



PROJECT MUSE®

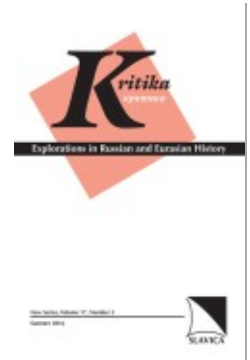
Across the Seven Seas: Is Russian Maritime History More Than Regional History?

Julia Leikin

Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 17, Number 3, Summer 2016, pp. 631-646 (Review)

Published by Slavica Publishers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2016.0038>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/631071>

Across the Seven Seas

Is Russian Maritime History More Than Regional History?

JULIA LEIKIN

Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741–1867*. 320 pp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN-13 978-0199343416. \$58.00.

Igor' Vladimirovich Kurukin, *Persidskii pokhod Petra Velikogo: Nizovoi korpus na beregakh Kaspiia, 1722–1735* (Peter the Great's Persian Campaign: The Nizovoi Regiment on the Shores of the Caspian, 1722–35). 381 pp. Moscow: Kvadriga, 2010. ISBN-13 978-5917910468.

Irina Mikhailovna Smilianskaia, Elena Borisovna Smilianskaia, and Mikhail Bronislavovich Velizhev, *Rossia v Sredizemnomor'e: Arkhipelagskaia ekspeditsiia Ekateriny Velikoi* (Russia in the Mediterranean Region: The Archipelago Expedition of Catherine the Great). 840 pp. Moscow: Indrik, 2011. ISBN-13 978-5916741292.

The Russian Empire is haunted by many stereotypes, one of which is that it does not have a maritime tradition. At the same time, the Imperial Russian Navy is put forth as the quintessential example of Russia's Westernization.¹ Given the resources invested in developing the navy and naval iconography in the imperial capital, it is odd that few studies exist that examine Russian naval practices and maritime interests outside of an immediate strategic context.²

¹ Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 83.

² As the books under review here and others show, Russia's activities at sea have received more attention in the scholarly literature in recent years: e.g., Ilya Vinkovetsky's *Russian America: An*

Over the past decade, essayists have observed an increase in maritime scholarship, proclaiming that “the sea is swinging into view” while offering new directions for research.³ Meanwhile, maritime history has been put forth as a way to understand global history,⁴ and scholarly monographs have given way to synthetic histories of many of the world’s seas, with chronological frameworks spanning centuries or even millennia.⁵ The large academic publishers Routledge and Brill have recently launched series specializing in maritime history.⁶ But while there has been an increase in the study of “watery” subjects, little of that scholarship has included Russia. Could it be that geography truly is destiny? Or are Russian historians simply tired of the trope that Russian expansion was driven by the search for a warm-water port and thus reluctant to approach the subject? The latter would certainly be a mistake, as imperial Russia bordered at least 13 seas (14, if you include the Caspian Sea, which geographers now classify as a lake, but the ancients considered an ocean) and a couple of oceans.

For over two decades, Atlantic history has shown that oceans are not barriers between nations but rather interactive spaces that have facilitated networks of commerce and exchange, transportation of people, and dissemination of institutions and ideas.⁷ Atlantic history is but one geographic subfield that was

Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Andrew Roberts’s forthcoming *Merchants, Migrants, and Microbes: Ottoman–Russian Relations in the 18th and 19th Centuries* will be an important contribution to maritime scholarship as it considers unique challenges from the spread of epidemic disease that the Russian Empire faced along its maritime border.

³ Kären Wigen, “AHR Forum: Oceans of History. Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 111, 3 (2006): 717–21; Glen O’Hara, “‘The Sea Is Swinging Into View’: Modern British Maritime History in a Globalised World,” *English Historical Review* 124, 510 (2009): 1109–34; W. Jeffrey Bolster, “Opportunities in Marine Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 11, 3 (2006): 567–97.

⁴ Daniel Finamore, ed., *Maritime History as World History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

⁵ Some examples of scholarly interest include Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Timothy Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate, AD 500–1000* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012); David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); and Michael North, *The Baltic: A History*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁶ Routledge’s Seas in History series includes Michael Pearson’s *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003); Brill’s Studies in Maritime History, under the direction of series editor Gelina Harlaftis, published its first books in 2015.

