In 1880, Adrian Jacobsen, working on behalf of Carl Hagenbeck, who ran Hagenbeck’s Zoo in Hamburg, Germany, recruited two Labrador Inuit families to accompany him to Europe and participate in shows featuring “exotic” people. One family consisted of Abraham, his wife Ulrike, daughter Sara, baby Maria, and Ulrike’s nephew Tobias. Abraham was a respected member of the Moravian community in Hebron, and he agreed to travel abroad over the objections of the Moravians. The second family was from the Nachvak area and consisted of Terrianiak, his wife Paingo, and their teenage daughter Noggasak. This group was not affiliated with any church and practiced shamanism. The families were distrustful of one another; though the heads of both families saw the venture as an opportunity to erase debts they had accumulated while trading at mission stations and Hudson’s Bay Company trading posts. Unfortunately, smallpox claimed the lives of the eight Inuit within five months of their voyage across the North Atlantic. They contracted this disease because of their employer’s unforgivable delay in having them vaccinated.

Once in Europe, Abraham wrote letters to a former teacher and kept a diary chronicling the group’s experiences. While the original diary has not been located, a missionary’s transcription of 14 pages of the document survives in the Moravian Archive in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Greifswald University projects that resulted in this book were built around that document and Abraham’s letters. Abraham reports that the two families were exhibited in Hagenbeck’s zoo and in various cities throughout Europe, where thousands of curious people paid money to see them. Soon after their arrival in Germany, both families came to regret their decision to spend a year abroad. Abraham wrote that the Inuit found the crowds unpleasant, tired of their duties, suffered mistreatment at the hands of their employers, caught a variety of ailments, and were desperately homesick.

Professor Lutz and his students located a number of other documents that provide additional information about this sad chapter in Inuit-Western history. The documents include Moravians’ letters expressing concern about the Hagenbeck arrangement, newspaper articles reporting on the Inuit exhibition, the physician Rudolf Virchow’s paper detailing physical and behavioral attributes of individual family members, and clothing advertisements making reference to the Inuit’s attire. These documents, along with Abraham’s letters and diary, have been translated into English and form the body of the publication. Historic drawings and photographs of the eight Inuit and Alootook Ipellie’s cover artwork complement the text and reinforce Abraham’s first-person voice.

In essays at the beginning and end of the book, Professor Lutz and his students tackle a number of difficult topics in a straightforward and sensitive fashion. They discuss late 19th century racial beliefs, scientific perspectives regarding indigenous peoples, and Moravians’ attitudes about converted and pagan Inuit. The book makes clear that there is an extensive history of exhibiting indigenous people in zoos, sideshows, world fairs, and museums throughout Europe and the United States for the entertainment and edification of the masses. Also, the publication provides a window into the social disruptions wrought by missionaries and traders, who in Labrador insisted on the separation of Christian and “heathen” Inuit and encouraged a dependency on trade goods, disrupting the social and economic lives of families and communities.

Unfortunately, the design of the central part of the book presents the reader with unnecessary challenges. The introductory section of the work, set in a two-column format, is attractive and very readable. The problem emerges in the section featuring the translated documents, beginning with a letter from Abraham to Brother Elsner. The text of Abraham’s letter is printed over eight pages. The text is centered in the top two-thirds of each page, framed by black photograph corners. A series of letters written by Moravians is printed along the lower third of each page, in a two-column format. The pieces are juxtaposed to reinforce their relationship; however, it is difficult to read two documents running concurrently over multiple pages. In order to read Abraham’s letter to Brother Elsner in its entirety, the reader has to ignore the Moravians’ correspondence at the bottom of eight pages. To read the correspondence, one has to flip back to the page where the letters begin and read the next 12 pages of text, ignoring Abraham’s letter and the beginning of Abraham’s diary. If that is not confusing enough, translations of newspaper articles and advertisements interrupt the flow of the diary and correspondence. The reader is forced to work hard,
navigating back and forth through this section of the publication, to appreciate the contents of these important texts and their relationships to one another.

