

## Revisitations

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It is often challenging to find the strands that connect articles in a given issue of a small yet heavily interdisciplinary regional studies journal. Yet I often marvel at how certain themes emerge time and time again. This issue is random at first glance; the topics are individually diverse when compared, but it is mostly their perennially significant nature within our region that makes them similar. Therefore, in this first issue of *Sibirica*'s twenty-first volume, I found that a theme of revisiting (and rethinking) came to the fore. The four articles included here all revisit key themes in Siberian studies—from human-animal interconnectedness and bear ceremonialism to state-instituted identity categories and urbanization—from fresh perspectives.

Victoria Soyán Peemot's article takes a novel approach to human-nonhuman relationships and relations with a sentient landscape by focusing on the often-overlooked category of waste—in this case, literal excrement. Discussing the myriad uses of dung by Tyvan herders, she shows how those who engage with the substance as a mundane yet valuable material consider it anything but waste; rather, it is a vital product that is both practical and symbolic. Dealing with dung is not merely a chore but also an act of care of nonhumans and the land itself—a way to be in good ecological relations with others in the world. Peemot weaves in memories and experiences from her childhood with Tyvan herders and ethnographic research, asking us to rethink the role of what Western environmentalism considers waste.

We then move to Andrew Wiget and Olga Balalaeva's article on contemporary Eastern Khanty bear ceremonialism. Bear ceremonialism has long fascinated anthropologists and folklorists across Siberia and Eurasia. Wiget and Balalaeva bring new data here to refresh a long conversation, and they examine the revival of bear ceremonies among their Eastern Khanty interlocutors. Throughout their discussion, they make links to other versions of the ceremony that circulate among Ob'-Ugrian communities, revealing how the specific practices they have documented show historical connections between groups, and new innovations that exist in tension with traditionalism. While Eastern



Khanty bear ceremonies may draw on various regional influences, they remain a strong vehicle for reviving and consolidating local ethnic identity.

Henry Jennings's historical contribution revisits the works of a selection of 18th-century travelers from Western Europe who visited Siberia, which reveals how these outsiders to the region relied on various criteria when attempting to classify the region's inhabitants as either Asian or European (see *Sibirica's* special issue "Asia in the Russian Imagination," volume 19, issue 1 for more on the various tensions within this theme). In examining this travel writing, Jennings shows how the writers' assessments reproduce the binaries of European settler/Asian indigenous peoples that existed locally but recasts them within the vocabulary of the Enlightenment most familiar to them.

Finally, Igor Popov's article revisits the future of cities in the Russian Arctic and argues that perhaps there is not much of one. This approach to the issues of Arctic cities differs quite strikingly from the perspectives shared recently in this journal in a 2019 special issue (volume 18, issue 3, "Indigenous Peoples, Urbanization Processes, and Interactions with Extraction Firms in Russia's Arctic"). Unlike the aforementioned issue, which considers cities (like Yakutsk) south of the Arctic Circle, Popov focuses only on urban areas using the strictest definition of the Arctic—the region above the Arctic Circle. He reveals the decreasing population trends affecting nearly all cities and urban-type settlements. He stresses that even if most people in rural areas of the Arctic moved to urban settlements, the rise in population would be negligible overall. Based on the data he analyzes, he suggests that urban settlements in the Arctic are unlikely to grow, especially as shift work continues to trend for industries located in the region.

All the topics covered in this issue have occupied and continue to occupy central discourses in the anthropology, history, and geography of this region. Hopefully the articles in this issue will invite the reader to return to these topics and concepts with refreshed thoughts.