⁷ David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11–27; Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *American Historical Review* 111, 3 (2006): 741–57.

inspired by Ferdinand Braudel's assemblage of the sea and surrounding lands into a single unit of historical analysis.⁸ In the Atlanticists' stead, scholars have argued that the Indian and Pacific oceans were similarly sites of circulation of trade, migration, and cultural exchange.⁹ Maritime historians have meditated on the divisions and diverse experiences of populations living around a single oceanic basin,¹⁰ and on similar experiences that historical actors encounter across different bodies of water.¹¹ Still other scholars have called for the oceans themselves to be the focus of maritime histories, for history to be "retold from the perspective of the sea."¹² In short, the perspectives developed by maritime historians are broad and not always in agreement with one another; they range from emphasizing similarities to inviting comparisons to mapping transnational currents. As Alexei Kraikovski recently noted, Russian history has its own tradition of scholarship on the relationship of Russians and the sea, although the tradition could be reinvigorated with new perspectives that focus on different groups involved in this relationship and less passive constructions of the environment.¹³

The three books under discussion may well begin the conversation on whether the approaches and perspectives developed by maritime historians are useful for understanding Russian history. Would these approaches reveal a new way of viewing Russian history? Have historians of maritime Russia employed them? These texts demonstrate the relevance of maritime subjects to wider questions of imperialism, territoriality, and foreign policy. Russian maritime history has left the strict purview of naval historians, no longer reading like a "company history" driven by traditional concerns of military

⁸ Ferdinand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (London: Collins, 1972).

⁹ See, e.g., Pearson, *Indian Ocean*; Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa, and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and David Iglar, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹¹ Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen, eds., *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

¹² Wigen, "Oceans of History," 717; Games, "Atlantic History," 746; W. Jeffrey Bolster, "Putting the Ocean in Atlantic History: Maritime Communities and Marine Ecology in the Northwest Atlantic, 1500–1800," *American Historical Review* 113, 1 (2008): 19–47; Ryan Tucker Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *American Historical Review* 118, 2 (2013): 349–77, here 350.

¹³ Alexei Kraikovski, "The Sea on One Side, Trouble on the Other': Russian Marine Resource Use before Peter the Great," *Slavonic and East European Review* 93, 1 (2015): 39–65, here 40–43.

and naval historians.¹⁴ Rather, these works look to the interaction of the navy, which controlled most of Russian maritime activity in the 18th century, with other social, political, cultural, and environmental concerns—what historian Isaac Land has termed “coastal history.”¹⁵ The navy was a different kind of colonial administrator, the marine environment opened up new possibilities and challenges for questions of logistics, and the seas have played an important role in Russian foreign politics in ways that suggest many new research possibilities. These themes resonate throughout the three books, which offer different approaches to three different seas. And they show, to paraphrase historians of imperial Russian governance, that Russia managed its various seas differently.

With the exception of Jones, the authors do not necessarily see themselves as writing in the historiographical tradition of maritime or coastal history. But, as I hope to show in this discussion, these texts nevertheless invite us to reassess the Russian Empire’s lack of maritime prowess. They exemplify the need to examine Russia’s maritime traditions not in competition with other empires but in dialogue with them; to view the navy as more than the manifestation of Russia’s strategic aims; to examine the culture and symbolism within and beyond the Admiralty; and to reach beyond the monopoly of the Admiralty College to view other actors who made up maritime Russia. These perspectives may not lie at the heart of oceanic history, but they show the payoff for historians of Russia who get their feet wet.



¹⁴ A few examples from the last century include Fred T. Jane, *The Imperial Russian Navy* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1983); Mairin Mitchell, *The Maritime History of Russia, 848–1948* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949); A. A. Lebedev, *U istokov Chernomorskogo flota Rossii ot Azovskoi flotilii Ekateriny II v bor’be za Krym i v sozdanii Chernomorskogo flota, 1768–1783 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Gangut, 2011); Lebedev, *Fregaty protiv korablei: Neizbezhnyi i neotseennyi epizod Russko-turetskoi voiny 1787–1791 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Gangut, 2011); Donald William Mitchell, *A History of Russian and Soviet Sea Power* (London: Deutsch, 1974); N. V. Stritskii, *Russkie admiralty—Geroi Sinopa* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2006); I. V. Kasatonov with V. D. Dotsenko and F. N. Gromov-Gribovskii, *Tri veka rossiiskogo flota*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: LOGOS, 1996); and David Woodward, *The Russians at Sea* (London: W. Kimber, 1965).

