



FOREWORD

BY *Bruce Grant*

IN 1889, LEV SHTERNBERG, a Russian law student who had been exiled to Sakhalin Island for his participation in an anti-tsarist terrorist organization, met a Gilyak man on the street in the small Sakhalin town of Aleksandrovsk. "I saw a disheveled Gilyak shaman," he entered in his fieldnotes, "with matted gray hair and a strange cordial smile. Small boys surrounded him, shouting 'Look at the old shaman, he'll tell your fortune!'"¹ Shternberg didn't know how to respond, but he remembered the shaman's expression as he walked by. So began one of Russia's most famous ethnographic encounters. From that first meeting, Shternberg went on to produce a corpus of writing on Gilyak life that easily compares to Franz Boas' "five-foot shelf" on the Kwakiutl and Bronislaw Malinowski's epics from the Trobriands. Like his foreign colleagues, he has enjoyed the reputation as a famous ancestor for the generations of anthropologists he trained and influenced. Yet, looking back on Shternberg's work today, what perhaps stands out is not even just what he wrote, but how his work has come to mean so many different things to so many. Shternberg's *Social Organization of the Gilyak*, his most extensive work in English translation, began as a spirited defense of the idea of group marriage first put forth by the American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan. To Shternberg's students and colleagues in late imperial and early Soviet Russia, it became a model ethnography for a nascent field. For Soviet social engineers in an age of rising Stalinism, it became a chronicle of everything that needed to be eradicated from Gilyak life. And for Gilyaks themselves, Shternberg's *Social Organization* articulated with strange prescience a politics of primitive communism that influenced how others viewed them for decades.

Who was Lev Shternberg? Born in a small town in Ukraine in 1861, he began his career in the radical Russian movement, Narodnaia Volia [The People's Will], advocating violence in the service of the Russian socialist cause. When banished for his activism to Sakhalin Island on Russia's Pacific coast in 1889, he turned exile to advantage in 8 years of ethnographic research. Together with colleagues Vladimir Bogoraz and Vladimir Iokhel'son, he became a popularizer of the long-standing but little-known Russian tradition of protracted, polyglot field studies. He was a scholar

¹ Shternberg, *Giliaki, orochi, gol'dy, negidal'tsy, ainy* (Khabarovsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatels'tvo, 1933), xiii.

of kinship, religion, and psychology. A passionate and charismatic teacher, he trained the Soviet Union's first generation of ethnographers. An energetic institution builder, he oversaw the transformation of St. Petersburg's Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the *Kunstkamera*) into one of the world's leading ethnographic collections. So, at the turn of the century, when American anthropologist Franz Boas was looking to build the publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902), it was not surprising that the St. Petersburg museum recommended Shternberg as one of their most promising ethnographers.

The Jesup Expedition, organized in early 1897, was named after its leading patron, the American banker Morris Jesup. One of the late, great expeditions of American anthropology, and surely one of the most ambitious, it was the first to investigate the origins of Amerindian peoples by drawing on ethnographic data from both the Russian and American North Pacific Rim.² Though the primary expeditions had already been funded, Boas was looking for an ethnographer to write on Sakhalin and the Amur when Shternberg came to the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1905. He and Boas struck a deal. Shternberg was to write a book based on his 1890s fieldwork among Sakhalin and Amur Gilyaks, a little-known group of just under 5000 people. It was an agreement that outlasted the first target publication date of 1907, and an agreement that outlasted both men. Delayed at first by the slow pace of writing and revision, *The Social Organization of the Gilyak* navigated its way through Shternberg's active work in Russian Jewish rights, World War I, the October Revolution, the Russian Civil War, Shternberg's death in 1927, funding strains at the American Museum of Natural History in the 1930s, Boas' death in 1942, and finally a Cold War that did little to permit the international scholarship that had given the Jesup Expedition its original verve. Nine decades, eight editors, and eleven translators later, Shternberg's English language text comes to light in this volume.³

Shternberg's *Social Organization*, then as now, began as a central contribution to North Asian ethnography, but in its theory and argument it came to represent much more than that. When Shternberg was first sent to Sakhalin in 1889, he had gained a cursory education in kinship theory and evolutionism from a fellow prison inmate in Odessa who had read him aloud Friedrich Engels' book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The book was a detailed commentary on American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan's work on kinship systems and the rise of civilization, and its influence over Shternberg lasted throughout his career. When Shternberg began his studies of the local Gilyak population on Sakhalin in 1891, he wrote excitedly to his friend Moisei Krol', "I've found a kinship terminology and clan system just like that of the Iroquois and the famous Punalua family of the Sandwich Islands, in a word, remains of the marriage form Morgan based his theory on At first I was scared to believe it . . . but as I went from yurta to yurta and from family to family making my census, I asked everyone

² Stanley Freed et al., "Capitalist Philanthropy and Russian Revolutionaries: The Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902)," *American Anthropologist* 90 (1988), 7–24.

³ For a full listing of participants in the editing of the manuscript since 1905, see the archival correspondence in appendix A.

how various kin members are called and who has rights to whom. Then I became convinced."⁴

From his fieldnotes, it is clear that Shternberg was excited by his discovery, one that eventually led him on a theoretical excursion through the rise of restricted cross-cousin marriage.⁵ Scholars from Morgan to Rivers to Engels and Freud had postulated an evolutionary paradigm of human social organization, beginning with incest, leading to a generalized "cousin marriage" or "sister-exchange," and later to the kind of more complex systems such as the form of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage Shternberg describes in this volume (see especially Chapter 8). With Morgan's theories of group marriage coming under attack, first from the Scottish juror J. S. McLennan in the 1890s and later more subtly from Boas himself, Shternberg saw the *Social Organization* manuscript as a detailed defense of Morgan's arguments. As Shternberg writes in Chapter 9 of this volume, "What Morgan based on speculation, we find fully realized among the Gilyak." He offered an emblematic illustration of the role of the mother's brother in the generalized exchange of women, and an early milestone in the development of prescriptive alliance theory.

For these reasons, the publication of Shternberg's manuscript is all to the good. But what actually did Shternberg discover? To be sure, in Shternberg's time, Gilyaks used formal terms of address that were complex enough to confuse even themselves, and that required a lifetime for mastery. But did this constitute, in the very confident way we find in *Social Organization*, such a juridical edifice? As David Schneider once wrote, whether we are reading Evans-Pritchard or Lévi-Strauss, Meyer Fortes or Edmund Leach, the tremendous constructedness of the kinship idiom rarely comes into play.

Fortes says quite clearly that for the Tallensi the ideology of kinship is so dominant that all other modes of relationship are assimilated to that ideology. Leach affirms that kinship is not a thing in itself but rather a way of thinking about the rights and usages with respect to land for the villages of Pul Eliya. They were there. They saw it. They talked to the natives. But just what did Fortes and Leach and Evans-Pritchard actually see and hear?⁶

Schneider's work, along with other critiques of kinship that followed Rodney Needham's cardinal 1971 collected volume, has not diminished kinship's role within anthropological thought so much as return us to the roots of kinship studies as a metaphor for anthropology itself.⁷ Reading Shternberg today, a hundred years after

⁴ Shternberg, *Giliaki*, xii.

⁵ AAN RF PF [Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, Petersburg branch, hereafter AAN] f. 282, o. 1, d. 120/1–14.

⁶ David Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1984), 3.

⁷ Rodney Needham, ed., *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (London: Tavistock, 1971). Some recent critiques of the anthropological study of kinship include Jane Collier and Sylvia Yanagisako, eds. *Gender and Kinship: Essays toward a Unified Analysis* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987); James Faubion, "Kinship Is Dead. Long Live Kinship," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996), 67–91; Jack Goody, *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive: Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-Industrial Societies of Asia* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); and Schneider, *A Critique*.



