

Editors' Introduction

Most of the essays in this anthology originated in an international workshop on “recent results and new perspectives in the study of Vitus Bering and the two Russian Kamchatka-Expeditions”.¹ The purpose of the workshop was to share insights from the increasing volume of research in several countries on these early eighteenth-century voyages of exploration, and to develop contacts and co-operation among scholars in this field. The participants were invited to focus on an aspect of their research that would give an idea of their current work's direction.

The anthology includes most of the formal presentations given at the workshop, but not all, regrettably. Nor does it reflect the many valuable contributions made by the participants in the course of the discussions.² On the other hand it publishes three essays that were not presented at the workshop,³ and two other *addenda*.

The workshop's organisers – now also the editors of the resulting volume – would like to thank all workshop participants and all contributors to the anthology for their stimulating input. We are grateful to Anna Halager for permission to publish her translation of the Okhotsk letters, and to Gyldendal Publishers for allowing an English version of the letters, first printed in the original German and in Danish translation as part of a Gyldendal publication.⁴ Julian Lewis and Patricia Lundahl kindly helped us edit articles submitted in English. Many thanks also to the Carlsberg Foundation and the Aarhus University Research Foundation for supporting publication of this book.

One clear theme in the recent study of Bering's expeditions has been the continuing debate on the real purpose of his first voyage. Carol Urness's paper takes us to the heart of this discussion. It began in 1977 when the American historian Raymond H. Fisher challenged the traditional view that Peter the Great had instructed Bering to find out whether Asia and America are separated or joined. Fisher argued that Bering's orders were in fact to find the route from Kamchatka to America. His interpretation found support in the work of the Russian scholar Boris Polevoi, who had been arguing along similar lines for some time.

Urness's 1987 book, *Bering's First Expedition: A re-examination based*

on eighteenth-century books, maps, and manuscripts, was a major contribution to this discussion. Challenging both Fisher and Polevoi, she argued that the expedition's main task was mapping. Her contribution to the present volume summarizes her position and outlines plans for further research and publication.

Another distinct direction has been the renewed efforts, from several sides, to make a larger quantity of source material accessible to researchers. Russian archives hold an impressive volume of documents related to the Kamchatka Expeditions, especially the Second, and only a fraction of these have been published. It is quite clear, from various historiographic points of view, that much more deserves to be brought to light.

Several of the workshop participants are engaged in the study and publication of archival documents. Tatyana S. Fedorova is one who may even be said to have led the way. She was compiler-in-chief of an anthology of documents on Russian expeditions to the Northern Pacific in the first half of the eighteenth century, which included a selection of documents on the Kamchatka Expeditions (mostly from the Russian State Navy Archive in St. Petersburg).⁵ When this anthology appeared in 1984, it was clearly the most important source publication in the field since A. Pokrovskii's bicentennial Bering volume in 1941.⁶

Fedorova's present contribution stems from her pre-eminent knowledge of the archival material. Her article deals with letters of denunciation and complaint written to the authorities in St. Petersburg by individual expedition members. These form a fascinating and relatively unresearched (though sadly abundant) category of sources, one that tells its own gloomy story about the atmosphere surrounding the expedition as time dragged on.

A somewhat different angle on the private life of the expedition officers is to be found in Natasha Okhotina Lind's contribution. Its title highlights the curious fact that Bering's wife, Anna Christina, brought a clavichord with her all the way from St. Petersburg to Okhotsk – and back again. It is equally remarkable that Bering brought his wife and their two youngest children with him all the way to the Pacific coast. Lind's article provides a very substantial update of information on the Captain-Commander's family life. This is largely based on sixteen recently discovered private letters, written by members of the Bering household in Okhotsk in February 1740. The complete text of the letters, originally in German, appears in English translation by Anna Halager in the Addenda section of the present volume.

Kamchatka Expedition documents are scattered in great numbers over several Russian archives. To some extent, this is the result of the historical development of the archival system and its individual institutions. Basically, however, it reflects the hierarchical government structure to which the Second Kamchatka Expedition was responsible in the days of Empress Anna Ioannovna. Bering and his Expedition had several masters. The expedition leadership had to submit reports to three organs of government: the Admiralty College, the Senate, and the Cabinet of Ministers. In addition, the Academic detachment of the Second Expedition belonged under the Academy of Sciences. Consequently, the main deposits of documents are in the Russian State Navy Archive (RGAVMF), the Russian State Archive for Ancient Documents (RGADA), and the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (PFA RAN).

