when Kazan University reiterated its strong objections, the ministry reconsidered and, after another round of consultations, decided in 1886 to move the chair in geography into the

21 Details of these discussions can be traced in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiiv (RGIA) f. 733, op. 149, no. 532 ("Delo o razreshenii uchredit' magistr geofiziki v Derptskom universitete"). See also L. D. Alekseeva, "Moskovskii universitet i stanovlenie prepodavaniia etnografii v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii," Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, ser. 8, Istoria, no. 6 (1988): 54–62.


23 This position was expressed particularly strongly by the faculty of Kazan University. See RGIA f. 733, op. 149, d. 532, ll. 100–1.

24 See the memorandum of Professor Fedor Uspenskii from Novorossiisk University (RGIA f. 733, op. 149, d. 532, ll. 44–45).
physical-mathematical faculty. Neither of the options under discussion was particularly advantageous for the development of ethnography. But putting geography in the hard sciences tilted the scales even further away from ethnography toward the specialized fields of orography, hydrology, and mathematical geography. When Kazan University submitted its teaching plan for the chair in geography, ethnography was omitted completely. Suggestions by Dmitrii Anuchin to leave ethnography as a separate field within the historical-philological faculty and by Eduard Petri to merge ethnography with anthropology (the study of mankind on the basis of physical features) were never acted upon. As a result, ethnography remained, all the way up to the 1920s, embedded in the teaching of geography within the physical-mathematical faculties of most Russian universities. A few minor points, however, mitigated the otherwise dreary picture: at Dorpat (Iur’ev) University, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the chair in geography and ethnography remained in the humanities; and in Moscow courses in ethnography were still permitted in the Historical-Philological Faculty on an ad hoc basis as voluntary electives. Both of these circumstances would present opportunities for Nikolai Kharuzin.

Becoming an Evolutionist

For the Kharuzin family, ardent supporters of the advancement of ethnography as an independent discipline, the outcome of the discussions in the Ministry of Education must have been a serious disappointment. Unable to pursue the study of ethnography as a scholarly field in its own right, the

25 The opinions of the universities and the ministry’s deliberations are summarized in a memorandum by N. A. Liubimov (RGIA f. 733, op. 142, d. 532, II. 189–205).
26 Ibid., l. 213.
27 Ibid., l. 171, 452. Anuchin had been appointed first to the newly created chair in anthropology at Moscow University in 1880. In 1884, in connection with the university reforms, he was called upon to fill the chair in geography and ethnography in the Historical-Philological Faculty. As one of the few Russians who had actually taught geography, ethnography, and anthropology, his views carried particularly weight, but he was still unable to influence the course of the discussions. In 1888 his chair was transferred back to the Physical-Mathematical Faculty, where he resumed his teaching of anthropology. See M. G. Levin, “Dmitrii Nikolaevich Anuchin,” Trudy Instituta etnografii im. N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia, vol. 1 (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1947), 8. Eduard Petri had been appointed to the analogous position in St. Petersburg University in 1888.
29 It is possible that Dorpat was able to keep ethnography in the Historical Faculty because it was not governed by the new 1884 university charter. Dorpat had its own separate charter which had been updated in the 1860s. See Michael H. Haltzel, “The Baltic Germans,” in Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, ed. Edward C. Thaden (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 174.
Kharuzins searched for ways to integrate it into their course of study. Aleksei Kharuzin had chosen to study anthropology at Moscow University under Dmitrii Anuchin; and his scholarly work, which he continued to pursue while building a distinguished career within the imperial bureaucracy, combined ethnographic observations with large doses of anthropometrics and craniology.³⁰ Nikolai Kharuzin, whose interests lay more firmly in ethnography itself, was unable to find as clear a path. His original hope had been to enroll in the Historical-Philological Faculty at Moscow University, but he had been deterred by the heavy requirements in the area of classical languages put in place as part of the 1884 reforms.³¹ As an alternative he chose, following the example of his brother Mikhail, to enroll in the Juridical Faculty. In addition to providing the opportunity to study with Maksim Kovalevskii, the Juridical Faculty had the advantage of including in its curriculum the study of customary law, one of the most vital topics of ethnographic research in the 1880s. For Mikhail, this appears to have been an adequate compromise, although his untimely death in 1888 makes it impossible to tell how his interests would have developed in later years. Nikolai, however, had broader ethnographic interests in areas such as religious belief, kinship, and the family, which deepened all the more as he gained experience in the field. Not only did law school prevent him from studying these areas of interest, it required him to spend time on topics totally unrelated to ethnography. Moreover, producing his monograph on the Lapps, a work easily comparable in scope to a doctoral dissertation, while still a student could not have had a beneficial effect on his regular studies. As a result, when the time came in 1890 to take his exams to complete his degree in law, Nikolai was thrown into crisis. Forced by exhaustion to interrupt his exams, he resolved on further reflection to abandon his juridical studies altogether and to transfer to Dorpat where he could take his exams in ethnography within the Historical-Philological Faculty.³² But to prepare for the new exams, he was required, in effect, to redo his entire university education. This posed a challenge. A year spent auditing lectures by historians and philologists filled in some of the gaps, but courses in the field of ethnography at the level necessary to complete a degree were simply not taught at Russian universities. Only by going abroad could Nikolai receive the training he needed to fulfill his scholarly ambitions.

Kharuzin spent almost two years, from 1891 to 1893, in Germany and France, accompanied by his sister Vera. Most of his time in Germany was


³² Ibid.
devoted to the study of museum collections in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig, in accordance with the widespread view at the time of museums as centers for anthropological research. In Paris, where they settled for an extended stay, the Kharuzins audited courses in ethnology and prehistoric culture at the Collège de France and the École d’anthropologie taught by Charles Letourneau, Gabriel Mortillet, and other prominent scholars. Outside the lecture hall, Nikolai and Vera perused the ethnographic collections of the Louvre and scoured the Bibliothèque nationale for useful works, devoting particular attention to the writings of Spencer, Tylor, MacLennan, and Morgan. Kharuzin also participated in French scholarly life. In addition to making the personal acquaintance of French scholars, he presented a paper on recent developments in Russian archeology at the Société nationale des antiquaires de France, for which he was awarded a silver medal.