FIG. 1. Lev Shternberg in exile, photographed on Sakhalin by prison authorities upon his arrival in 1889. Courtesy of the Sakhalin State Archive.

that would eventually greatly influence Shternberg. Before and after the emancipation, the Russian writers Aleksandr Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevskii sent thousands of urban intelligentsia, “critically thinking people,” peregrinating across the Russian countryside to appreciate, and more importantly educate, Russia’s “soulful” peasantry. The belief was that these encounters between city and country [*khozheniia v narod*] would strengthen and advance Russia’s famous tradition of communal organization, the peasant *mir*.¹¹ By the 1870s, Russia’s urban intellectual classes took to the countryside in unprecedented numbers, with over 200 groups from European Russia’s 51 administrative regions [*guberniia*] taking part in this rural invasion in 1874 alone. However, the urban activists were divided over both goal and method, and by the end of the 1870s, two distinct factions had formed. One favored working through small-scale, incremental gestures advanced by propagandists living in local villages, while another militated for higher profile political acts against the state in

¹¹ Nikolai Troitskii, “Druz’ia naroda ili besy?” *Rodina* 2 (1996), 69.

the cities.¹² Shternberg and Krol' inherited both of these traditions when they joined the movement's second faction, Narodnaia Volia [The People's Will], upon entering St. Petersburg University in 1881, months after the group had made an attempt on the life of Tsar Aleksandr II.

Historians have looked back upon Narodnaia Volia through many lenses. Early Bolshevik revolutionaries embraced their use of violence in the defense of the working class, whereas imperial Russian liberals saw them as noble but quixotic men of dangerous means.¹³ Notably, however, as Christoph Gassenschmidt has argued, the group also served as a channel for Jewish political activism; up to 25 percent of Narodnaia Volia membership in some regions was of Jewish origin, and five out of the seven leaders of the movement were prominent Jewish activists.¹⁴ Although the government tracked the group's membership at 500, mostly in Ukraine and along the Volga, its real numbers were likely 10–20 times that, with police records counting over 8000 arrests of the group's members between 1881 and 1883 alone.¹⁵

Along with a young Vladimir (Natan) Bogoraz, Shternberg and Krol' became members of Narodnaia Volia's "Central Student Circle" in 1881. Yet, by 1882, the movement was already in decline under government siege. By the end of their first year in St. Petersburg, police sent Shternberg and Krol' back to Ukraine for having participated in student demonstrations. Shternberg enrolled in law at Novorossiisk University in Odessa a year later, continuing to rise within the movement's ranks and becoming editor of its journal, *Vestnik Narodnoi Voli*.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 69. Both sides in the 1870s successor movement to Herzen, Zemlia i Volia [Land and Will] had their detractors: Local village policemen had little trouble identifying and arresting the outside agitators because "they were the only village residents who would neither drink nor take bribes"; their urban counterparts had different trouble maintaining secrecy because of the more sensational resistance acts they advocated. Troitskii explains that when the two groups broke off in 1879, forming Chernyi Peredel [Black Partition] and Narodnaia Volia [The People's Will], the first took *zemlia* while the second took *volia*.

¹³ Ibid., 67. One of the most detailed accounts of the participation of Shternberg, Krol' and Bogoraz in Narodnaia Volia is found in Erich E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), ch. 11. See also V. A. Malinin, *Filosofia revoliutsionnogo narodnichestva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972); V. A. Tvardovskaia, "People's Will," *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* 17 (New York: MacMillan, 1983), 617–618; Christoph Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900–1914: The Modernization of Russian Jewry* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1995); Daniel Brower, *Training the Nihilists* (Ithaca, N Y: Cornell, 1975); Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (New York: Viking, 1980); and Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Knopf, 1960). Hilda Hoogenboom takes a particularly productive look at the question of genre in Vera Figner's Narodnaia Volia memoirs. See Hoogenboom, "Vera Figner and Revolutionary Autobiographies: The Influence of Gender on Genre," in Rosalind Marsh, ed., *Women in Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 78–92.

¹⁴ Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics*, 5.

¹⁵ Troitskii, "Druz'ia naroda," 70.

¹⁶ Chuner Mikhailovich Taksami, "Issledovatel', drug i uchitel' nivkhov," in Ivan A. Senchenko, ed., *Issledovатели Sakhalina i Kuril* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1961), 108. For an example of Shternberg's most provocative political writing at this time, see his "Politicheskii terror v Rossii 1884," in Boris Sapir, ed., *Lavrov—Years of Emigration*, Vol. 2 (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1974), 572–594.

For Shternberg the risks in such work were evident. Between 1879 and 1883, amidst thousands of arrests, the government held over 70 trials to indict Narodnaia Volia members, sending some 2000 people to prison. Authorities arrested Shternberg himself in April of 1886 after police exposed an elderly female street vendor he had recruited for the distribution of literature.¹⁷ Shternberg spent 3 years in the Odessa Central Prison before the court sentenced him to 10 years of exile on Sakhalin Island.

Shternberg's prison diaries from the years 1887 and 1888, 14 notebooks now preserved in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, are documents that astonish for the range of acquired languages and literatures occupying Shternberg while in confinement.¹⁸ Long passages in Russian, Yiddish, English, and French, interspersed with Italian vocabulary lists, fill the pages stamped by prison censors. Many of Shternberg's entries are excerpts from Shakespeare, Milton, Mill, Machiavelli, and, perhaps all too aptly for his imminent sentencing, *Robinson Crusoe*.¹⁹ By the tone of the entries, the prison years were a painful, introspective period that recalled his childhood in Zhitomir as formative for his later intellectual life. Shternberg wrote,

My education was an imperfect one, though my family gave me more than I could ever absorb. From the ages of five to twelve, I studied the Hebrew language and religion. These years were decisive. I was deprived of all joys of youth, and the lasting impressions of these years are moral ones. Conversations on morality and learning were among the only I had. Sad and hollow . . . Instead of novels, I studied philosophy and history, creating a chasm between myself and my school friends. I condemned them, and in turn was mocked by them. Even those that liked me took issue with my company, for I was strange to all . . . That position imbued me with an inexpressible bitterness.²⁰

¹⁷ Krol', "Vospominaniia," 229.

¹⁸ AAN f. 282, o. 1, d. 120/1–14.

¹⁹ Although Shternberg excerpted the first and best known of Daniel Defoe's *Crusoe* voyages, *The Wonderful Life and Surprising Adventures of the Renowned Hero Robinson Crusoe* (Philadelphia: Cist, 1789), Defoe sent *Crusoe* through the Tatar Strait and up the Amur River en route to China in his second volume, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1925 [1790]).

²⁰ AAN f. 282, o. 1, d. 120/12, l. 1–3ob. Although Shternberg wrote this entry, as some others, in his own English, possibly to seek privacy from prison censors, I have modified the original text to avoid grammatical confusion. The original extract reads:

My education was very imperfect, though from my kindred I received more than was possible to acquire. From five, close to age of twelve years, I studied the Hebrew tongue and theology. These years have decided all my future. I was bereaved of all joys of youth, and the single impressions of these years were moral beliefs. Therefore, ideas of morality and learning grew to me as real things. All conversations of that time had one topic. Sad and hollow. Sad and fitting. When my fellows threw the ball and found delight in fantastical tales, my mind required a more hard enjoyment, the rigors of contemplating. Instead of novels, I studied philosophy and history. This had thrown an impassable abyss between me and my school fellows. I condemned them, and was in turn mocked by them. And even they that esteemed me, they could not find a delight in my society, for I was strange to all . . . That position imbued me with an inexpressible bitterness.

actively colonizing since the 15th century. However, these literal and metaphoric distances turned against the local island populations in the latter half of the century when the tsarist administration saw in Sakhalin the perfect outpost for its growing exiled population. Officials began considering the penal colony idea in 1870, and by 1881 had established the island prison system. The tsar accorded Sakhalin its own governor, and from 1884 onward over 1000 exiles were shipped to Sakhalin each year. "By 1888 Sakhalin had become," in the words of George Kennan, "the largest and most important penal establishment in Siberia."²⁶ Indeed, although exiles were banished all across Siberia during the tsarist and Soviet periods, often to places even farther than Sakhalin, such as Chukotka or Kamchatka, the island's choppy seas and perceived isolation made it one of the most dreaded of exile destinations. Any man with a sentence of more than 2 years and 8 months could be sent to Sakhalin, as could any woman under the age of 40 with a sentence of 2 years or more. Exiled political agitators of any stripe were sent automatically.²⁷ The writer James McConkey notes that by the end of the 19th century Sakhalin had, through the eyes of its Russian prisoners, become synonymous with hopelessness, bestial callousness, moral depravity, obliteration of the self, despair, and miasma.²⁸

In March of 1889, Shternberg sailed from Odessa to Sakhalin on the ship *Peterburg*. Although Shternberg later posted a comforting letter to his parents about the voyage, Ossendowski's account of the passage he made on the same boat 16 years later offers us a stark description.