The fact that the Second Kamchatka Expedition was involved with several arms of government over an extended period of time, makes it an interesting case from the perspective of administrative history and law, as pointed out by the Moscow archivist Evgenii E. Rychalovskii. His paper focuses on the role played by the Cabinet of Ministers in the governmental management of the Expedition. The Cabinet, headed *de facto* by Vice-Chancellor A.I. Osterman, held a unique position among the highest institutions of government in the years 1731-1741. Rychalovskii outlines briefly the emergence and the functions of the Cabinet, and the increasing power of the Ministers. His thoroughly documented study moves on to examine the relations between the Cabinet, on the one hand, and the Senate, the Admiralty College, and the Siberian Office (*Sibirskii prikaz*), on the other.

Special attention is given to Osterman's personal role in launching and controlling the Expedition. The Okhotsk letters indicate that Bering and his wife were personally acquainted with Osterman. Rychalovskii's findings confirm the existence of a personal relationship, with Osterman acting initially as Bering's protector, but later assuming a more critical posture. An unrealized project to replace Bering as commander of the Expedition with Spangberg in 1740 seems to bear Osterman's imprint.

Archaeology is another new direction in the study of the Kamchatka Expeditions. At the workshop, Danish archaeologist Svend E. Albrethsen, a participant in the Danish-Russian expedition to Bering Island in 1991, gave the workshop an informal presentation with slides from the various stages of the archaeological work, the results of which included

the unearthing of Bering's skeleton.⁷ A further result of this discovery has been that the identity of the only known portrait of Vitus Bering, reproduced on the cover of this volume, is now being questioned by experts in forensic medicine who claim that the excavated skull does not match the proportions of the portrait's face. Reconstructions on the basis of the skull have led to the appearance of new experimental images of Bering in Russia.

Not only the visual image of Bering, but also the verbal ones, have been subjects to change. Peter Ulf Møller's article is a comparative study of the images of Bering in Russian and in Danish historiography of the Expeditions, in their order of appearance, from the eighteenth century through the twentieth. Russian historiography has, most broadly speaking, been divided between praising the Expeditions' achievements and criticising their foreign leadership. This contradiction in terms, or "voprekizm" ("in-spite-of-ness"), to use a term from Soviet literary criticism, became an important indication of political correctness under post-war Stalinism, when the ideological struggle against "cosmopolitanism" also made itself felt in what was being written about the Expeditions. Unsurprisingly and probably without exception, Danish historiography is well-disposed towards the Danish sailor who became a famous explorer in the Russian service. Danish writers find favourable interpretations of the few, crucial episodes that usually provide the starting point for more critical renderings of Bering.

The author of the article is hopeful that further publications of archival documents will cast further light on Bering's activities and take creators of his future images beyond the current stereotypes. After all, few sailors have written as much as Bering did, albeit that most of his writing was in bureaucratic prose.

The professors from the Academy of Sciences who travelled with the Second Expedition, were, of course, far more prolific writers than Bering. The study of their output, both published and unpublished, and the publication or republication of parts of it, forms another distinct direction in recent work on the Expedition. Six of the contributions to this volume may be seen as parts of this process.

The first is by Dittmar Dahlmann, who recently edited an abbreviated and annotated new edition of Johann Georg Gmelin's four volumes of *Reise durch Sibirien von dem Jahre 1733-1743*, originally published in Göttingen 1751-52.⁸ His essay on Gmelin and the Second Kamchatka Expedition provides an introduction to the Academic detachment, its

members and tasks, as well as to the “methodisation” of scientific journeys, of which the Kamchatka Expedition was “the first highlight”, marking the beginning of the era of expeditions. The focus of the essay is, however, on the “inner structure” of the expedition, including differences in goals, social, economic and cultural backgrounds, and salaries among the participants. It offers a key to understanding the many personal conflicts that marred the great undertaking.

Dahlmann argues convincingly that “the people involved here had hierarchies in their heads, and attempted to magnify their glory, their reputation and their survival”. He refuses to call the problems that the German scholar Georg Wilhelm Steller had with Bering and his naval officers during the American voyage “a tragic conflict”. Instead, they were an inevitable and necessary argument between people pursuing different goals and interests. The governmental institutions in charge of the expedition never paid any serious attention to these conflicts. But recent scholarship does, as Fedorova’s essay also shows.

Professor Gmelin was responsible for natural history research within the Academic detachment. No less important was his colleague and compatriot, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, responsible for ethnography and history, including the history of the expedition itself. Müller left an enormous collection of manuscripts. A considerable part of them (though not all) are in Müller’s personal archive (fond 21) in the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (PFA RAN). Another important depository for Müller documents is the RGADA in Moscow.

At the time of the workshop, Vladimir S. Sobolev was still director of the PFA RAN in St. Petersburg. His paper offers a very useful overview of the contents of the Müller archive. Roughly one-third of the 1,250 files relate to the Second Kamchatka Expedition. Sobolev is now Director of the Navy Archive (RGAVMF), also in St. Petersburg. He has been very active in international co-operation on publication projects and is co-founder with Wieland Hintzsche of the German-Russian publication series *Quellen zur Geschichte Sibiriens und Alaskas aus russischen Archiven*, published in Halle and Moscow.