¹⁵ Isaac Land, “Tidal Waves: The New Coastal History,” *Journal of Social History* 40, 3 (2007): 731–43, here 732. The concept of “coastal history” and a research agenda are developed further on *The Coastal History Blog*, <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/coastalhistory/>. In the same vein, Michael Pearson has written of “littoral societies” in reference to frontiers between land and sea such as beaches and coastlines, which belong to one as much as the other. See M. N. Pearson, “Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problems,” *Journal of World History* 17, 4 (2006): 353–73.

The multiauthored *Rossiiia v Sredizemnomor'e* provides a much-needed, thorough, and well-documented examination of the Mediterranean through a “Russian prism.”¹⁶ This is an impressive volume, and its three coauthors—I. M. Smilianskaia, E. B. Smilianskaia, and M. B. Velizhev—cover a great variety of political and military activities of Russia’s naval and diplomatic corps during the 1768–74 Russian-Ottoman War. Working across multiple archives in Russia, Greece, Italy, and France, the three authors have introduced new material to provide a social and cultural context to Russian activities in the Mediterranean. This episode in Russian naval history has traditionally been presented from a military perspective in both Russian and Western historiography, but with this book the authors introduce broad social and cultural elements to a one-dimensional narrative.¹⁷ The book’s chapters read more like loosely connected essays rather than one overarching argument about the First Archipelago Expedition. They cover Russia’s diplomatic maneuvers, strategic preparations, culture and everyday life in the Archipelago and Tuscany, and political overtures to Egypt and Syria. In an appendix nearly as long as the book itself, the authors reproduce nine primary documents, including the entire diary of Captain Stepan Petrovich Khmetevskii, who accompanied John Elphinstone’s squadron to the Aegean Sea, as well as three shorter articles on the material culture and political consequences of the expedition. In short, this tremendous effort draws on many sources, provides an international bibliography, and makes an important intervention in the historiography of the Russian Empire. The many aspects of Russian presence in the Mediterranean that the authors cover underpin their central thesis that the First Archipelago Expedition “became an important confirmation of the Russian Empire’s entry ‘into the concert’ of Great Powers” (477).

The outcome of the 1768 war between the Russian and Ottoman empires has long been considered the origin of the “Eastern Question” of 19th-century diplomacy.¹⁸ The book’s opening chapters address the multiplicity of readings that Russia’s intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire have

¹⁶ Abulafia, *Great Sea*, 504.

¹⁷ For prior studies, see, e.g., Roger C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559–1853* (Liverpool: University Press, 1952); E. V. Tarle, *Chesmenskii boi i pervaiia russkaia ekspeditsiia v Arkhipelag 1769–1774* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1945); and G. A. Grebenshchikova, *Baltiiskii flot v period pravleniia Ekateriny II: Dokumenty, fakty, issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2007).

¹⁸ M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966). For a discussion of the historiography on the Eastern Question and an alternative periodization, see Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, “Introduction: The Eastern Question Reconsidered,” in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, ed. Frary and Kozelsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 3–34.

had to endure. Here, I. M. and E. B. Smilianskaia describe the strategic and diplomatic preparations for the expedition, dating the so-called Greek Project to the 1770s, if not earlier, and tempering some of the wilder claims about Catherine's plans to invade Constantinople and liberate the Greeks from the Ottoman "yoke." Their explanations—considering commercial, strategic, and cultural explanations in Russia's war with the Ottoman Empire—reconcile and synthesize the polarized historiography.¹⁹ Russia's aims in the war, they argue, were pragmatic, but Russian elites emphasized the religious and cultural dimensions of Christian unity to mobilize Greek support and win the public relations war in the European press.

The book has ten chapters, split across three themes: the planning stages of Catherine II's Archipelago Expedition, Russians in the Mediterranean, and the Propaganda War. The first five chapters expound the military, diplomatic, and political run-up to the expedition, including the meatiest part of the book—the rich discussion of the Archipelago Principality (more on this below). The remaining five chapters examine surrounding diplomatic and cultural circumstances of Russia's Mediterranean presence: Russia's relationships with Italian states, diplomatic relations with the beys of Egypt and Syria, and portrayal in the Russian and European press. Building on the work of Vera Proskurina and Andrei Zorin, Smilianskaia and Velizhev excerpt poems, plays, and odes that reflect the symbolic significance of the expedition and its resonance in Russia's cultural sphere.²⁰ The two chapters (6 and 7) on Russia's relationship with the Italian states during this war, written by M. B. Velizhev, offer an often-overlooked perspective to the Russian narrative of this expedition. Velizhev draws on Italian archival material to document the local perception of Russian presence. As Velizhev shows, Tuscany and Venice, despite both states' proclaimed neutrality, had radically different approaches to Russian presence in their sovereign space and recruitment of their subjects into service.