Russian ships used to sail from Odessa to the western shore of Sakhalin two or three times a year, ships that wore a strange appearance. No passengers were visible on the decks, only a dark flag with some letters on it flew at the masthead. If anyone could have boarded this mysterious ship near Colombo or Shanghai, he would have been struck by the sound of clanking chains and by the continuous buzz below decks that would have reminded him of some enormous bee-hive—only these bees were not free insects . . . This sea journey of these chained men and women shut up in iron cages recalled the most terrible scenes of *Dante's Inferno*. Storms at sea, heat under the tropics, cold in the North Pacific, dirt surpassing anything the most vivid imagination could picture, persecution of these helpless victims—all this took toll of their ranks by hundreds, a result considered desirable from the Government standpoint, as it diminished costs and saved trouble.²⁹

Upon his arrival in 1889, Shternberg's status was that of a political rather than criminal exile, which permitted him to reside in special housing in the small administrative town of Aleksandrovsk, though he joined other prisoners at hard labor during the days. However, by March of 1890, penal officials cited Shternberg's harmful ideological influence over other local exiles and relocated him to the remote

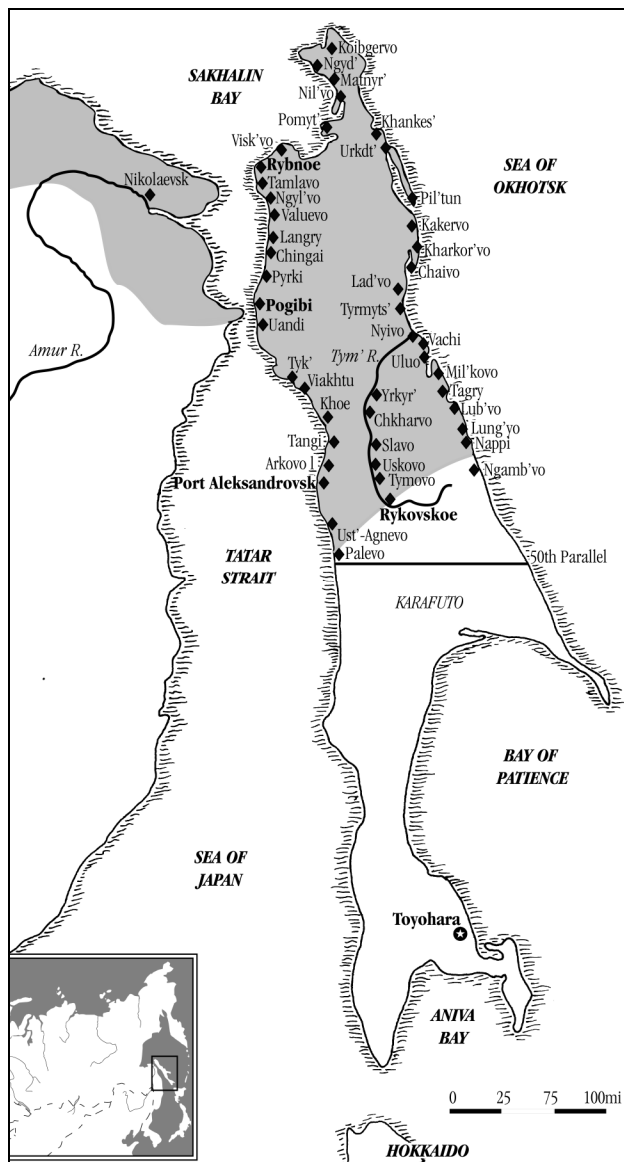
²⁶ Kennan in John Stephan, *Sakhalin—A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 68.

²⁷ Hawes, *In the Uttermost East*, 337.

²⁸ James McConkey, *To a Distant Island* (New York: Dutton, 1986), 154. For another of many examples, see also A. A. Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia* (St. Petersburg: I. D. Sykin, 1905), 1.

²⁹ Ossendowski, *Man and Mystery*, 223–224.

MAP 1. Sakhalin Island, 1905. Over the course of the 20th century, Gilyaks have numbered from 4000 to 5000 people living on North Sakhalin Island and the banks of the Amur River (shown in shaded areas). At the turn of the century, over 100 small Gilyak villages lined the shores and rivers of North Sakhalin where Shternberg did much of his Gilyak research. The largest of these settlements are shown here. Russian and Japanese regional centers are in bold. Following the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, the Treaty of Portsmouth divided Russia's North Sakhalin from Japan's Karafuto at the 50th Parallel. *Source:* GASO f. 511, o. 2, d. 150, 152.

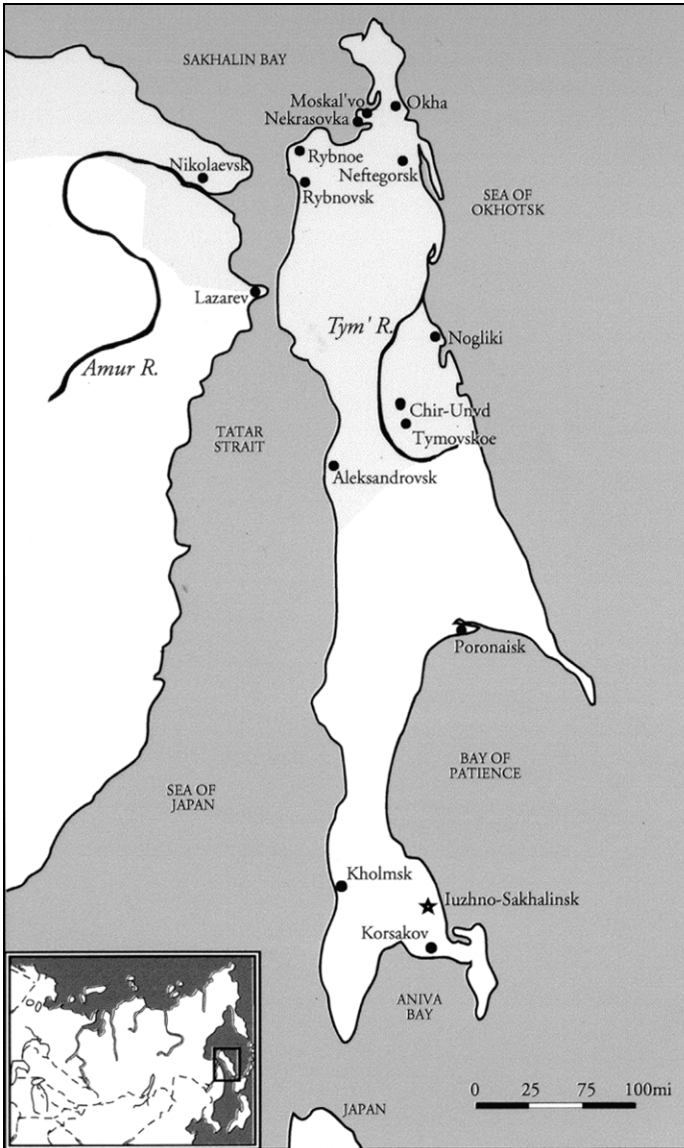


community of Viakhtu some 100 km north of Aleksandrovsk on the Tatar Strait.³⁰ That the playwright Anton Chekhov was known to be en route to Sakhalin at the same time, and that authorities were likely fearful of having Shternberg brief Chekhov on the finer points of the tsarist penal system, was an additional factor often later noted in Soviet writings.³¹

Viakhtu consisted of five houses for exiles who had finished their prison terms, and was a way station for Gilyaks traveling between the northwest coast and Aleksandrovsk. In his field diaries Shternberg described the small house where he lived under surveillance by imperial police officers as

³⁰ The town is now called Viakhta.