Gudrun Bucher has been using material from the Müller Archive at PFA RAN, St. Petersburg to study the ethnographical dimension of the Academician’s work. During the Second Kamchatka Expedition Müller was to describe the many different Siberian peoples. In his efforts to accomplish this task in a systematic way, he eventually compiled a

list of no fewer than 923 questions to be answered in each description of an aboriginal Siberian people. The questionnaire was set down by Müller in an instruction of 1740 to Johann Eberhard Fischer, who was being sent out from St. Petersburg to replace him as historian with the Expedition.

As Bucher sees it, the Second Kamchatka Expedition's contribution to the development of ethnography as a separate science has been much neglected in the history of ethnography so far. In fact, Müller had created the new science, later to be called ethnography. Only the name was missing, although Müller came quite close by using the German term "Völker-Beschreibung". Bucher is also the author of a recently published doctoral dissertation on Müller and ethnography.⁹

Aleksandr Khr. Elert has also been to the archives to study Müller's documents. He is the author of several books and articles on Müller and the indigenous peoples of Siberia, including his doctoral dissertation.¹⁰ The present article is based on Müller's unfinished "Description of the Siberian Peoples" and other unpublished ethnographic works in RGADA that have not previously been the object of scientific investigation.

Russian contacts with different Siberian peoples took various forms. Elert's article reminds us of the vastness of Siberia by focusing on regional differences in the ways in which the Russian colonisers and the indigenous peoples of Siberia met and lived with each other. Müller's ethnographic works throw historical light on this important question. Unlike his "History of Siberia" (published in parts), where the relations between the Russians and the Siberian aborigines are seen only from the Russian side, they testify to his detailed understanding of the other side as well. Müller also understood that the Russian side was not the same everywhere, and that the specific composition of the Russian population in different places was important. In Müller's opinion, however, only the Russian peasants exercised a "civilising" and useful influence on the aborigines.

Dittmar Dahlmann's second contribution to our volume is also on Müller. It introduces his personal correspondences with two learned friends, the mathematician Leonhard Euler and the geographer Anton Friedrich Büsching, one during and one after the Second Kamchatka Expedition. Both correspondences provide a variety of interesting, curious, and often surprising information about the three distinguished letter writers. Everyday expedition life appears in glimpses, and we also learn about the academic discussions that arose in Europe when

information about the Second Kamchatka Expedition eventually began to leak out of Russia.

Though only a junior member of the Academic Detachment, Steller may well be the most widely known of the German scholars on the expedition as he actually travelled with Bering, accompanying him on his last voyage, to Alaska. He was also a prolific writer. His diary from the American voyage, edited by Pallas and published posthumously in 1793, gave a highly readable eyewitness account with dramatic highlights such as the wreck of Bering's ship on an unknown island and the Captain-Commander's death.¹¹ The whole adventurous voyage was narrated with vigour and even passion, and harsh judgements were passed on fellow travellers. Müller's earlier, more scholarly account seems very buttoned-up by comparison.

Neither Pallas' edition, nor the earlier, also posthumous publication of Steller's description of Kamchatka,¹² exhaust Steller's body of writing. Wieland Hintzsche, editor-in-chief of the publication series *Quellen zur Geschichte Sibiriens und Alaskas aus russischen Archiven* mentioned above, has been tracking down original Steller documents in Russian archives for years. His workshop paper gives an overview of Steller's travel journal. There is evidence that Steller kept a journal from his departure from St. Petersburg in 1737 to his return to Kamchatka from Bering Island in 1742, and perhaps even up to his departure from Kamchatka. Several parts of it have been found, but not all. Hintzsche, in co-operation with others, has published several volumes of Steller's literary remains.¹³

Natasha Okhotina Lind's second contribution is partly an article, partly a publication of archival material. It takes us into a fateful period in the study of the Kamchatka Expeditions in the Soviet Union, when the recreation of the past was most directly affected by events in the present. It examines the grandiose academic plans to mark the bicentenary of Bering's death in December 1941, which were upset by Hitler's attack in June. It also looks at a prominent Russian scholar in this field, the historian A.I. Andreev, who was arrested in 1929 in connection with the infamous "Academic trial", on the basis of charges fabricated by the OGPU, and was exiled to Siberia until 1935. His published work includes the much admired 1940 edition of the account of the Second Kamchatka Expedition by Bering's lieutenant, the Swede Sven Waxell.¹⁴ Many of Andreev's works about Siberia and the Kamchatka Expeditions were never published, but some have been preserved in Andreev's personal archive in the St. Petersburg branch of

the Academy Archive (PFA RAN). Lind reproduces his outline for a large unpublished anthology of documents. After the war scholars had to take new ideological guidelines into consideration. Lind's publication of two readers' *dicta* on a rejected book by S.I. Baskin, provides samples of the academic atmosphere under post-war Stalinism.