The names that crop up in connection with Kharuzin’s stay in Paris suggest a distinct trajectory in the young man’s intellectual development. The scholarly landscape of late 19th-century France was marked by a rift in the human sciences between an ethnographic and an anthropological school, each with its own institutions and conceptual approach to the study of human culture. The ethnographers, while politically more conservative, rejected biological determinism and focused their efforts on a text-based study of cultural production in the tradition of the humanities. The anthropologists, following in the footsteps of their leader Paul Broca, embraced a rigorous philosophical materialism that precluded a view of culture as an independent force shaping the destiny of mankind. While not rejecting the study of cultural phenomena, they privileged the physical features of the human organism in general and the cranium in particular as the key to unlocking the intellectual and moral characteristics of biologically determined races. Charles Letourneau and Gabriel de Mortillet were prominent figures in a contingent of radical thinkers who came to dominate Broca’s Société d’anthropologie de Paris in the 1880s and 1890s. Letourneau was a sociologist who combined in his

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34 According to V. F. Miller, the topic of Kharuzin’s paper was “new views on culture of the burial mound (kurgan) period in Central Russia. See Miller, “Nikolai Nikolaevich Kharuzin,” 2. But the paper published in the society’s journal was on a quite different topic: “Études sur les anciennes églises aux toits en forme de tente,” *Mémoires de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* 53 (1893).


36 Both Letourneau and Mortillet were founding members of the Society of Mutual Autopsy, which sought to endow the specter of death with transcendent meaning beyond the realm of
conception of society a vigorous evolutionism with a continuing belief in the determinative force of biological traits. "Milieu can do much," he wrote, "but it doesn’t do all, and race is more important."37

It is not clear how much Kharuzin was aware of the rifts and fissures within the scholarly community he was exploring, but his primary affiliation while in France was clearly with the anthropologists. On the other hand, Kharuzin was decidedly selective in his intellectual borrowing. In all likelihood, he tended toward the anthropologists because he found himself more in agreement with their materialist approach to science. Nonetheless, he held firmly to his self-identity as an ethnographer and showed little inclination to blur the distinctions between these fields. Furthermore, there is little evidence that he found the anthropological absorption with race particularly compelling or productive. In a review of a book by Letourneau on the evolution of art, in fact, Kharuzin took the author to task for his use of race as an organizing principle:

The imperfection of this system [of racial classification] is too self-evident to justify taking the time to analyze it; but apart from the fact that it is unscientific, it greatly hinders the ability to resolve the question of the degree to which the cultural level of a tribe is reflected in the character of its art, so that, for example, with regard to primitive people, one has to search out observations that the author has scattered in various chapters.38

Letourneau’s racial classifications, in effect, cut across the distinctions that were of interest to Kharuzin and were, therefore, more a hindrance than a help.

What Kharuzin did find attractive in Letourneau’s work was a systematic intellectual structure that could endow facts with meaning as part of a broad vision of cultural evolution. As Kharuzin put it in a review, the facts, which Letourneau supplies in great abundance, “are presented in a systematic order and make it possible to trace the evolution of the phenomenon.”39 Kharuzin’s intensive reading in the literature of English anthropological evolutionism


while in Paris undoubtedly reinforced his conviction that the task of ethnography was to place specific facts within a broader conception of the development of humanity as a whole. Thus Kharuzin’s travels abroad in 1891–93 appear to mark a decisive intellectual turning point. Out of his immersion in West European scholarship he arrived at a guiding theoretical framework, anthropological evolutionism, with the intellectual rigor and explanatory power necessary to endow ethnography with the authority of science.

Anthropological evolutionism was not, however, a monolithic doctrine laid out in a finite body of canonical works. Even the label “evolutionism,” in Russia at least, appears to have been used rarely, if at all, in the 1890s—at the most, Russian writers might sometimes refer to an “evolutionary tendency.” Moreover, by the 1890s, the classic evolutionist works by Edward Burnett Tylor, Herbert Spencer, John Lubbock, Henry Maine, Lewis Henry Morgan, John MacLennan, Johann Bachofen, and Adolf Bastian were at least two decades old and had been supplemented and in some cases superseded by the works of a new generation of scholars: Ernst Grosse, Edvard Westermarck, Carl Nicolai Starcke, Richard Hildebrandt, Heinrich Cunow, and others now largely forgotten. Concepts such as Morgan’s theory of primitive promiscuity had been critiqued and debated to the point that they could no longer be applied without a long footnote of explanation.

In this context the question arises: can we really speak of “evolutionism” as a concrete intellectual phenomenon—a thing in itself? Are we not, by attaching a label, imputing an unwarranted degree of coherence to a set of ideas that may have been far more diverse and diffuse than the label would appear to imply? This pitfall might be avoided, I would suggest, by defining

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40 I was unable to find a single use of the term in book reviews published in the 1890s in Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. The earliest reference I could locate came from A. N. Maksimov’s critical article “Sovremennoe polozhenie etnografii i ee uspekhi,” originally published in 1908. See A. N. Maksimov, Izbrannye trudy (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 1997), 36–48. Maksimov writes: “The new orientation of Frobeneus and Graebner [proponents of the diffusionist “cultural circles” theory], which could be called geographical or, perhaps, historical in contrast to the earlier, purely evolutionary point of view, promises to bring serious corrections to all earlier conceptions” (42). Maksimov’s usage would tend to support the idea that “evolutionism” as a coherent concept only began to take shape as other schools emerged with critiques of previous practices.