The readable two-column format that characterized the introductory section is used again in the appendices. Attractive black-and-white photographs of the abandoned Hebron mission station, taken by Hans-Ludwig Blohm, conclude the book. Their relationship to the volume is not developed, which is unfortunate.

This little book is very painful to read because it features multiple accounts of inhumane treatment of Inuit by Westerners. However, it is also an important publication that should be read widely and discussed openly by people living and working in the North. Inuit art collectors and gallery owners, scientists and social scientists, educators, and museum professionals should study this publication and reflect on their own ethical practices, keeping in mind Alootook Ipellie’s concern, expressed in the Foreword to the book, that too often in modern contexts Inuit continue to be treated as exotic objects of curiosity.

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THE TLINGIT INDIANS IN RUSSIAN AMERICA,

This book is a translation of a 1991 Russian volume, “Idnietsy Tl'inkity v Period Russkoi Ameriki (1741–1867).” originally published by Nauka, Siberian Division. In the preface, the author notes that since the publication of the Russian edition, he has expanded the text and Documentary Appendix and added new ethnographic information from both Russian and American sources. He states that, “In many ways this is an original work” (p. x).

The book is divided into three major sections. The first is Grinev’s reconstruction and interpretation of traditional Tlingit society and culture prior to their contact with Europeans. In this ethnographic survey, he discusses the geography, technology, economics, social organization, morals, legends, and intellectual culture of the Tlingit. Although the author relies principally on Russian texts and archival material, he makes extensive use of the works of Frederica de Laguna, Sergei Kan, and Ronald Olson for his re-creation and interpretation of traditional Tlingit life. Underlying the entire book is the theory that societies pass through stages of social evolution, with the changes driven by economic conditions and ownership of the means of production.

The second section describes the history of Tlingit relations with Europeans in Russian America. Most of the accounts are again based on Russian sources, with little input from the Spanish or British documents, fur trader journals, or historical records from other European and American sources. I found some historical errors, such as the statement that Malaspina stayed at Yakutat (Port Mulgrave) from May 1 to July 6, 1791 (p. 96). In fact, Malaspina left Acapulco on May 1, arrived in Yakutat on June 25, and left on July 6, 12 days later. Regarding the killing of Colonel Ebey, the author says (p. 206) that the Tlingit sent a special fighting expedition to Oregon to avenge the chief’s death. However, Ebey was killed at Port Townsend, near Seattle, Washington. One wonders then, if there are similar errors regarding the Russian documents.

The final section of Grinev’s book is entitled, “The Influence of European Contacts on Tlingit Culture in Russian America.” I found this section very informative, though the interpretation is influenced by the author’s theoretical bias, mentioned above. Much of his information comes from early Russian documents that at times reflect ethnocentric European views of the Tlingit.

In their introduction, the translators mention that three American anthropologists and one Tlingit, David Ramos of Yakutat, read and commented on parts of the text. In his bibliography and text of this new original work, Grinev includes two articles by Mark Jacobs, Sr., and Mark Jacobs, Jr., and three books and two articles by Richard and Nora Dauenhauer. In the 15 years following the publication of the original Russian edition, the Tlingit people themselves have conducted many clan and cultural conferences and have issued reports from these meetings. Tlingit anthropologists and scholars have published several new works. If one is to write the history of a particular society and include recent works, then it would seem appropriate to make a greater use of information and the views of other Tlingit, as well as of works by outsiders.

The book is a valuable contribution to the literature because it contains many new statements, data, and information from a vast collection of Russian documents, some of which have never been used before in the analysis of cultural change among the Tlingit. It is one person’s interpretation of the Tlingit in Russian America, and should be understood as such. It is now up to Tlingit readers, scholars, and elders, along with historians who read Russian, to evaluate the text in much greater detail to determine its historical and cultural accuracy.

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