The Addenda section provides an English rendering, as noted, of the Bering family's private letters from Okhotsk in February 1740, by Anna Halager. In addition, it contains a bibliography on Bering and the Kamchatka Expeditions, compiled by Peter Ulf Møller.

Natasha Okhotina Lind

Peter Ulf Møller

Notes

- 1 Held at the University of Copenhagen 4-5 December 1998, with 21 registered participants from Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland, and the United States, and funded by the Carlsberg Foundation as part of a research grant.
- 2 The workshop also benefited from papers by Rudolf Mumenthaler-Stofer, Sigurd Rambusch, Han F. Vermeulen, and Christiaan Zandt, from informal presentations by Svend E. Albrethsen, Jan Oelker, and Ulli Wannhoff, and from the active participation of Hans Bagger, James R. Gibson, Anna Halager, and Keith Hill.
- 3 By Aleksandr Elert and Dittmar Dahlman, both on G.F. Müller, and Natasha Okhotina Lind, on A.I. Andreev.
- 4 In: Natasha Okhotina Lind & Peter Ulf Møller (1997) *Kommandøren og konen. Arkivfund om danske deltagere i Vitus Berings ekspeditioner*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. The Okhotsk Letters were transcribed from the German manuscript and translated into Danish by Leif Hernø.
- 5 Т.С. Федорова (отв. сост.) (1984) *Русские экспедиции по изучению северной части Тихого океана в первой половине XVIII в. Сборник документов* (= Исследования русских на Тихом океане в XVIII - первой половине XIX в.), Москва.
- 6 Покровский, А. (ред.) (1941) *Экспедиция Беринга, сборник документов*, Москва.
- 7 Cf. Albrethsen, Svend E. (1993) "Vitus Bering's second Kamchatka expedition — the journey to America and archaeological excavations on Bering Island", in: Jacobsen, N. Kingo (ed) *Vitus Bering 1741-1991*, English edition. Copenhagen (= Kulturgeografiske skrifter, bd. 13, nr. 2), pp. 66-96.

- 8 Gmelin, Johann Georg (1999) *Expedition ins unbekannte Sibirien* (= Fremde Kulturen in alten Berichten, Band 7). Herausgegeben, eingeleitet und erläutert von Dittmar Dahlmann, Sigmaringen.
- 9 Gudrun Bucher (2002) *“Von Beschreibung der Sitten und Gebräuche der Völker”*: die Instruktionen Gerhard Friedrich Müllers und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Ethnologie und der Geschichtswissenschaft, Stuttgart (= Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa, 63).
- 10 Элерт, А.Х. (1999) *Народы Сибири в трудах Г.Ф. Миллера*, Новосибирск.
- 11 Steller, Georg Wilhelm (1793) *Reise von Kamtschatka nach Amerika mit dem Commandeur-Capitän Bering...*, Ed. Peter Simon Pallas, St. Petersburg.
- 12 Steller, Georg Wilhelm (1774) *Beschreibung von dem Lande Kamtschatka*, Frankfurt und Leipzig.
- 13 Штеллер, Георг Вильгельм (1998) *Письма и документы 1740*. Ред. коллегия тома Виланд Хинтцше, Томас Николь, Ольга Владимировна Новохатко. Москва (= Источники по истории Сибири и Аляски из российских архивов, том I).
Steller, Georg Wilhelm (2000) *Briefe und Dokumente 1740*. Herausgegeben von Wieland Hintzsche, Thomas Nickol und Ol'ga Vladimirovna Novochatko, Halle (= Quellen zur Geschichte Sibiriens und Alaskas aus russischen Archiven, Band I).
Steller, Georg Wilhelm, Stepan Krašeninnikov, Johann Eberhard Fischer (2000) *Reisetagebücher 1735 bis 1743*. Bearb. von Wieland Hintzsche unter Mitarbeit von Thomas Nickol, Ol'ga Vladimirovna Novochatko, Dietmar Schulze, Halle (= Quellen zur Geschichte Sibiriens und Alaskas aus russischen Archiven, Band II).
Steller, Georg Wilhelm (2001) *Briefe und Dokumente 1739*. Bearb. von Wieland Hintzsche unter Mitarbeit von Thomas Nickol, Ol'ga Vladimirovna Novochatko, Dietmar Schulze, Halle (= Quellen zur Geschichte Sibiriens und Alaskas aus russischen Archiven, Band III).
- 14 Ваксель, Свен (1940) *Вторая камчатская экспедиция Витуса Беринга*. Под редакцией А.И. Андреева. Перевод с рукописи на немецком языке Ю.И. Бронштейна, Ленинград – Москва.