41 As Kharuzin put it, “These attacks on the theory of Morgan might seem somewhat obsolete: contemporary ethnographic studies have shown for some time, what in the scheme put forth by Morgan needs to be rejected, and what should be accepted with reservations. Therefore at the present time you could hardly find an ethnographer who would be so bold as to structure the history of the development of the family in accordance with the scheme of that scholar” (N. N. Kharuzin, “Iz zapadno-evropeiskoi etnograficheskoi liternutry,” Etnograficheskoe obozrenie, no. 4 [1896], 90). Kharuzin even went so far as to reject Friedrich Engels’s Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State on the grounds that it was little more than a popularization of Morgan. His review can be found in Etnograficheskoe obozrenie, no. 2 (1894): 182.
evolutionism more clearly, breaking it down into its constituent elements—core ideas and assumptions that can easily be identified and traced in scholarly discourse. Five concepts in particular stand out in this regard: first, the notion of evolution itself—the view of the history of mankind as a linear hierarchical succession of stages, each with its own characteristic combination of cultural features; second, the concept of "survivals"—cultural features from earlier stages persisting in an atavistic state long after their original function had disappeared; third, the "psychic unity of mankind"—humanity as a single unified species undergoing a uniform process of cultural evolution; fourth, the notion of "independent invention," the assumption that analogous cultural features among disparate peoples could be explained by their common position on the ladder of socio-cultural evolution; and, finally, the comparative method of analysis allowing the scholar to draw conclusions about a given group based on evidence gathered from other groups at the same cultural level. Thus ethnographic observations of present-day "savages," evolutionists assumed, provided essential insights into the prehistory of civilized man. To the extent that these five elements are manifested in Kharuzin's scholarship it is reasonable, I would argue, to consider him an evolutionist regardless of whether he actually used the term himself.

Evolutionist thinking was not unknown in Russia in the period prior to Kharuzin's stay in France. As early as the 1840s, Konstantin Kavelin, the historian and legal scholar, had put forth a theory that closely anticipated Tylor's notion of "survivals." Tylor's *Primitive Culture* was translated into Russian as early as 1872, followed only a few years later by Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times* and *Origins of Civilization.* By the 1880s, a small but significant number of Russian scholars were working within an evolutionist framework with varying degrees of fidelity to its founding figures. Among the more doctrinaire of the Russian evolutionists was Mikhail Kulisher, 

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42 Perhaps the clearest, most programmatic statement of these core concepts of anthropological evolutionism can be found in a speech given by Edward Burnett Tylor to the Anthropological Institution of Great Britain and Ireland in 1888: "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions, Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent." For a summary and analysis, see Stocking, *After Tylor,* 3–14. Kharuzin would almost certainly have been familiar with Tylor’s ideas, since a Russian translation of the article appeared in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie—a journal that he played a key role in publishing. See [E. Tylor], “O metode issledovaniia razvitiia uchrezhdenii,” Etnograficheskoe obozrenie, no. 2 (1890): 1–31.


a dedicated defender of Lubbock's theory of communal marriage. Others espousing evolutionist views included Maksim Kovalevskii, the Ukrainian ethnographer N. F. Sumtsov, and I. N. Smirnov of Kazan University, who later gained notoriety by upholding the plausibility of human sacrifice among the Udmurt of the Middle Volga region in the so-called Multan case. But not all Russian scholars were so quick to adopt the evolutionist paradigm. Dmitrii Anuchin—while familiar with, and positively inclined toward, evolutionist ideas—took a more cautious approach in applying them to Russian ethnography. In a programmatic article on the tasks of ethnography appearing in the first issue of Etnograficheskoe obozrenie, Anuchin stayed within the traditional framework of Russian ethnography, arguing for the need to assemble and systematize all the available material about individual peoples into comprehensive ethnographic monographs. While Anuchin cautioned against the collection of data as an end in itself, he insisted that meaningful comparative analysis could begin only when sufficient empirical evidence had been assembled. Most Russian ethnographers in the 1890s, it is fair to assume, stayed with the boundaries of Anuchin's concept of the field as narodovedenie, the study of peoples.

Up until his travel abroad, Kharuzin also worked largely within the traditional framework of Russian ethnography. Kharuzin's 1890 monograph on the Lapps can be seen, in fact, as a direct fulfillment of Anuchin's ethnographic program. In addition to his own observations and reports provided by local correspondents, Kharuzin conducted extensive library and archival research in an attempt to draw together all available data on the Lapps into a comprehensive ethnographic portrait. The work is organized thematically, starting with a geographical and historical survey and going on to address specific aspects of the Lapp way of life—religious belief, family and kinship, the arts, and so on. But for all the richness of his data, Kharuzin's book on the Lapps is largely free from overarching theoretical schemes. At the most, Kharuzin implied a vague notion of survivals. In discussing family life, for example, he alluded to a "clan organization" (rodovoe ushiroistvo) that had once prevailed but could now only be detected through surviving traces. But even here, he

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47 Anuchin, in fact, took an active interest in Kharuzin's study and provided him with substantial bibliographical and anthropological data. Two letters from Anuchin, one of which is dated November 1889, found in Kharuzin's personal archival collection convey extensive information mainly gleaned from foreign sources of the Lapp in Sweden and Norway. See Otdel pis'mennikh istochnikov Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeia (OPI GIM) f. 81 (Kharuzinykh), no. 8 (Pis'ma raznykh lits N. I. Kharuzinu), ll. 40-42.
48 Kharuzin, Russkie Lopari, 237-38.
relied largely on historical data and direct ethnographic evidence rather than the abstract workings of the comparative method to reconstruct the past. If Kharuzin’s early work is relatively free of evolutionist schemes, however, the same cannot be said of his writings after his return from his study abroad.

Applied Evolutionism: Levels of Culture

After successfully completing the exams in ethnography and geography at Iur’ev University (Dorpat) in the fall of 1893, Kharuzin devoted himself wholeheartedly to his ethnographic research and writing. Supporting himself through a modest position at the Archive of the Ministry of Justice, supplemented with funds from his dwindling share of the family fortune, Kharuzin set out to apply the theoretical principles absorbed during his study abroad. Vsevolod Miller wrote to him: “Even without your assurances, I sincerely believe in your love for the poor bride ethnography. Let us hope that this penniless maiden turns out to have a rich American uncle and that your marriage will be happy in all respects.” In the future, Miller suggested, “you will look back with a feeling of gratification on this period of struggle that you are now enduring, when your head is full of plans, when your hand reaches out on its own accord for the pen.”