¹⁹ Vladimir Ulianitskii, *Dardanely, Bosfor i Chernoe more v XVIII veke* (Moscow: A. Gatsuk, 1883); E. I. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir 1774 goda: Ego podgotovka i zakliuchenie* (Moscow: Akademiiia nauk SSSR, 1955); S. M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen, toma 27–28*, in *Sochineniia*, 18 vols. (Moscow: Mysl', 1994), vol. 14.

²⁰ Andrei Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla: Literatura i gosudarstvennaia ideologiia v Rossii v poslednei treti XVIII–pervoi treti XIX veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001); Vera Proskurina, *Mify imperii: Literatura i vlast' v epokhu Ekateriny II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006). Richard Wortman's *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II*, new abr. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), emphasizes the themes of Roman antiquity in Catherine's symbols of power, whereas here the imagery has Hellenic motifs.

In the book's longest chapter (chapter 5), E. B. Smilianskaia presents the imperial project of the First Archipelago Expedition. Galvanized by the success of the 1770 Battle of Çeşme, the Russian navy gained a stronger hold in the Aegean Sea by setting up a base on the centrally located island of Paros. The Greek Principality, largely absent from Russian historiography, was headed by Admiral Grigory Spiridov and became Russia's first overseas colony. The principality began with a group of 14 islands willingly entering Russian suzerainty. While drawing on comparisons with the Septinsular Republic (1800–7), Smilianskaia presents the principality not as a proto-Greek state but as a manifestation of Russian ideas about governance.

In drawing up the vision for a Greek principality, Russian elites put into action enlightened ideas about self-government and education. The islands were put under Russian protection and tutelage, but Spiridov sought to foster eventual self-governance and independence for each. Each island would send several elected deputies to a Senate, which would be the seat of power of the Archipelago Principality. In theory, Spiridov also intended to preserve the autonomy of the islands' spiritual leadership, even accounting for confessional differences among the Christian population. The island of Naxos was the site of Orlov's academy to educate the future leadership of the Archipelago. Some of the imperial overtones were more opportunistic. In their questionnaires about the islands, the Russians examined the taxation policies of the Ottomans and offered to lower the taxes and tribute the islanders paid. In that way, the Russians viewed their presence as the more cost-effective option. On other islands, however, they confiscated provisions under a "right of war," claiming that their losses would be compensated when they entered Russian protection (173). In short, Smilianskaia has uncovered a treasure trove of materials about the imperial vision Aleksei Orlov, Grigorii Spiridov, Pavel Nesterov, and others had for the Greek islands. But her discussion also raises conceptual questions such as the distinction between *pokrovitel'stvo* (patronage/protectorship) and *poddanstvo* (subjecthood), and which more accurately describes the relationship of the principality's subjects to Catherine II (153). This chapter offers only a cursory look at the intricacies of Russia's first overseas colony, but many of these elements have been examined in greater depth in Smilianskaia's *Grecheskie ostrova Ekateriny II* (Catherine II's Greek Islands).²¹



²¹ E. B. Smilianskaia, *Grecheskie ostrova Ekateriny II: Opyty imperskoi politiki Rossii v Sredizemnomor'e* (Moscow: Indrik, 2015).

Igor' Kurukin's *Persidskii pokhod Petra Velikogo* offers a contrasting view of 18th-century naval colonial administration from Russia's temporarily acquired ports on the Caspian Sea. Without losing sight of the Caspian Sea basin as home to many peoples, groups, allegiances, religions, and imperial influences, Kurukin presents the sea as a single unit of historical analysis and with it provides a new perspective on a history that had previously been written in discrete pieces through the prism of national histories. Peter the Great's 1722–23 campaign to the shores of the Caspian Sea came on the heels of the victories in the Northern War and in pursuit of a maritime route to Persia and India. The expedition and war resulted in territorial gains along the western and southern shores of the Caspian Sea, which the Russian Empire struggled to hold until the 1735 Treaty of Ganja compelled the Russians to evacuate the area. The text focuses on the garrisons along the shores of the Caspian—in the Fortress of the Holy Cross, Derbent, Baku, and Gilan—and their ongoing efforts to pacify rebelling populations of the newly conquered territories through military and diplomatic means. Kurukin's Caspian Sea basin is not the traditional nationalist and ethnographic patchwork but rather a delicate balance of influence among three empires—Russian, Persian, and Ottoman—and many small-time leaders of local principalities and peoples.