³¹ Nina Ivanovna Gagen-Torn, *L. Ia. Shternberg* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 28–30.



MAP 2. Sakhalin Island, 1995. The USSR reclaimed the southern half of Sakhalin at the close of World War II, further accelerating voluntary migration and involuntary displacement, now from north to south. Gilyak (Nivkh) villages, already diminished by Sovietizing relocation programs of the 1920s and the collectivization of the 1930s, were dealt a final blow when a massive resettlement program in the 1960s reduced the entire number of both Russian and Gilyak settlements across the island from 1000 to 329. The Gilyak (Nivkh) population, still stable from a century ago, is now concentrated in the towns of Okha, Nekrasovka, Rybnoe, Nogliki, Chir-Unvd, and Poronaisk. Shaded areas show traditional Nivkh territory.

a lonely abandoned grave in the empty taiga along the banks of the Tatar Strait The gloomy sky hung low over the snowy savanna, bordered by a thick fog, and beyond it, it seemed, was the end of the world, a kingdom of endless ice and gloom In the house [we were five—myself,] three former convicts turned officers and a military supervisor. Vigilantly they kept watch through a tiny window looking out onto the shore, thinking they might find a passerby or runaway convict The hope for them as for everyone was to win the curious three ruble prize for each fugitive captured.³²

³² Taksami, "Issledovatel'," 109–110.



FIG. 2. The house where Shternberg resided in Viakhta, Sakhalin Island, starting in 1891. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 162, l. 117.

"It was here," Shternberg wrote, "that I was ethnographically baptized." In his "Russian Palestine," "A grim land!" where the sea was "eternally stormy," and where the true inhabitants were "bears, powerful winds, punishing hellish blizzards and destructive hurricanes," Shternberg began his investigations of local Gilyak life.³³ Shternberg's Narodnaia Volia comrade-in-exile, Vladimir Bogoraz, himself sent to the Kolyma Peninsula, later coyly described Shternberg's decision to study Gilyak as "owing to the leisure time we all enjoyed then," underscoring the unlikely boost that banishment gave anthropology in Siberia as well as the Trobriand Islands.³⁴ However, it was more likely the practical interests of the Sakhalin administration, who saw in Shternberg's restlessness someone both to organize a census of the island's Gilyak population and appoint a network of native officials who would report to Aleksandrovsk authorities.³⁵ In February of 1891, the prison administration allowed Shternberg to undertake what would be the first of dozens of excursions to Gilyak communities across North Sakhalin.³⁶ It was a new kind of rural

³³ Cf. the Preface in this volume.

³⁴ Bogoraz correspondence cited from the Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow; hereafter GARF] f. 3977, o. 1, d. 279, l. 110. For a particularly good reading of Bogoraz's early fieldwork in Chukotka, see Igor Krupnik, "The Bogoraz Enigma," in Vaclav Hubinger, ed., *Anthropological Concepts in the Postmodern Era* (London: Routledge, 1996), 35–52.

³⁵ Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 112; "Dnevnik puteshestviia L. Ia. Shternberga" (1891), AAN f. 282, o. 1, d. 190, l. 48.

³⁶ Cf. the Preface in this volume; Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 22–23.

invasion [*khozhdenie v narod*] for Shternberg, but one for which he was ironically well suited, given the very Narodnaia Volia background for which he had been imprisoned.

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For Gilyaks, Shternberg arrived at a time when outside influences were widely restructuring their access to natural resources. Hunters and fishermen by tradition, the Gilyak population had never exceeded 5000, divided approximately between the Amur delta and North Sakhalin. Nevertheless, because of the river and coastal locations of their villages they had long been integrated into expansive trade networks with neighboring indigenous groups and the Amur mainland Manchurians. By the 1860s, they were clearly under new pressure to define their rights to resource use as Russian and Japanese fishing fleets began sparring over the prime waters. The arrival of fishing industrialists also introduced the additional draw of paid seasonal labor: Many Gilyaks were lured into taking disadvantageous salary advances and fell into considerable debt.³⁷

Although by the late 19th century some Gilyaks had begun to build Russian-style houses, the majority still lived a seminomadic life between summer and winter homes in order to exploit seasonal fishing and hunting grounds. The traditional Gilyak summer dwelling was a large one-room wooden cabin perched on posts 4–5 feet above the ground, whereas winter dwellings were partly underground to ensure warmth.³⁸ On Sakhalin, both shores of the northern portion of the island as well as the banks of the central Tym' and Poronai rivers were lined with Gilyak villages approximately every 5 km. Anywhere from one or two to 10 families constituted a village, with the maximum number of residents usually around 50. Almost every family kept a dog team for winter transport and shared narrow wooden log boats for navigating the hazardous coastal waters.

Fishing dominated the Gilyak economy in almost all respects. Summer was the busiest period, given the magnitude of the fish runs and the volume of salmon to be dried into *iukola* which would be the main food supply for the rest of the year. Winter, by contrast, they set aside for periodic hunting and almost constant socializing—as Shternberg wrote, “*dolce far niente*,” sweet doing nothing.³⁹ The Gilyak diet consisted of fresh or dried salmon, a variety of wild berries prepared plainly or in custards, and a range of products adopted from Japanese and Manchu traders, such as low-grade brick tea, millet, potatoes, sugar, alcohol, and tobacco. Traditional Gilyak clothing, in the form of tunics and pants for men and long tunic-style dresses for women, was made from a variety of textiles, including complexly crafted salmon-skin jackets. As with the clothing of other indigenous peoples of the Amur area, Gilyak designs borrowed heavily from local Chinese practices. Few if any Gilyaks were known to be literate, though many had practical knowledge of Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and

³⁷ Anna Vasil'evna Smoliak, *Etnicheskie protsessy u narodov Nizhnego Amura i Sakhalina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 161–182; and “Zametki po etnografii nivkhov Amurskogo Limana,” *Trudy Instituta Etnografii* 56 (1960), 96–98.

³⁸ In *Social Organization*, Shternberg refers to both as yurtas.

³⁹ Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 27.



FIG. 3. Shternberg drinking tea with Gilyaks, 1890s. *Source*: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 162, l. 119.

other languages for trading purposes. Although Shternberg expressed surprise at the number of Gilyaks who knew Russian, he worked largely in Gilyak, a language noted for its grammatical complexity. For example, it includes 26 ways of counting from 1 to 10 based on the spiritual and material qualities of the objects being counted. Linguists consider it to be so distinct as to have no known affiliation with another language.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that Gilyaks, as both Shternberg and later anthropologists observed, came the closest of any of the Far Eastern peoples in the 19th century to adopting Russian ways, late 19th century Russian Orthodox missionaries recorded few efforts to win Gilyak converts. Through to the early 20th century, reports suggest a Gilyak world view that remained animistic, recognizing four spirit masters presiding in turn over the Sky, the Hills, the Water, and Fire. Gilyaks recognized each of these figures through feeding rituals, such as a ritual feeding of the sea with tobacco and *mos'* (an aspic made from seal fat, fish skin, and berries) before commencing a sea expedition. By the same token, Gilyaks had a complex symbolic relationship with the animal world: Bears in particular were regarded as ritual kin and would often be kept in pens inside or alongside family homes for several years as visiting

⁴⁰ For analyses of the Gilyak (Nivkh) language, see the works of Robert Austerlitz, Bernard Comrie, Erukhim Abramovich (Iurii) Kreinovich, Galina Aleksandrovna Otaina, and Vladimir Z. Panfilov in the bibliography.

guests, culminating in a bear festival that marked the high point of the winter social season.