Indeed, in the period between his graduation in 1893 and his death in 1900, Kharuzin was strikingly prolific. In addition to completing the series of lectures that made up his four-volume posthumously published textbook, he wrote two monographs on dwellings among the Finnish peoples and Turkic and Mongol nomads of the Russian empire, at least a dozen substantive articles on a variety of ethnographic and historical topics, several extended review essays, and as many as 140 short book reviews for Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. In 1896, he began teaching on a voluntary basis without compensation, first at Moscow University and then, starting in 1898, at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. In addition to his writing and teaching, Kharuzin continued his fieldwork, traveling during the summer months to Crimea, western Siberia, the Altai, and various other destinations.

For his first significant work after his return from abroad, Kharuzin chose a topic of considerable contemporary relevance for ethnic relations within the Russian empire—the ability of ethnic Russians to assimilate other peoples into their midst. Many assumed that Russians had a special gift for

49 V. F. Miller to N. N. Kharuzin, [n.d.], OPI GIM f. 81, no. 15, l. 142.
50 Miller, “Nikolai Nikolaevich Kharuzin,” 7. A complete bibliography of Kharuzin’s works is included at the end of Miller’s obituary and in the first volume of his textbook (Kharuzin, Etnografiia, 1: 339–43).
51 Miller, “Nikolai Nikolaevich Kharuzin,” 5–6. Kharuzin also worked as a volunteer at the State Historical Museum.
assimilation, allowing them to easily absorb and integrate the peoples of the empire. But these comfortable assumptions were complicated and challenged by the well-documented phenomenon of “Russians into Yakuts”: assimilation of Russians into supposedly “lower” ethnicities. Here was an area in which Kharuzin could bring his theoretical insights to bear to shed light on a topic of direct interest to broad sectors of Russian educated society.

Kharuzin’s interest was sparked by a survey circulated by the Kazan ethnographer Ivan Smirnov, intended to generate data on the assimilative abilities of the Russian people. This was an issue in which Smirnov clearly had a stake—during the late 1880s and the 1890s, he had published a series of monographs on the non-Russian peoples of the Middle Volga region in which he had emphasized repeatedly the ongoing processes of ethnic assimilation, which, he felt, would eventually lead to the disappearance of the non-Russian groups. His mission was one of salvage ethnography—recording for science the features of each people before the inevitable assimilatory processes took their course.

Kharuzin, from the start, expressed his skepticism regarding Smirnov’s approach. It was not that Kharuzin doubted the presence of assimilation, although he noted that its force was often exaggerated. Merely adopting customs, technologies, or even the vocabulary of neighboring groups, for example, could not be considered real assimilation. Rather, he disagreed with the assumption that certain peoples (i.e., the Russians) had innate abilities that made them particularly effective as conduits of cultural assimilation. Instead, Kharuzin explained assimilation in terms of the combined interaction of a number of factors at work in a given context. Everything from man...


54 Assimilation and Russification were, moreover, issues in which Kharuzin in all probability had a direct personal interest. The family had close connections with Dorpat University and its gymnasium, where the two elder brothers, Mikhail and Aleksei, had studied. Nikolai himself was completing his degree at the university at precisely the period when the name was being changed from Dorpat to Iur’ev and Russian was being introduced as the obligatory language of instruction. It certainly seems plausible that this context may have stimulated Kharuzin’s interest in the question of cultural assimilation. Kharuzin does not mention the situation in the Baltic region in his article, but his conclusion—that cultural level rather than innate national qualities drives processes of assimilation—would certainly seem to suggest a skeptical view of the government’s policies. On the Russification at Dorpat, see Haltzel, “The Baltic Germans,” 174–77.

55 I. N. Smirnov’s monographs on the Volga peoples include Cheremisy: Istoriko- etnograficheskii ocherk (Kazan: Tipografia Imperatorskogo universiteta, 1889); Votiak: Istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk (Kazan: [n. p.], 1890); Permiaki: Istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk (Kazan: [n. p.], 1891) and Mordva (Kazan: Tipografia Imperatorskogo universiteta, 1895). Smirnov’s views on assimilation and Russification were expressed in “Obrusenie inorodts ev i zadachi obrusel’noi politiki,” Istoricheskii vestnik 47 (1892): 752–65.
riage practices to geographical location, religion, and mode of subsistence could play a role in determining whether assimilation would take place. Thus Kharuzin explicitly rejected explanations of assimilation based on conceptions of national character and race. "It is hardly possible," he wrote, "to accept national character as the main decisive reason for the phenomenon under investigation." 56 Yet in rejecting innate characteristics, Kharuzin did not abandon the quest to isolate a dominant explanatory factor. It was, he argued, the level of culture, based on an evolutionist scheme of development, that was most decisive in determining the likelihood of assimilation. Thus the Finnic peoples of western Siberia and the Volga region, whose cultural level was relatively low in relation to surrounding Russian populations, were most prone to assimilation. Even assimilation of Russians could be explained, Kharuzin felt, by relative levels of culture. Small groups of Cossacks not engaged in agricultural production, hence less firmly rooted in a higher stage of culture, tended to adopt the language and customs of the surrounding nomadic populations. But when settled populations of Russian agriculturalists lived in proximity with nomads, the flow of assimilation moved in the opposite direction. 57 Of course, additional factors such as modes of subsistence and religion had to be taken into consideration, but the level of culture remained decisive. 58 Kharuzin wrote, "We have seen that in the process of mutual relations ... a particular combination of causes is at play which can facilitate or delay this process [of assimilation], but that the main regulating factor is the cultural level of the ethnic groups coming into contact." 59

Kharuzin's article on assimilation is characteristic of the style and method of his later works. His erudition is manifestly apparent in the rich array of data presented as illustration. At the same time, he rarely raised questions as to the reliability of his data or the circumstances under which they were collected. By and large, he envisioned ethnographic facts as discreet units to be harvested from the mass of ethnographic data and rearranged in comparative relations in accordance with an overarching organizational principle. But Kharuzin's ethnographic laws, conceived in isolation from the data to which they were applied, seem, in retrospect, rather artificial and ill-fitting—a Procrustean bed onto which the complex and unruly ethnographic details were thrust. Fixed upon his evolutionary scheme, Kharuzin failed to give

56 Kharuzin, "Ob assimilatsionnoi sposobnosti," 63.
57 Ibid., 70–74.
58 For example, nomads of the steppe such as the Kalmyks and Kirgiz (Kazakhs) tended to resist assimilation despite their lower cultural level due to the specific conditions of the nomad way of life, which inculcated an insular mentality and limited the scope of substantive interaction with settled populations. Major religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, also tended to pose a barrier to assimilation, whereas pagan beliefs were less of an impediment (ibid., 66–68).
59 Ibid., 77.
adequate consideration to alternative explanations potentially more relevant to the data. Perhaps out of a desire, conscious or unconscious, to transcend the "earth science" paradigm, he minimized, for example, the significance of geographic setting as a factor leading toward assimilation: Russians may have been prone to adopt the ways of the Yakut because therein lay the key to survival in the harsh environment of the Siberian North. Rather than viewing modes of subsistence such as pastoral nomadism or arctic foraging as adaptations to the demands of a particular set of environmental conditions, he continued to view them within a rigid hierarchy of cultural stages.