The lucrative trade with India and Persia, an important motivation and partial pretext for Russia's incursions into the shah's territories, however, is not the focus of the book.²² Kurukin is more interested in the impact of the presence of the Nizovoi Regiment and its daily activities in the conquered territories. In chapters 2 and 3, he lays out the strides taken by Peter the Great to conquer the territories along the western and southern shores of the Caspian. The Russian troops had to contend with new styles of warfare, difficulties in supply logistics, and an unfamiliar climate. Russian efforts to control the territory also required understanding the local landscape of power. Here Kurukin's attention to detail is commendable as he reconstructs the entangled politics of the region with a wide cast of governors, local princes, tsars and khans, and senior diplomats of the Ottoman and Persian empires. Chapter 6 describes issues such as recruitment of foreign subjects into Russian service or subjecthood and negotiations of spheres of influence that heightened diplomatic tensions. The Russian leaders continually sought to form alliances with local leaders or gain allegiances of local groups by offering protection from rival empires. These efforts were to no avail, and the imperial agents faced frequent rebellions instead. The cost of Russia's military presence

²² Alton S. Donnelly shows the strong allure of commerce and influence wielded by Russian merchants on Peter's decision to undertake this campaign. See his "Peter the Great and Central Asia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 17, 2–3 (1975): 202–17.

in the Caspian ran high, both financially and in terms of soldiers' lives. By Kurukin's estimate, more than 40,000 soldiers lost their lives in the course of ten years (207). Chapter 4, which documents the daily life in the barracks, also demonstrates how undesirable this posting was for soldiers in the Russian army. Only wealthy officers were able to bring ample supplies of wine and to purchase other luxury items; the majority of soldiers complained about the high cost of provisions in the region, and many deserted their posts.

Kurukin's work also offers an interesting discussion of other elements of Russia's imperial mentality. Russia's territorial conquests put many Muslim subjects under Russia's control. But in contrast to the violent conversion campaigns elsewhere in the Russian Empire, Peter I instead tried to encourage Muslims to relocate to nearby Ottoman territories and to encourage Ottoman Christian subjects—namely, Georgians and Armenians—to relocate to Baku and other port cities that were under Russian control. Kurukin also observes that the hostile relationship between the regiments and the local population further strained the garrisons' ability to support themselves and live off the revenues and resources extracted from these territories. About half of the provisions used by the garrisons were brought in from Russia's interior. Chapter 5, in particular, offers many vignettes of colonial administration on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The military commanders in the territories created new government organs that conducted censuses and attempted to govern the population by investigating questions of theft, domestic abuse, and sodomy. The chancelleries that served these functions also operated out of the Fortress of the Holy Cross.

If little of this strikes the reader as maritime history, it bears remembering how fluid the concept of maritime history is. Isaac Land writes that “‘oceanic’ history was always a metaphor”; he proposes “coastal history” as a more appropriate and “productive” metaphor to describe human activity along the sea shores, coastlines, and waterfronts.²³ In that spirit, Kurukin's book demonstrates that Russian presence on the Caspian Sea in the first third of the 18th century was closely entangled with the outcome of events on land. But his terrestrial focus is also likely to be a result of source selection. The book's six lengthy chapters draw on material from Moscow's central archives: diplomatic papers from the Foreign Policy Archive of Imperial Russia (AVPRI) and reports from the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA). Materials from the naval archive would likely tell a more aquatic story.²⁴ Still, the imperial

²³ Land, “Tidal Waves,” 740.

²⁴ Compare with M. A. Kirokosian, *Russkii flag na Kaspii: Dva stoletii Kaspiiskoi flotilii* (Moscow: Voennaia kniga/Kuchkovo pole, 2013), which draws on published materials from the Russian State Naval Archive (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv voenno-morskogo flota).

view of the Caspian Sea as a single region, and Russia's first effort to control it as one administrative unit, is an important reorientation of perspective for analyzing Peter's campaign and the tumultuous history of Russia's presence in the North Caucasus. This point is implicit in the presentation of the material but could probably be argued more forcefully in the book. The images in the book's insert from the original manuscript of F. I. Soimonov's survey of the Caspian Sea shores, *Opisanie Kaspiiskogo moria*, make this point well. Soimonov's survey of the Caspian Sea, discussed briefly in the book, was conducted on the eve of Peter I's expedition under the auspices of a survey to discover new trade routes. The account was published by the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1763. The book would, however, be vastly improved with a thorough map to help visualize the territories and troop movements Kurukin describes—in particular as he often uses old or Russified names of the cities, territories, and provinces.