By virtue of language, clothing, systems of counting, and sheer physical appearance, there was much to set Gilyaks apart from the gradually expanding Russian community around them. Between bear sacrifice, shamanic healing rituals, and Gilyak forest feedings, there was much fodder for the nascent practice of ethnography, which my description only begins to touch upon here, and which has been so excellently treated elsewhere.⁴¹ However, what makes the literature on Gilyak life so striking—Shternberg's *Social Organization* being no exception—is the shifting tides of what counted as useful or important knowledge from one political era to another. This was perhaps most evident in the Soviet period, when Shternberg's posthumous editors published his careful work on the clan system "to ensure the liquidation of patriarchal clans."⁴² But with the regnant intellectual trends at the time of Shternberg's field research, it was Gilyak kinship structure and its implications for burgeoning socialist theories of egalitarian primitive society that rose to the fore.

GILYAKS AND GROUP MARRIAGE

By the time Shternberg arrived on Sakhalin in 1889, the American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan had set in motion a series of debates on the nature of classificatory kinship in his pathbreaking books *League of the Iroquois* (1851), *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871), and *Ancient Society* (1877). It was the last of these books, *Ancient Society*, that the Russian jurist Maksim Kovalevskii lent to Karl Marx, who made extensive notes on the book between before his death in 1883.⁴³ One year later, Engels published his and Marx's response to Morgan in the influential *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). While Shternberg states frequently in *Social Organization* that his goal was to test Morgan's hypotheses, it is nonetheless in the context of both Engels and late 19th century theories of group marriage that many of Shternberg's observations on Gilyak life can be understood.

Lewis Henry Morgan's first book, *League of the Iroquois*, grew out of his early commitment to the rights of local Iroquois populations in his native New York state. In this 1858 publication, he paid early attention to what he found to be a uniquely

⁴¹ Prior to Shternberg, the German ethnographer Leopold von Schrenck conducted a lengthy survey of Gilyak (Nivkh) life for the Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1859. The Polish scholar Bronislaw Pilsudskii (older brother of the Polish leader Iuzef) was a coeval in exile with Shternberg on Sakhalin. At the outset of the Soviet period one of Shternberg's graduate students, Erukhim Kreinovich, began what would become decades of research on Gilyak life; in the 1960s and 70s and 80s, there have been considerable contributions by Anna Smoliak, the Gilyak (Nivkh) ethnographer Chuner Taksami, and the collective of the Sakhalin Regional Museum. In the English language, Lydia Black put the 19th and 20th century Russian materials to excellent use in her monographs on Nivkh social organization and symbol systems. Bruce Grant has written on the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. See their works in the bibliography.

⁴² Shternberg, *Giliaki*, xxxvi.

⁴³ Lawrence Krader, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1974), 6; Lester Richard Hiatt, *Arguments about Aborigines* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 59.

integrative kinship terminology that Iroquois used to reach across clan affiliations. Morgan described Iroquois kin terms as “classificatory,” because entire groups of relatives, both lineal and collateral, could be classified as group “brothers” or group “sisters,” depending on the angle of relationship. Shortly after the book’s publication, however, Morgan found similar patterns among the Ojibwa of Lake Superior and excitedly began sending out questionnaires in preparation for a wide-scale comparison of kinship terminologies.⁴⁴

In 1871, Morgan’s ambitious *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* analyzed kinship systems set forth by the 139 respondents who had answered his call for data. The seeds of what soon came to be termed “group marriage” came in Morgan’s reflections upon “pínalúan” (or punaluan) sexual customs offered to him by Lorin Andrews, a judge of the Supreme Court of Hawaii. Andrews had written, “The relationship of *pínalúa* is rather amphibious. It arose from the fact that two or more brothers, with their wives, or two or more sisters with their husbands, were inclined to possess each other in common; but the modern use of the word is that of *dear friend*, an intimate companion.”⁴⁵ Andrews offered Morgan a conjectural solution to the “mystery of Hawaiian kinship” that Shternberg would later see by analogy among Gilyaks—how it was that all males and females of a man’s parents’ generation could be “fathers” and “mothers,” how so many members of his own generation could be “brothers” and “sisters,” and so on. Morgan’s conclusion that these terms were survivals of an earlier age of promiscuity was a milestone in thinking on evolution. Here was a stage of marital development

Older in point of time than polygamy and polyandria, and yet involving the essential features of both. The several brothers, who thus cohabited with each other’s wives, lived in polygynia; and the several sisters, who thus cohabited with each other’s husbands, lived in polyandria. It also presupposes *communal families*, with communism in living, which, there are abundant reasons for supposing, were very general in the primitive ages of mankind; and one of the stages through which human society passed before reaching the family in its proper sense, founded upon marriage between single pairs.⁴⁶

In print, Morgan was cautious with his evolutionism. His stages in the development of the family were “landmarks of experience” known to varying degrees among different peoples of the world.⁴⁷ Yet many readers saw simpler, unilineal development upon finding his cardinal list of 15 stages of family life in *Systems*, beginning with “Promiscuous Intercourse” and continuing through “The Intermarriage or Cohabitation of Brothers and Sisters” to “The Civilized Family” and, finally, “The

⁴⁴ Hiatt, *Arguments*, 36–38.

⁴⁵ Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1871), 453n, original emphasis. For Morgan’s fuller account of the Hawaiian case, see *Systems*, 451–458; and Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 427–428. For a concise discussion of the Punaluan category as an example of Morgan’s nonsymbolic logic, see Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), 58–59.

⁴⁶ Morgan, *Systems*, 457, original emphasis.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 479.



FIG. 4. A young Gilyak couple, 1890s. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 162.

Overthrow of the Classificatory System of Relationship, and the Substitution of the Descriptive."⁴⁸ In doing so, Morgan joined the conjecture put forth by Bachofen, Maine, Lubbock, and McLennan that the earliest forms of human society were found in a promiscuous horde.⁴⁹

In his next book, *Ancient Society*, group marriage emerged more clearly as a explanation for kin terms that tied certain societies to these developmental stages. After meeting with Darwin, Morgan had begun to think of family structures as evidence for different stages in human social evolution.⁵⁰ He assigned group marriage to the period of savagery; a loose pairing arrangement between husband and wife to the period of barbarism; and the monogamy hegemonic today to mankind's later rise of civilization.

In his 1884 response to Morgan, Engels streamlined Morgan's analyses into a more trenchant indictment of the rise of bourgeois patriarchy. While Morgan concentrated primarily on the first two stages of savagery and barbarism, Engels focused on the civilizing process and how family relations intersected with the rise of private property concepts. Whereas in savagery and barbarism descent was often matrilineal, Engels argued that civilization, by contrast, promoted patrilineal descent through monogamy. When descent was traced through the female line, Engels reasoned, paternity, or more specifically, precise rules of material inheritance, could not be firmly held. "Once it had passed into the private possession of families and there rapidly begun to augment, this wealth dealt a severe blow to the society founded on pairing marriage and the matriarchal gens," Engels wrote. "Monogamous marriage comes on

⁴⁸ Ibid., 480.

⁴⁹ Krader, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, 63.