In his article on assimilation, Kharuzin refrained from an explicit elaboration of his evolutionary scheme. In effect, he took for granted that his readers understood what he meant by levels of culture. Moreover, in highlighting the role of cultural contact and assimilation as routes of advancement to higher levels of culture, Kharuzin subtly undermined, unwittingly perhaps, the evolutionist model of internally driven progress from one stage to the next. If tribes at a "lower" stage of development could advance through contact with their more civilized neighbors, perhaps it was more appropriate to view the development of culture in a diffusionist mode, emanating from discrete points of innovation, rather than in evolutionist terms as the succession of universal stages.

But, far from abandoning his evolutionist convictions, Kharuzin drew them into still sharper relief in his subsequent works. His

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60 Whether due to the novelty of his approach or his controversial position, Kharuzin was unable to reach his intended audience. He had hoped to publish the piece in Russkaia mys', but the editors rejected it for fear of the reaction it might provoke among "our unreasonably fervent Russifiers." He then tried Vestnik Evropy, but even Vsevolod Miller's personal appeal to Aleksandr Pypin was to no avail (Otdel rukopisei Rossiskoi natsional'noi biblioteki, V. F. Miller to A. N. Pypin [1894], f. 621, d. 547, l. 21). In April 1894, Mikhail Stasiulevich, the editor of Vestnik Evropy, wrote to Kharuzin rejecting the article on the grounds that it was too specialized. "For all the scholarly interest that your piece presents, it risks getting lost in a journal for nonspecialists. It would be avoided by most readers or, what is worse, incorrectly understood. Throughout its history, the Russian nation [narod] has shown an almost unlimited capacity for the assimilation of other peoples. In any event, such a piece will find a better readership in the "Notes" of the Geographical Society or some other specialized journal" (OPI GIM £ 81, d. 8, l. 111).

61 Kharuzin's position on assimilation, while perhaps not entirely consistent from the perspective of evolutionist theory, actually makes a great deal of sense from the perspective of Russian imperial interests. The stance of superiority inherent in Kharuzin's notions of cultural levels was clearly an integral element of the imperial endeavor. But to downplay the role of external borrowing and insist exclusively on an internally driven process of cultural evolution would call into question the viability of a Russian "civilizing mission"—a concept essential to the legitimacy of the Russian imperial project. For a good discussion of the ideological underpinnings of Russian imperialism during this time, see David Schimmelpenningk van der Oye, Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001); and Vera Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia," Historical Journal 48, 1 (2005): 127–50.
studies of dwellings among the Finnic and Turkic peoples produced in the mid-1890s are a case in point.\textsuperscript{62}

Kharuzin’s choice to organize his study of dwellings around broad ethno-linguistic categories—Finnic and Turkic peoples—might appear strange from an evolutionist perspective. Did he wish to isolate inherent ethnic characteristics derived from common origins or explore processes of cultural interaction and exchange made possible by linguistic and geographical proximity? Actually Kharuzin had little interest in either of these approaches. Rather, his ethnically based scheme represented a methodological compromise: “it is most convenient to systemize material by ethnic groups, since having studied the laws of development in a particular sphere within the boundaries of various individual tribes, it is easier to orient oneself in the material and, having sought out the common points in the laws of development among a series of tribes, rise to the establishment of more general laws.”\textsuperscript{63} Ethno-linguistic groups such as the Turkic and Mongol peoples formed natural units of investigation, since all were located more or less on the same level of cultural development, all were subject to a similar range of geographic conditions, and all were engaged in patterns of interaction and exchange leading to the sharing of traits and characteristics. But despite whatever borrowing may have taken place, Kharuzin continued to insist on the internally driven and inexorable nature of cultural development:

The nomadic way of life usually appears stable and immobile, the reason being that, for the most part, changes in the cultural level of the nomad actually do take place slowly. But if you look more closely and compare the contemporary spiritual and social life of many of the nomadic peoples of Russia with the images that older writers have sketched out, it is not difficult to notice that the nomad ... continues to move forward along the paths of culture.\textsuperscript{64}

The “paths of culture,” Kharuzin implies, are set structures, a fixed succession of states and stages along which a tribe progresses alongside its immediate ethnic neighbors. Events such as the adoption of a major world religion (Islam or Buddhism, in the case of the nomads) or the breakup of the old clan-based form of social organization are rungs on the ladder of progress, plainly visible to the scholarly observer. It was only when a nomadic people


\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 3.
settled down and adopted agriculture that it fell under the dominant influence of its more civilized compatriots, merging its developmental narrative into the history of established nations.

To track the progression of the steppe nomads along the path of culture, Kharuzin applied the classic method of evolutionist museum anthropology: isolate a specific element of material culture (dwellings, in this particular case), assemble all the available types and variants, and arrange them into a set hierarchical succession. The place of a given item on the developmental scale could easily be determined, Kharuzin suggested, by considering its degree of complexity: "among two forms of one and the same type of dwelling, the most ancient should be considered the one that is simpler, whose structure is less complex." There was, however, one slight complication: when a group adopted a new type of housing, it continued to use the old forms for supplementary purposes. Thus, when visiting a Bashkir village, one might find the family living in a well-built wooden cottage, while using a straw hut (shalash) for cooking, bathing in a crude log cabin (srub), and escaping the summer heat in a felt covered yurt—all remnants of earlier steps on the ladder of cultural advancement. Here, in unadulterated form, was Tylor's doctrine of "survivals"—relics from the past endowed with new functions but providing a window into earlier stages along the "path of culture."