The book's narrative is rich in detail and leaves little room for analysis. Kurukin quotes extensively from reports sent by the administrators of the Caspian provinces to the government. These reports and other evidence he presents reflect some of the chauvinistic assumptions of the Russian troops toward the inhabitants of the Caspian lands, but he could probably make a stronger argument in connecting those assumptions to Russian practices. There could also be a deeper discussion about the categories of "regular" and "irregular troops," which served in the Fortress of the Holy Cross, although differences particularly in remuneration are sometimes mentioned in passing. Kurukin might also be bolder with his critique of the concept "rebels" (*buntovshchiki*) that was frequently used by the administrators of the territories in their reports to the monarchs. In the original sources, the term *buntovshchiki* is used both in contrast to trained militiamen (35) and as restless populations unhappy with Russian rule (e.g., 134–36). But Kurukin makes only passing mention of the difficulties the leadership of the Russian forces had in identifying enemies or discerning them from a generally malcontent population. These *buntovshchiki*, it should be added, were, according to Kurukin, Peter I's pretext for invading Persian territories in the first place—to punish the "agitators and rebels" who precluded Russian trade (58–59).



In the same vein as Kurukin, Ryan Tucker Jones argues for the usefulness of considering the North Pacific Basin as a distinct region, similar but analytically separate from Siberia and the Far East. In his *Empire of Extinction*, Jones examines imperial Russia's exploration of the North Pacific in the 18th

and 19th centuries, highlighting the state's evolving relationship with the flora and fauna of this remote corner of the Russian Empire. By revealing the breadth of information acquired through journals of voyages and scientific expeditions around the Kamchatka Peninsula and the North Pacific Islands, topographical surveys, and catalogues of new plant and animal species, Jones argues for the centrality of natural history in assessing the Russian Empire's marine resources. The usefulness of science to colonialism is well documented in other imperial contexts.²⁵ But as Jones shows, the Russian context was important for bringing the dangers of species extinction to scientific and international attention. *Empire of Extinction* demonstrates how environmental understanding of the North Pacific was a significant part of Russian maritime history in the 18th century; the voyages of exploration led by Bering, Billings, and Krusenstern drew on the expertise of Russian and foreign captains and officers who brought the authority of the Russian state to the region and information about the region back to the imperial center. Through the North Pacific voyages and "control of oceanic space" Russians both "reconceptualize[d] their empire" (17) and established "the empire's maritime credentials" (179). As Jones has argued elsewhere, the marine environment is not only a setting but also the main protagonist in the study of the North Pacific, and marine mammals—the "strange beasts of the sea" of this book's subtitle—are at its center.²⁶

Jones builds his arguments on his reading of the accounts of natural historians, who duly recorded the discoveries in the North Pacific as part of the "territoriality" (per Willard Sunderland) of the empire.²⁷ Natural historians documented the region, its rivers and hills, vegetation, and animal resources, commenting on their potential for adding to the empire's wealth. As Jones recounts in chapter 3, the information provided by the Second Kamchatka Expedition nourished various imperial initiatives such as development of the landscape and agriculture to make the inhospitable environment more accommodating to settlement by Russians. At the same time, the descriptions allowed the imperial elite to boast about the empire's size and diversity of its holdings to bolster national prestige. In the 18th century, it was the work and ideas of natural historians such as Steller, Krashennikov, Pallas, and

²⁵ There is a vast literature on this, but for a selection, see James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, eds., *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State, and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Jones, "Running into Whales."

²⁷ Willard Sunderland, "Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century," in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*, ed. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatoly Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 33–66.

Gmelin that helped give shape and direction to the Russian Empire. The naturalists provided scientific knowledge that shaped the North Pacific in the same way that ethnographers, anthropologists, and other social scientists informed Russian policy in the 19th century.²⁸ Jones also notes the registers in which travelers and natural scientists wrote about the Russian North Pacific; their ideas about nature—the ones that underpinned both Russian self-perception and foreign critiques about Russia—were often cloaked in a “trope of abundance” of land, plants, and animals (104). These descriptions masked the environmental problems that overhunting of fur seals and sea otters had wrought and only encouraged further exploitation of the region by the state.