⁵⁰ Darwin's role in the work of Morgan and later Engels was nonetheless a passive one. Reeling from the social arguments being drawn from his work, Darwin reacted in horror when Marx proposed dedicating *Das Kapital* to him. See Maurice Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 5; and Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988).

the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other."⁵¹ While modern states presented themselves as products of natural social evolution—"the image and reality of reason," as Hegel said—Engels countered that states were products of society that bound up specific interests in the accumulation of private wealth by a few, and that families governed under a patriarchal system of monogamy served that end.⁵² Nonetheless, in order to demonstrate that the bourgeois state was a temporary formation, Marx and Engels were in need of other formations since gone by. For this they prized Morgan's catalog of primitive life.

Many scholars have observed that although there was little to explain how patrilineal descent accounts for property more accurately than matrilineal descent, the details counted less than the framework. "What mattered to Marx and Engels," Maurice Bloch wrote, "was not so much the specific history which had produced these concepts, but the fact that they had a history at all, that the concepts depended on the type of society and economy in which they occurred."⁵³ Indeed, the most salient part of Engels' book might have been the title, where the rise of family, private property, and the state could all be tied to *one* origin, monogamy.

* * * * *

Where did Gilyaks fit into all of this? Like many indigenous peoples across Siberia in the late 19th century, clan affiliation structured a great deal of Gilyak political, economic, social, and religious life. There were roughly two dozen active clans among Sakhalin Gilyaks during Shternberg's 8 years there. While only one clan or lineage ideally prevailed in a given village, in practice mixed settlements had made the system more complex by the late 1800s. Shternberg's descriptions of the Gilyak kinship system were famously labyrinthine: Gilyaks were exogamous in that they married only outside their lineage in a complex system of reciprocities that bound together, in Gilyak terms, the wife-givers and the wife-takers.⁵⁴ But what made Gilyaks unique, Shternberg claimed, was a triangulated system of marital exchange, based on a tri-clan phratry or alliance group (from the Gilyak, *pandf*) that underwrote a complex web of mutual social and economic obligations.⁵⁵ Following Morgan's terminology, Shternberg charted Gilyak kin relations under the heading of "group marriage,"

⁵¹ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State: In Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 119, 128.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵³ Bloch, *Marxism*, 94.

⁵⁴ Shternberg's cardinal writings on Gilyak kinship are in this volume, as well as in *Giliaki*, 30–45, 81–246, and *Sem'ia*, passim. Smoliak, *Etnicheskie protsessy*, 76–88, 150–167 and 222, is an excellent Russian review. The clearest analyses in English are in Lydia Black, "Dogs, Bears and Killer Whales: An Analysis of the Nivkh Symbolic System," Ph.D. diss., Univ. Massachusetts, Amherst, 1973, ch. 4; Lydia Black, "Relative Status of Wife Givers and Wife Takers in Gilyak Society" *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 5 (1972), 1244–1248; and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), ch. 14. For an example of the variety of ways people put a similar social form into practice, see R. H. Barnes' excellent study, *Kédang: A Study in the Collective Thought of an Eastern Indonesian People* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), chs. 14–17.

⁵⁵ In his 1904 essay, "Giliaki," Shternberg stressed the tri-clan model, although in this book he stresses that minimally four clans, and ideally five, were required for the successful local functioning of any given marrying network. See Chapters 7 and 16 of this volume.

because he found the Gilyak kin system to be remarkably similar to the Punaluan system in Hawaii that Morgan had documented. According to the classificatory nature of Gilyak kin terminology, any married man or woman had several potential “husbands” or “wives” from his or her marrying generation. As a result, “all men of a given lineage had rights of sexual access to women of their own generation in the wife-giving lineage,” and by the same token, women had the same access to men of their own generation in the wife-taking lineage.⁵⁶ In practice, the system was a loose kind of monogamy: Many Gilyak men and women initiated discreet but permissible affairs, particularly with visiting guests, and under more formal circumstances of levirate, widowed women often married their husband’s younger brother. Nonetheless, public displays of affection were uncommon and most Gilyaks considered it indiscreet to discuss extramarital activities in public.⁵⁷ The crucial element here is the reference to group marriage, for, according to Morgan’s taxonomy, any group still practicing group marriage could only fall under the category of savagery.

When Engels came upon Shternberg’s first field report from Sakhalin in the Moscow newspaper *Russkie Vedomosti* in 1892, he seized upon the case as an example of group marriage still extant and had it translated into German for reprinting within days.⁵⁸ Shternberg’s account was important for Engels not only because it suggested the existence of group marriage in general but because the perceived backwardness of Gilyak life resonated so well with his and Marx’s evolutionary framework. What made the Gilyak case relevant was that, in Engels’ view, “It demonstrates the similarity, even their identity in their main characteristics, of the social institutions of primitive peoples at approximately the same stage of development.”⁵⁹ What was good for Morgan, by association, was good for Marx and Engels’ evolutionist theory of class struggle. Hence, that Gilyaks were proven to be a primitive people with backward customs became, in its own way, a building block in the edifice of Russian socialism.

* * * * *

While Engels popularized Shternberg’s work for Russian and, perhaps more importantly, later Soviet readers, Shternberg swayed little from the basic Morganian position developed in *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*. After the Sandwich Islands, the main evidence for Morgan’s theory of group marriage came from anthropology’s El Dorado of complex kinship systems, Australia. In 1880, Australian researchers Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt released their monograph, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* announcing “the most extensive system of communal marriage the world has ever known.”⁶⁰ Despite the book’s dedication to and approving preface from Morgan,

⁵⁶ Lydia Black, “Dogs, Bears and Killer Whales,” 34. Black’s reference to “lineages” resonates with Lévi-Strauss’ observation that Shternberg’s preference for “clan” might have been better captured by the more specific idea of lineage. Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures*, 301.

⁵⁷ Chapter 6 of this volume; Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 169. Kreinovich makes similar observations in “Perezhitki rodovoi sobstvennosti i gruppovogo braka u giliakov,” *Trudy Instituta Antropologii, Arkheologii i Etnografii* 4 (1936), 711–754.

⁵⁸ *Russkie Vedomosti*, October 14, 1892. Reprinted in German in *Die Neue Zeit* XI (12) (1892), Band 2, 373–375; and in English in Engels, *Origin*, 238–241.

⁵⁹ Engels, *Origin*, 239.

⁶⁰ Morgan in Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1880), 10.

New functionalist critiques notwithstanding, the most subtle figure working against Shternberg's argument for Gilyak group marriage was perhaps Boas himself, who chiseled away at the Morganian evolutionary stages in his 1911 book, *The Mind of Primitive Man*. While conceding the similarities found across early human societies, Boas pointedly wrote, "The theory of parallel development [advanced by Morgan], if it is to have any significance, would require that among all branches of mankind the steps of invention should have followed, at least approximately, in the same order, and that no important gaps should be found. The facts, so far as known at the present time, are entirely contrary to this view."⁶⁴ Unexpected similarities in material and social systems, Boas argued, had obscured the differences, which followed from a multitude of causes and consequences.