The Ostiak Bear Vow: Totemism and the Psychic Unity of Mankind
Kharuzin's study of dwellings, focusing on ethno-linguistic groups, demonstrated a clear progression of cultural stages but provided little opportunity for the application of the comparative method. The presence of analogous cultural features among related groups of nomads could be easily explained through interaction and borrowing, leaving little need to draw on notions of independent invention and the psychic unity of mankind. In 1898, however, Kharuzin published (again in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*) a study of the cult of the bear among the Ostiaks and Voguls (Khanty and Mansi) of western Siberia, in which he applied to the fullest extent in his writings the methods and assumptions of evolutionist theory.

Kharuzin's study of the bear cult began as an investigation into a curious juridical custom. For centuries, Russian administrators had known and made use of the Ostiak and Vogul practice of swearing oaths on bear pelts, the equivalent to the Christian practice of swearing on the Bible. Should the vow

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67 Ibid., no. 2 (1896): 71.

be broken, the natives believed, the spirit of the bear would exact a fearsome revenge. Numerous travelers and ethnographers had noted this custom and described its details, creating a rich base of descriptive accounts. Kharuzin, however, set for himself the deeper task of explaining the custom’s origins and its place within the evolution of religious beliefs. Specifically, Kharuzin attempted to show that the veneration of the bear had its origins in totemism, a practice that, he claimed, had long ago died out among the Ostiak and Vogul but had left traces in the ritual life of the people.

The concept of totemism had been introduced to the anthropological literature by John McLennan in the late 1860s as an elaboration of Edward Tylor’s theory of animism. Much about the concept remained in dispute throughout the heyday of evolutionism, but in its broadest dimensions, McLennan presented totemism as a discrete stage of sociocultural evolution manifested in a particular form of social organization and religious belief. A clan, he theorized, would adopt an animal or plant species as its symbolic progenitor, identifying emblem, and primary object of veneration. Once in place, the totem would regulate social relations through the practice of marital exogamy, matrilineal heredity, and the imposition of taboos. Never fully accepted by Tylor himself, the concept of totemism was later adopted and elaborated by James Frazer as a major component of his theories on primitive religion best known through his work *The Golden Bough*. Kharuzin, who cited Frazer a number of times, seems to have accepted totemism as an established fact, a concrete phenomenon that did not even require systematic explanation, much less modification or critique.

Fitting the Ostiak bear oath into the paradigmatic framework of totemism was no simple proposition. In significant respects, the bear cult departed from the model. A totem, in theory, would never be used for food since it was considered the flesh and blood of its clan. Yet bear meat was savored as a delicacy among the Ostiaks and Voguls. A totem would generally be venerated only by a particular clan, yet the cult of the bear was embraced not only by the entire Ostiak and Votiak peoples but by many other Siberian peoples as well. Moreover, Ostiak and Vogul mythology made no mention of the bear as an ancestor. Frazer himself had suggested an alternative explanation. Addressing the veneration of bears among native peoples throughout Siberia and North America, he ascribed the phenomenon to a sense of fear.

Kharuzin describes several different variations of the bear oath. In some accounts, axes and knives were used along with the bear pelt. In other cases, the bear’s head was cut with a knife or bitten. Regardless of the details, the essential points was the belief that the bear would impose retribution should the vow be broken (“Medvezh’ia prisiaga,” no. 3 [1898], 1-7).


Ibid., 126-51.

that the spirit of a large and dangerous beast hunted by man would exact its revenge upon the hunter if not treated with the proper honor and respect.73 Kharuzin was obliged to concede that such fears were indeed a factor among the Ostiaks and Voguls. On the face of it, the evidence for totemism as the source of the bear oath seemed rather meager.

But to say, as was clearly the case, that totemism did not exist among the Ostiaks and Voguls in the present day did not mean that it had not existed at some point in the distant past. Indeed, if totemism was, as McLennan had argued, a fundamental stage in the path of cultural evolution, then it must have existed among all peoples in the distant past. Kharuzin’s task then was to peel away the accumulated layers of meaning surrounding the bear cult in search of a connection, a piece of the puzzle that could make sense only as part of the belief system of totemism. His methodology necessitated a close examination of the practices of the bear cult among the Ostiaks and Votiaks, based on a rich assortment of ethnographic accounts, considering at every step whether various alternative explanations were sufficient. Not only did Kharuzin draw heavily on Russian and German ethnographic accounts of the peoples in question, but he also introduced comparative evidence from around the world, citing accounts of peoples whose totemism was assumed to have survived intact into historical times. If the Great Rabbit, creator of the universe among the Algonquin, had its origins in a lowly totem, this might well explain how the bear could have attained its overwhelming significance among the Ostiaks and Votiaks despite its origins in totemism.74 Other examples, used in similar ways, were drawn from the peoples of Sumatra, Guinea, Cambodia, Borneo, Madagascar, Melanesia, Australia, and numerous other locations. Thus the comparative method, using the experience of cultures at a particular stage of development to fill in the gaps regarding a different group at an analogous stage, proved an invaluable tool for Kharuzin in his quest for the totemic roots of the bear cult.75 Not surprisingly, Kharuzin found his connection in the end. In the first part of the article he established how rituals intended to secure the passage of the slain bear’s soul into the afterlife went beyond fear alone and could be explained only as a survival of

73 Ibid., 10.


75 It was precisely Ivan Smirnov’s use (or misuse) of the comparative method in the Multan case that predisposed him to accept as plausible the accusation of human sacrifice leveled against a group of Votiak (Udmurt) defendants. Finding “survivals” of human sacrifice in the folklore of neighboring peoples, Smirnov took this as confirmation that such sacrifices had not only existed in the past but might also be practiced in the present day. See Geraci, Window on the East, 202–17. Kharuzin was certainly aware of the Multan case and looked with a certain amount of skepticism on Smirnov’s work. But this skepticism seems not to have extended to Smirnov’s professed methods.
In the second half, he traced the survivals of totemism in folklore and, using the comparative method, showed how totemism in its pure form could have evolved to take on the attributes of the cult of the bear.