Jones finds the roots of natural historians’ approaches and attitudes toward the potential of the North Pacific in their social and political backgrounds. By parsing published and unpublished texts, Jones presents a valuable discussion that contextualizes naturalists’ ideas and critiques within broader social conditions. Jones argues that certain foreign-born naturalists, although in the service of the Russian Empire, found some of the empire’s activities in the North Pacific unsavory. Comparing the presentation of Kamchatka, its resources, and possibilities by the German-born naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller and his Russian student Stepan Krashennikov, Jones argues that the German’s competing loyalties made him more critical of the consequences of imperial expansion. This is a compelling argument, and Steller’s disgust with the brutality of conquest was shared by some of the most prominent thinkers of the 18th century.²⁹ Jones writes of Steller’s conflicting loyalties in serving the Russian Empire, but from the evidence it seems that what Steller found “deeply immoral” were the practices of the Cossacks and the lifestyle of Russian sailors rather than the entire imperial enterprise (51). Unfortunately, this paradox of whether foreign-born experts were complicit in the activities of the Russian Empire remains unresolved. But Jones’s bigger point is that the ambiguity of Steller’s position was interpreted and amplified by European observers as a condemnation of the Russian Empire. In chapter 5, Jones compares another pair of natural historians—Peter Simon Pallas and Thomas Pennant—and their contrasting approaches to cataloguing the animals of the North Pacific. This chapter is a crucial link in Jones’s elegant theory of how

²⁸ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Marina Mogil’ner, *Homo imperii: Istoriiia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii, XIX–nachalo XX vv.* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007).

²⁹ Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

the loss of Steller's sea cow and the larger threat of species extinction came to the world's attention.

At the same time, no environmental history would be complete without an account of the commercial interests that brought about ecological disaster. In a chapter titled "Promyshlenniki, Siberians, Alaskans, and Catastrophic Change in an Island Ecosystem," Jones explains how the activities of the *promyshlenniki* (fur traders) distressed the North Pacific environment. Jones tries to balance Russian activity, and with it Russian responsibility, for the environmental crisis of the North Pacific against larger environmental changes that made marine mammals particularly vulnerable to extinction or near-extinction. Jones, like his protagonist Steller, sees government deregulation of the *promyshlenniki* and the fur trappers' excessive greed as the cause of depletion of many of the region's animals as well as upheaval to the Aleut lifestyle. He overlays the counts of furs trapped by annual hunting expeditions with models of the approximate size of animal populations to illustrate the point of how disastrous the Russians' level of activities was. In the appendix, Jones even reconstructs to the extent possible Russian hunting parties to the North Pacific and the annual catches of sea otters, fur seals, blue (polar) foxes, and other foxes. The furs were trapped, traded, collected, or extracted by the *promyshlenniki* with the assistance of the local population, which was made to pay tribute with these pelts. "The Russians based their fledgling empire on the exploitation of marine mammals," Jones claims (98). The statistics are devastating, but none of the *promyshlenniki*, governors, or even natural historians was aware of the environmental problems this level of activity caused. As Jones explains, extinction was not something that registered with even the trained naturalists; natural historians at the time believed in a concept of "Nature's Economy" and any observed decline in animal populations found many alternative explanations such as that animals simply migrated. The ocean as a hunting ground and sea otters as prey are distinct from the Siberian story because, unlike "highly mobile" sables, sea otters did not normally travel far enough to migrate to nearby islands (69–70). Moreover, the other culprit Jones blames was the cash-strapped Russian state, which chose to collect taxes and tribute rather than regulate the harmful activities of fur trappers. It is difficult to find an early modern empire that was not "chronically short of money," but the lavish expeditions to the North Pacific show that not every decision made by the Russian government was driven by economic concerns (71). From the evidence Jones presents, none of the critiques of Russia that emerged on the basis of natural historians' observations in the late 18th century were based on impending environmental

disaster, but rather that Russians were savage and incompetently mismanaged their fur resources.

Jones presents a clear narrative of the ways in which Russian imperialism contributed to the depletion and extinction of the marine mammals, but there is no bright-line between where the 18th-century naturalists' critique of Russian imperialism stops and his own criticism begins. Jones claims, for instance, "the Russian empire held the ultimate responsibility for preserving the North Pacific's fur-bearing animals, and in this it failed spectacularly in the eighteenth century" (89). This is one elucidation of Jones's implicit and sometimes explicit lament that the Russian Empire allowed this ecological disaster to transpire. The book suggests that such sentiments were expressed by foreign naturalists in Russia and European observers, but the evidence reveals that few of the naturalists or foreign observers had the same regard for ecological preservation or comprehensive understanding of the issues at stake, especially not before the very end of the 18th century. The conflation of the two lines of analysis demonstrates how Donald Worster's statement that "environmental history was ... born out of a moral purpose" may be at odds with some of the premises underlying the new approaches to Russian imperial history.³⁰