In the years after Shternberg's death in 1927, further critiques diminished much of the group marriage debate, at least in the way Morgan had framed it. In his 1941 *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, Radcliffe-Brown described group marriage's place in evolutionary kinship theory as "one of the most fantastic in a subject that is full of fantastic hypotheses."⁶⁵ While Radcliffe-Brown's own research in Australia conceded that classificatory kinship terms demanded certain levels of behavior appropriate to the imputed relation, fictive or real, he argued that there were clear distinctions, in every Australian society considered by Morgan, that asserted the primacy of the nuclear family. George Peter Murdock, in his canonic 1949 kinship guide, *Social Structure*, followed Boas in arguing that there was no direct relationship between kinship nomenclature and societal complexity.⁶⁶ Lévi-Strauss, who published his essay on Gilyaks in *Elementary Structures of Kinship* the same year, remarked only that Shternberg was ultimately more observer than theoretician, subject to "rash historical interpretations."⁶⁷

Whatever their fate in kinship debates abroad, for Gilyaks the die was cast. Their role as the quintessential savages of Engels' favor made them famous in Russian and Soviet ethnographic literature. Their personification of primitive communism, postulated by Morgan and elaborated by Engels, became axiomatic. What was lost in the process was that the report that found its way into *Russkie Vedomosti* was one of Shternberg's first, outlining a clan system he would later come to recognize as far less fixed than he first had perceived it. Given the swell of non-Gilyaks into the area, the increasing dislocations through travel and trade, and the demographic havoc wrought by disease, he realized that much of what he had been presented was an ideal system. This realization later found confirmation in the work of Soviet ethnographers such as Anna Smoliak, who pointed out that intermarriage with Gol'd (Nanai), Tungus (Evenk), and Manchurian Chinese prefigured the character of many Gilyak (Nivkh) settlements in a way that made close adherence to the marriage rules described by Shternberg difficult. Anthropologist Chuner Taksami, himself a Nivkh, noted that

⁶⁴ Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1927 [1911]), 182. See also Gladys A. Reichards' "Social Life," in Boas, ed., *General Anthropology* (New York: D. C. Heath, 1938), 409–486.

⁶⁵ Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen and West, 1952 [1941]), 59, also in Hiatt, *Arguments*, 54.

⁶⁶ George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: MacMillan, 1949), 187.

⁶⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures*, 292, 301.

actual examples of Shternberg's labyrinthine systems were few.⁶⁸ That the clan system may not have functioned as methodically as suggested, that group marriage was not as licentious as it sounded, that Shternberg himself was not wholly loyal to the Marxian strain of materialism for which Engels had conscripted him (Shternberg once called Marxism "a hackneyed reworking of the Hegelian triad")⁶⁹—or that Gilyaks at the turn of the century were far from an isolated tribe waiting to be discovered—were points that soon came to be lost in a handful of popular and scholarly accounts that entrenched Gilyaks in an edifice of evolutionary theory.

For Gilyaks of a century ago, there was considerable consequence in Shternberg's chance reading of Engels on the eve of his Sakhalin exile. The irony is that for someone who set out to produce a sympathetic portrait of Gilyak life, one of the results of his path through evolutionism was to emphasize the more sensational aspects of primitive life held in popular thought. Many Russian ethnographers besides Shternberg followed the terminology of the day by making similar claims to group marriage in Siberia in the later 1800s. However, as anthropologist Peter Schweitzer has shown, few if any of the cases actually corresponded to Morgan's criteria. What so many scholars and travelers claimed to document as group marriage more closely approximated extensive extramarital liaisons, and, in some cases, prostitution. The application of Morganian categories was itself awkward in Siberia because, as in Chukotka, for example, there were cases of virtually neighboring ethnic groups, effectively at the same "stage" of social development, with widely divergent kinship systems.⁷⁰ One wonders how Gilyak life might have been perceived differently had their most famous ethnographer not foregrounded their social structure so prominently.

THE SAGA OF THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION TEXT

The odyssey of the *Social Organization* text, which marked the foundation of Shternberg's understanding of Gilyak marriage rules, is itself a small epic in the changing fortunes of Russian and American scholarship over the 20th century.⁷¹ In 1898, when Boas was first looking for fieldworkers who might be recruited for the Russian side of the Jesup project, the German ethnographer Berthold Laufer, accompanied by archaeologist Gerald Fowke, had already begun an expedition to Sakhalin and the Amur, arriving on Sakhalin that spring, only 1 year after Shternberg had been released. When Boas consulted Vasilii Radlov, then head of the prestigious Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg, about Russian fieldworkers, Radlov was quick to recommend two former exiles who had emerged as excellent ethnographers:

⁶⁸ Smoliak, *Etnicheskie protsessy*; Taksami, *Osnovnye problemy*, 86, 110.

⁶⁹ Shternberg, *Giliaki*, xxi.

⁷⁰ Peter Schweitzer, "Spouse-Exchange in North-Eastern Siberia: On Kinship and Sexual Relations and their Transformations," *Vienna Contributions to Ethnology and Anthropology* 5 (1989), 17–38. Maurice Bloch expands on general misconceptions held by Morgan in *Marxism and Anthropology*, *passim*.

⁷¹ Anthropologist Sergei Kan has treated the history of the manuscript in the greatest depth in his insightful forthcoming article, "The Mystery of the Missing Monograph or Why Boas Did Not Include Shternberg's 'The Social Organization of the Gilyak' in the Jesup Expedition Publications" [unpublished manuscript].

Shternberg's Narodnaia Volia colleague Bogoraz, who had been exiled to Kolyma and who had worked with Chukchi; and Vladimir Iokhel'son, another revolutionary sent to northeastern Siberia, where he worked among Koriaks and Yukaghirs. At that time, Radlov himself was only 1 year shy of meeting Lev Shternberg.⁷²

From the time he left Sakhalin in May of 1897 to his trip to New York in the summer of 1905, Shternberg's career as an ethnographer and curator had met with its own partial successes. Originally returning to Zhitomir, where he lived under police surveillance as part of his early release from Sakhalin, Shternberg soon received permission to move to St. Petersburg in 1899 through the intervention of Radlov. In 1900, the Russian publishers of the prestigious *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' Brokgausa i Efrona* [*Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron*] hired him as a contributing editor, eventually leading to the publication of more than 40 essay-length entries.⁷³ His early rise within the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography was equally prodigious, from his start as a volunteer in 1901 to his appointment as a senior ethnographer and lecturer in 1904.

The original agreement by Shternberg and Boas in 1905 was for Shternberg to produce a general text called *The Gilyak and Their Neighbors*. Judging by the impatience Boas began expressing within only a year or two of this first meeting, it is likely that Shternberg's original pledge was to get the book out quickly, given the writing he had already done since leaving Sakhalin 8 years earlier.⁷⁴ Indeed, Shternberg had already published preliminary portions of the *Social Organization* text in the leading Russian journal *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* [*Ethnographic Review*].⁷⁵ But 1905 and the events that followed made for what Shternberg later described as "a difficult year."⁷⁶ "Bloody Sunday," the massacre of hundreds of demonstrators by imperial troops on Palace Square in St. Petersburg on January 9, 1905, had already transpired by the time Shternberg went to New York. Later, in October of that year, rioting in the city of Odessa, where Shternberg had many friends and had spent 3 years in internment, led to pogroms claiming the lives of 400 Jews and 100 non-Jews; a further 300, mostly Jewish, were injured, and over 1600 Jewish homes were damaged.⁷⁷

Boas, whose academic career also often melded with political activism, was sympathetic, writing to Shternberg in January of 1906 to express his concern for "the terrible affairs that are happening under your very eyes day after day."⁷⁸ By August of the same year, however, Boas needed progress reports from both Bogoraz and

⁷² For cardinal accounts of Russian contributions to the Jesup Expedition, see Freed et al, "Capitalist Philanthropy," and Nikolai B. Vakhtin, "Franz Boas and the Shaping of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, 1895–1900: A Russian Perspective" [unpublished manuscript].

⁷³ Shternberg's contribution to the Brockhaus encyclopedia is discussed most extensively in Vladimir Germanovich Bogoraz, "L. Ia. Shternberg kak etnograf," in S. Ol'denburg, ed., *Pamiati L. Ia. Shternberga* (Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk, 1928), 4–30.

⁷⁴ Kan, "The Mystery," passim. See also appendix A of this volume.

⁷⁵ Shternberg, "Giliaki," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 28, no. 60 (1904), 1–42; no. 61, 19–55; and no. 63, 66–119.

⁷⁶ Letter from Shternberg to Boas, 11 August 1906, in the Boas Collection of the American Philosophical Society [hereafter APS].

⁷⁷ Robert Weinberg, *Blood on the Steps: The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), ch. 7.

⁷⁸ AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 2, l. 29.