Kharuzin tells a fascinating tale. His account is rich in factual detail; his comparisons are revealing; and his analysis, for the most part, is careful and insightful. Yet for Kharuzin, it was not sufficient simply to recount and place in a comparative context a curious set of rituals and beliefs. For his study to meet the criteria of science it had to shed light on a deeper truth, a phase of human existence common to all peoples. Yet it was precisely his attempt to draw out the connection between the bear cult and totemism that seems in retrospect most forced and artificial. The problem was not so much with Kharuzin’s data or even his analytical skills but rather with the concept of totemism itself. Kharuzin was all too willing to accept totemism as a set fact, a thing in itself, as concrete a phenomenon for its own time as the bear cult he was describing. In actuality, totemism was anything but concrete. Many of the most basic features of totemism were the object of vigorous debates among Western anthropologists. Even Frazer himself proposed three separate theories at various points to account for the origins of totemism. As Claude Lévi-Strauss later pointed out, totemism, rather than constituting a single cultural “fact,” denoted a whole set of features—animal worship, exogamous clans, use of totemic emblems, matrilineal descent, taboos, and so forth. As the quality and quantity of ethnographic data improved, it became clear that the number of instances in which all these features actually coincided was exceedingly small. By the 1910s, totemism, which Kharuzin had tried so hard to substantiate as a concrete stage in the path of cultural evolution, was looking more and more like a figment of the Victorian imagination.

If veneration of the bear was merely a means to mitigate the threat from a fierce and frightening beast, then the Ostiaks and Voguls had ways of ensuring that the bear's soul would be destroyed after the hunt. The presence of rituals designed specifically to facilitate the passage of the bear’s soul into the afterlife suggested, to Kharuzin, the need for an alternative explanation, which only totemism could provide. See Kharuzin, “Medvez’ia prisiaga,” no. 3 (1898): 35–36.


Stocking, After Tylor, 140–45.

Stocking, After Tylor, 178. The concept of totemism, of course, has not disappeared from the anthropological literature. The writings of Sigmund Freud (Totem and Taboo) and Emile Durkheim (The Elementary Forms of Religious Life) generated new interest in totemism, despite the widespread theoretical confusion surrounding the term. A. R. Radcliffe-Browne also integrated totemism into his functionalist theories. Lévi-Strauss’s devastating critique did much to discredit the concept, but there are still anthropologists today who continue to insist on the utility of the “old-fashioned term.” Even so, it is hard to imagine contemporary anthropologists subscribing to the notion of totemism as a stage in cultural evolution...
All three of the works we have examined at length show a clear set of common characteristics. All are skillfully constructed, integrating a mass of detailed ethnographic data into a clear and well-organized narrative. When discussing the data themselves, Kharuzin shows considerable critical skill and judgment. Yet there is a certain deductive quality to Kharuzin’s reasoning. Rather than drawing an explanatory framework out of the data, he brings to the material ready-made conceptions that serve as a kind of first principle creating order, structure, and meaning. In Kharuzin’s writing, it is the explanatory framework that validates the data rather than the opposite. But such an approach creates a certain vulnerability: Kharuzin’s arguments as a whole are only as valid as the core conceptions upon which they rest. If the notion of cultural stages is rejected, then Kharuzin’s argument on assimilation collapses. If totemism turns out to be a mirage, then Kharuzin’s elaborate discussion of the bear oath becomes little more than an engaging compilation. Yet, for all the centrality of these theoretical constructs, Kharuzin rarely engaged in an open discussion of his methodology. Spared the light of critical scrutiny, contradictions and weaknesses in evolutionist thought increasingly evident to scholars both in Russia and the West escaped Kharuzin’s attention.

A Paradigm Cracks

Kharuzin’s article on the bear oath turned out to be the last of his major ethnographic studies. By 1898, when the article first appeared, he was teaching courses in ethnography at both the Lazarev Institute and the Historical-Philological Faculty at Moscow University, and his abundant scholarly energies were devoted to preparing the lectures that would later form the basis for his posthumous textbook. In 1899, Kharuzin took on another obligation, writing newspaper articles on international affairs—no doubt for financial reasons, since he was never paid for his teaching. The exact cause of Kharuzin’s death in March 1900 is unclear, although in his obituary Vsevolod Miller made reference to “bleeding in the area of the heart” as the decisive blow.\(^{80}\) Kharuzin’s health problems were not new. As early as 1893, Miller had spoken of Kharuzin at a meeting of the OLEAE ethnographers, noting that he had sacrificed even his health for the good of the field.\(^{81}\) On many occasions, doctors had advised him to cut back his activities and go on vacation, but his intellectual drive was such that he could not tolerate representing “humanity’s first religion.” See Chris Knight, “Totemism,” in *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 550–51.

\(^{80}\) Miller, “Nikolai Nikolaevich Kharuzin,” 1.

\(^{81}\) OPI GIM f. 81, d. 15, l. 79 ob. This information was conveyed back to Kharuzin in a letter from his colleague A. D. Solodovnik.
even short periods of inactivity. To all appearances, Kharuzin had literally worked himself to death.

Posterity was not especially kind to Nikolai Kharuzin. Of all his scholarly works, his study of the Russian Lapps probably had the most lasting impact, due no doubt to the immediacy and richness of his materials and his engaging presentation. His later articles, in which his evolutionist theoretical framework was more fully expressed, seem to have left much less of an impression on the field. Drawing largely upon the observations of previous ethnographers, their main claim to originality lay in the presentation of ethnographic data within an evolutionist theoretical framework; and, as we have seen, this was precisely their weakest side.

Kharuzin's posthumous reputation was dealt a serious blow quite soon after his death when Aleksandr Maksimov, a talented young ethnographer known for his mercilessly critical perspective, published a harsh review of the first volume of Kharuzin's textbook. As a reference source, Maksimov wrote, the work was of little value, since the factual data were presented in an unsystematic manner, with very uneven treatment given to different topics. Moreover, Kharuzin was far too willing to rely upon the ready-made conclusions of foreign scholars without subjecting them to the necessary critical assessment or placing them in the context of more recent literature. Kharuzin, Maksimov acknowledged, probably did not have the time to rework his lectures and should not be held fully responsible for their shortcomings. But had his relatives really done him a service by bringing his notes into print?