In Steller's condemnation of the brutality of the Russian Empire Jones finds the "seeds" of an ecological dimension of a critique of Russian imperialism (49) and claims that with Steller the "thread of resistance to flattening human and animal worlds" began (240). The proposition that Steller "anticipated later critiques of environmental effects" (51) seems tenuous, unsupported by the two passages Jones cites where Steller is outraged at gamblers killing otters for sport (48) and an appreciation for sea otters' medicinal properties (49). Steller was indeed an outspoken critic of Russian cruelty on Kamchatka and the brutality exhibited by Cossacks and other authorities in the North Pacific. His journal and posthumous publications were filled with criticisms directed at the Russians just as they were filled with compassion and sympathy for the Kamchadals.³¹ But Steller said nothing of conservation in the Russian

³⁰ Donald Worster, "Appendix: Doing Environmental History," in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Worster and Alfred W. Crosby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 290.

³¹ Georg Wilhelm Steller, *Steller's History of Kamchatka: Collected Information concerning the History of Kamchatka, Its Peoples, Their Manners, Names, Lifestyle, and Various Customary Practices*, ed. Marvin W. Falk, trans. Margritt Engel and Karen Willmore (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2003); Steller, "Steller's Journal of the Sea Voyage from Kamchatka to America and Return," in *Bering's Voyages: An Account of the Efforts of the Russians to Determine the Relation of Asia and America*, ed. F. A. Golder, trans. Leonhard Stejneger, 2 vols. (Rochester, NY: Scholar's Choice, 2015), 2:9–188.

fur trade, and the European reception of his writings—mainly concerned with the mysterious circumstances of his death—expressed little concern over Russian ecology.

Jones is far more convincing when he presents the European responses to Sauer's field notes 50 years later. He identifies three lines of critique, one of which incorporated Sauer's warning of extinction and lobbed criticisms condemning the horrors of Russian imperialism and suggesting that other European empires could manage animal resources more successfully (139, 166). Jones then shows that the Russian government introduced conservationist measures in the early 19th century, which within a few decades became "some of the most progressive anywhere in the colonial world" (196–97). The difference between Jones's claims of when the ecological critiques began and his evidence of any such concerns is over 50 years. In those decades, according to Jones's records, overhunting reached catastrophic dimensions, and the sea cow went extinct.

How could the Russian Empire be expected to control an environmental disaster that it had no scientific or conceptual tools to recognize? Jones's assertions about the magnitude of ecological damage may be true, but they have little in common with the 18th-century critique or thought about extinction. From the evidence Jones presents in the book, few natural historians or members of the Russian or international elite expressed their responsibility to animals in the same normative terms. Even the ideas of the Enlightenment, an important but unparsed intellectual current for Jones, were inconsistent on the treatment of animals, with Comte de Buffon's opinion both that man was the most destructive creature of all (49) and that dominion over animals was the pinnacle of enlightened civilization (5–6).



To suggest that these books can be discussed together as histories of maritime Russia raises the question of the role that the sea plays in each of them. Most immediately, in a nod to Braudel, the maritime focus determines a region in its relation to the sea and not according to national borders or hermetic regional labels such as the Far East, Central Asia, or the Balkans. In this, we defer to the 18th-century Russian mentality that viewed the Caspian Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the North Pacific as central to the regions within which the empire acted or over which it ruled. Admittedly, these are imperial categories, open to their own postcolonial criticisms, but perhaps they are more useful for the study of imperial activity than other divisions of space. In fact, this approach serves to highlight the ways in which maritime history

was an important component of Russian imperial history and requires further study for a fuller understanding of the Russian Empire. The second question, then, is whether there is anything particular about the sea as the defining feature of a region. To varying degrees, each of these books demonstrates the distinctiveness brought by the sea: the Caspian Sea, desirable for its easier trading route, was an advantageous feature for supply lines and troop reinforcements in a difficult setting; the geographical distinctiveness of the Archipelago Principality dictated the form of government the Russian navy sought to establish there; and the North Pacific environment was a dynamic factor in Russian imperialism. These are some of the questions raised by these books, and many new questions will arise as historians consider the management of the Russian Empire's marine resources and maritime borders.

School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University College London
16 Taviton St.
London WC1H 0BW, UK
j.leikin.12@ucl.ac.uk