Shternberg for funding purposes and was urging them to “tear themselves away” from Russia’s political maelstrom.⁷⁹ However, between the intensity of their political work and the demands of their careers, Bogoraz and Shternberg were clearly working at different paces. Bogoraz spent 2 months in prison in late 1905 along with five members of the Central Bureau of the Farmers’ Union (and he would go on to spend a particularly grueling 9 months in solitary confinement in 1911 following further work with the same group). In 1906, Shternberg published his foundational essay on Russian Jewish rights, “Tragedy of the Six-Million People.”⁸⁰

Shternberg’s professional and political obligations were clearly enormous. In 1907 he presided over the first of three congresses of the *Evreiskaia Narodnaia Grupa* [The Jewish People’s League] in St. Petersburg, emerging as one of its chief ideologists. Later, in 1908, he was elected to the Organizing Committee of the Jewish Historical Society and became director of the Jewish Museum in St. Petersburg. At least one historian has named him among the eight major Jewish liberal figures in Russia at that time.⁸¹ In 1908 he became ill from cholera, but still managed to deliver to Boas the first few chapters of the *Social Organization* text. Two years later, he made his second and final trip to the Russian Far East, using some of the new data he collected to modify the manuscript, although his time on Sakhalin was less than 2 weeks before moving on to the Amur. It was not until 1912 that Boas received the better (but not entire) part of the work reprinted here.

At this stage, Boas arranged for one of his students, Alexander Goldenweiser, of Ukrainian origin, to translate at least one chapter of the Shternberg text for preliminary printing. Goldenweiser had already translated parts of Bogoraz’ and Iokhel’son’s Jesup works, and he fulfilled Boas’ request quickly. Boas requested that Shternberg present a full table of Gilyak kinship terms (Table 1) and refine his transcription system, which often combined both Cyrillic and Latin letters in the same Gilyak words.⁸²

If life before World War I had made it difficult for Shternberg to complete this work, then the decade that followed made that goal nearly impossible. In September of 1916 at the height of World War I, Boas wrote Shternberg conceding, “At present it is hardly possible to write about anything serious.”⁸³ Shternberg made an effort, sending a few more short chapters in February of 1917, and charitably Boas let up on the tempo of his reminders.⁸⁴ In the difficult early years of the Soviet 1920s, Boas proposed all manner of sustenance to Shternberg, from one offer of \$300 in May of 1922 for “some subject on the Amur River tribes” to a pledge of emergency food aid later in July.⁸⁵ The turmoil of World War I, the October Revolution, and an equally trenchant Civil War did much to paralyze the workings of academic life. Shternberg spread himself thinly, organizing commissions for the Russian Geographic Society and Committee for Study of Tribal Composition of the USSR [KIPS], traveling to the war front

⁷⁹ Ibid., I. 19.

⁸⁰ Bogoraz discusses Shternberg’s 1906 essay at length in Bogoraz, “L. Ia. Shternberg kak chelovek i uchenyi,” *Etnografiia* 2 (1927), 271.

⁸¹ Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics*, 53–57, 74.

⁸² See the 1912 archival correspondence in appendix A of this volume.

⁸³ AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 29, l. 62.

⁸⁴ Letter of 28 February 1917 from Shternberg to Boas, APS.

⁸⁵ AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 29, ll. 64, 66, 70.





Gilyak students from Sakhalin and the Amur region studying in Leningrad in 1928. Finally, Bogor

The Koshkin prefaces to the two 1933 editions of the manuscript are themselves studies in

For the modern reader, Shternberg's algebraic kinship formulae, which at their apex resemble permutations and combinations reminiscent of the high speed digital computing that Lévi-Strauss pledged would revolutionize myth analysis, evoke at times high modernism more than marriage.¹¹³ Indeed, the functioning of Gilyak marriage rules *as a system* is perhaps what stands out most today, as it may have for Shternberg himself, who later in life conceded the simplicity of his original castings of Gilyak group marriage by writing, "I took them all for pure-blooded aristocrats."¹¹⁴ Some modern Gilyak (Nivkh) readers of *Social Organization* in 1995 have taken this admission one step further. As an accountant from a North Sakhalin shipping port who had grown up in a Gilyak village in the taiga, Elizaveta Merkulova said,

I've read those stories about how a man would offer his wife to a visitor for the night, but I can't believe any of it. When I was young, my Russian friends would even ask me about it. Everyone thinks it's what we used to do. But I can't believe it, because I remember how jealously all my mother's and father's families treated the women. They were unbelievably protective and jealous. Among [Gilyaks] at least, I mean, I just don't see it. Think of all the instances of men killing their wives out of jealousy. It used to happen more frequently when I was young but it happens today. So to imagine that a man would just offer his wife to another under those circumstances, it seems impossible. It was all a big Russian fantasy.¹¹⁵

Yet, if the idea of group marriage has not held up well, Merkulova only smiled when I told her that parts of Shternberg's text left me feeling that I, too, following his observation in Chapter 6, had fallen prey to "the almost hypnotic effect" of Gilyak kinship terms.¹¹⁶

You find it difficult? I don't find it difficult, but that's probably because I grew up with it. I think a lot gets lost in the translation since there are some words that just don't really have translations. Even if you take the simplest words like *imk* and *itk*: Everyone thinks that this means "mother" and "father," and that's true. But neither of those words really give you a sense of what it's like when everyone is connected to each other through formal relations. There's no context to place these words when you have to start saying "the son of my sister of my father . . ."! Whereas we would just say *pu* . . . and you say it knowing that everyone is connected to everyone else in some important way.¹¹⁷

Merkulova's response was a laurel branch to the uninitiated, but she also reminds us why kinship became such a regnant and often dazzling way of accessing other people's worlds, promising at once an objective force of reason and a hopeful

¹¹³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in his *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 206–231.

¹¹⁴ Shternberg in Smoliak, *Etnicheskie protsessy*, 86.

¹¹⁵ See the interview with Merkulova in the Afterword.

¹¹⁶ In this context, Chapters 1, 7, 9, and 10 deserve special mention for their complexity.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

insight into subjective lives. Shternberg's own evolution of thought on Gilyak kinship reminds us that the elegance of kinship constructions can sometimes be misleading. As Greg Urban has noted, "Kinship terms seem to us to be closely related to one another—pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—because we, in fact, treat them that way in our discourse practices."¹¹⁸ Hence, when Lévi-Strauss wrote, "A human group need only proclaim the law of the marriage of the mother's brother's daughter for a vast cycle of reciprocity between all generations and lineages to be organized, as harmonious and ineluctable as any physical or biological law," harmony may have also been in the eye of the beholder.¹¹⁹ Gilyak marriage rules were evidently not only difficult for Gilyaks themselves to follow, Gilyaks may never have followed them as religiously as Shternberg avowed.

In the decades of Sovietization that followed Shternberg's first drafts of *Social Organization*, the kinds of local knowledge and social circumstances that made Gilyak marriage rules possible have long since been transformed. As the Nivkh ethnographer Galina Dem'ianovna Lok blurted out when we both sat sequestered in the confines of a North Sakhalin oil town in 1995, reading the entire text aloud to each other for review, "You would have to have a head bigger than an entire House of Soviets to understand this!" And yet for all the passage of practice, to some Nivkhi even the most complicated of marriage rules have not lost, in Shternberg's words from Chapter 4, their "mnemonic-adjudicating force." To historians of anthropology, Shternberg's work invites us to reflect on one people's experience of being represented through a language of kinship that became the discipline's flagship idiom in the 20th century. To Gilyaks a century after Shternberg first came and went, he offers a portrait of lives once lived, and the terms of address that still reconstitute that world.

¹¹⁸ Greg Urban, *Metaphysical Community* (Austin: Univ. Texas Press, 1996), 104.

¹¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss in Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 2 (New York: Zone, 1993), 47.