Several years later, in an article on the state of the field, Maksimov extended his critique to anthropological evolutionism as a whole. The broad generalizations put forth by Tylor and his followers were suspect in at least three areas, Maksimov argued. First, for all their seeming erudition, the evolutionist theorists based their conclusions on a very limited body of data. Even the best recent work by scholars such as Westermarck and H. J. Nieboer only encompassed a small percentage of the tribes and peoples known to exist. Furthermore, Maksimov continued, the data used by "armchair

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83 A. N. Maksimov, review of Nikolai Kharuzin, Etnografija, vol. 1, in Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal, no. 1 (1902): 141-43. Maksimov published a review of the second volume in Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal, no. 1 (1903): 112-14, which was only marginally more favorable. I have no evidence of how Nikolai's siblings responded to Maksimov's critique, but it is interesting to note that Vera Kharuzina later published in her own name a textbook on ethnography—perhaps a tacit acknowledgment of the weakness of her brother's earlier attempt (Vera Nikolaevna Kharuzina, Etnografija, 2 vols. [Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Imperatorskogo arkheologicheskogo instituta, 1909-14]). Vera Kharuzina's text was reissued after her death and continued to be used in university courses throughout the Soviet period (Voedelenie v etnografii: Opisanie i klassifikatsiia narodov zemnogo shara [Moscow: Izdanie MGU, 1941]).
anthropologists" often proved to be misleading, unreliable, or just plain wrong. For example, claims of group marriage and "primitive promiscuity" inferred from data collected by missionaries and colonial administrators often proved groundless once trained observers arrived to investigate. Finally, the "comparative method" beloved by evolutionist thinkers required that cultural facts be plucked out of their native context and viewed in isolation, resulting more often than not in meaningless parallels leading to spurious conclusions. Was it surprising, therefore, that so many of the grand theories of evolutionism turned out to be castles in the clouds? Maksimov, however, remained optimistic about the future of the field. Much more work remained to be done, he insisted, in the detailed study of individual peoples—returning, in essence to the familiar territory of the Russian ethnographic tradition. To the extent that comparative discussion was in order, it would have to be based on documented historical patterns of cultural interaction and borrowing, an approach fruitfully pursued by German scholars of the "cultural circles" school—Friedrich Ratzel, Leo Frobenius, Fritz Graebner, and others.

Maksimov's critique of evolutionism was one of a number of similar attacks taking place within the various traditions of anthropology that served collectively to displace anthropological evolutionism from its position of theoretical dominance. Franz Boas earned his place as the "father of American anthropology" by toppling evolutionist methods both in museum displays and in ethnographic research and replacing them with the holistic investigation and presentation of individual cultures. Boas, of course, was a product of the German tradition, where evolutionist models, advocated most prominently by Adolf Bastian, had always been tempered by a close attention to the influence of geographic factors. Not surprisingly, German scholars were

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84 An example of just such an instance in the Russian context can be found in Lev Shternberg's claim to have detected signs of group marriage among the Nivkhi (Giliak) of Sakhalin. See Bruce Grant, "Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia," in Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 292–310.

85 Maksimov's critique was echoed and extended by the ethnographer N. M. Mogilianskii, who explicitly rejected ethnography as a universal history of culture and invoked Kharuzin as a notable proponent of such an approach. Ethnography, Mogilianskii insisted, "is first and foremost the study of peoples [narodovedenie]." It was Mogilianskii who introduced as a more sophisticated rendition of Nadezhdin's narodnost' the term "ethnos," which would later be adopted as the central focus of Soviet ethnographic research. See N. M. Mogilianskii, "Predmet i zadacha etnografii," Zhivaia starina, no. 1–3 (1916): 1–22.


88 On Boas's critique of evolutionism in the context of his German intellectual roots, see Matti Bunzl, "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter
also quick to break from evolutionism in favor of geographically centered models of cultural diffusion infused with varying degrees of racial determinism. In France, evolutionist conceptions were also offset by the focus on race, which tended to turn anthropologists away from the psychic unity of mankind. Durkheim's sociology, in contrast, emerged as the dominant method in France for the study of society and social organization. Even in England, where evolutionism had always been strongest, contradictory ideas and evidence began to build up after 1900, leading a number of prominent scholars such as William Rivers to swear off evolutionism by around 1911, thereby opening the way for the emergence of English functionalism. In all these cases, what we see is a scholarly paradigm, no longer able to serve as an adequate explanatory framework given the weight of available evidence, beginning to break apart under the strain.

If Kharuzin's scholarly career had not been cut off so prematurely by his untimely death, how would he have responded to the growing critique of evolutionism? Would he have reassessed his views and retooled his scholarship in accordance with the latest trends or clung doggedly to his established convictions? Kharuzin, in contrast to Maksimov, was never one to bring theoretical discussions to the forefront of his scholarship, and I suspect that had he lived, he would have avoided an open debate and quietly continued his quest for the laws governing mankind's advancement along the "paths of culture." A suggestive parallel can be seen in the career of Lev Shternberg, who, despite his close collaboration with Franz Boas as part of the Jessup North Pacific Expedition, steadfastly maintained his evolutionist views up to his death in 1927. For Shternberg and Kharuzin, evolutionism was far more than a conditional explanatory mechanism to be discarded at its first signs of obsolescence. Evolutionism held the promise of elevating ethnography to the status of a true science, raising it up from mere description and endowing it with the task of charting the cultural progress of all of humanity. Kharuzin was by no means a blind follower of Western science, as his numerous critical reviews of individual authors reveal. Yet the core assumptions of evolutionist thought—the successive levels of culture, survivals, and the psychic unity of


89 Zimmerman, Anthropology and Antihumanism, 201-16.

90 Stocking, After Tylor, 179-220.

mankind—constituted for him a holistic worldview. Like many Russian intellectuals, Kharuzin looked to Western science for a total system of knowledge through which to impart a rational structure to the chaos of lived experience. Once in place, such a worldview often proves to be unshakable.

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