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in collaboration with

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## **Four Perspectives. The Story about the Research Project on the Siberian Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków**

The themes that carry us through life generally have their source in our early fascinations. Nevertheless, to achieve, from a subtle and vague interest, knowledge based on proper skills one requires effort and time. It was the same in my case. Some time ago I came across my old notebook with notes about a book I was reading as a teenager: “Journeys to Hell. Mystery plays of shamans”. By Jerzy Wasilewski. Perhaps it was one of the recommended readings before sitting an exam to become a student of ethnology, I do not remember the circumstances under which I chose to read the book. I copied the details of the shaman’s costume in ink and pasted them into my notebook between notes and quotes. Later on, there were other books, studies, sometimes the Siberian theme returned, for instance, when we prepared an adaptation of “Anhelli”<sup>1</sup> with the Kraków-based off theatre Eloë, located at the PWST Theatre School, in which I was in charge of the music. Next, I was involved in the production of the documentary “Gugara”, which was set among the reindeer herders of Ewenki and direct-

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<sup>1</sup>The mood and the content of the poem “Anhelli” by Juliusz Słowacki (first published in 1838), inspired many artists. Słowacki wrote the poem after Polish-Russian conflict in 1831, depicting the lives of Polish political prisoners exiled by the Tzar to Siberia.

ed by Andrzej Dybczak and Jacek Nagłowski. Years later, when it became clear that the place that had become my workplace had an extraordinary collection of objects from Siberia, all I had to do was to somehow make them speak, make them become a kind of travel document for the people linked to them, in the past and present.

I started creating the appropriate setting and conditions for the interpretation of objects from Siberia at the Ethnographic Museum in 2014. I tried to get funding for the research of the collection in one of the competitions for PhD students, but these plans failed, and the idea had to be refined. The project had to become more thorough — it became clear that it was worthwhile for the entire collection to be included in the research and to work on the project for several years. Organising a research team as well as framework to facilitate the research implementation was the first task to complete. From the outset, this was based on the parallel reading of the archives and the contemporary contexts in the places of origin of the collections. I have worked at the MEK since 2008, coordinating research projects focused on two strands of contemporary Polish culture — the theme of allotment gardens and the process of change regarding wedding rituals. Both cases included work with the collection as well as various experiments conducted during field research. In the case of the Siberian collection, however, the clue was that it was the collection which was to become the point of origin for further research and search for collaborators, whose work would produce expected results.

After various attempts, the team was finally formed. Grażyna Kubica-Heller, from the Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University, who specialises, among other things, in working with ethnographic sources — including the Siberian context, as well as methodological issues, has agreed to lead the team. In addition to myself, other members of our team included an experienced curator Jacek Kukuczka, who is the direct keeper of the Siberian collection, and Andrzej Dybczak, an artist (writer and film-maker), but also an ethnologist, who came with the experience of making documentaries in Siberia and was very well-versed in the audio-visual means of recording. In 2014 he was already looking into the Siberian collection of MEK, in 2008 he was invited to the museum by Katarzyna Barańska to show his film “Gugara”, laureate of the “Golden Lajkonik” award at the Kraków Film Festival. Throughout the process of forming our team and looking for sources of funding, it became apparent that the best option for our

four person group would be to undertake the project, which was awarded a grant in the 2016 competition of the National Humanities Development Program. The endeavour was a product of our collaboration, the result of several months of preparations for the competition in 2015. This was also new for the museum, so far MEK has never financed research projects with funds from competitions for scientific institutions. With the support of the museum's management, as well as our joint work on the competition application, we obtained funding to conduct this research.

Our team gathered diverse perspectives, which helped to develop research assumptions and paths for their realisation, to consequently conduct effective research and present the results through numerous materials published on the museum's website. The website presents the entire collection in the form of a database, as well as contexts from the field research, e.g. in the section "Stories" and "Voices from the field".

By obtaining separate funding from the competition of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage we could prepare and launch the exhibition: "Siberia. Voices from the North" (16.10.2020 — 31.12.2021)<sup>2</sup> accompanied by a programme of meetings and additional events "Siberia. Explanations"<sup>3</sup> — supported by the company Gaz-System S.A., its sponsor. The exhibition had been prepared prior to the introduction of anti-pandemic restrictions, therefore it was necessary to adapt its shape to those restrictions. For this reason, the studio warehouse, an important site for our activity, was unfortunately unavailable to the public.

Encouraged by the editors of ZWAM, we decided to share our thoughts on the research performed as part of the ethnographic museum's scientific activities. Are the actions we present a response to Ivan Gaskell's call published in ZWAM two years ago (first printed in 2017) for the museum

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<sup>2</sup> Exhibition curatorial team: Andrzej Dybczak, Jacek Kukuczka, Anna Zabdyrska, Magdalena Zych.

<sup>3</sup> The program includes special reports from the studio magazine and exhibition ("Benedykt Dybowski Resettles Reindeer," "Konstanty Podhorski in the Gold Rush," "Secrets of the Siberian Collection Warehouse"), as well as panel discussions on selected topics with special guests ("The Participation of Poles in the Colonization of Siberia," "Siberia in Reportage", "People and Animals", "The North is Changing its Climate", "Ethnographic Collections in the 21st Century", "Delicate Matter — Conservation of the Siberian Collection"). Video material from the meetings is available on the MEK YouTube channel. Soon, the podcast: "Siberian Kraków" — walking in the footsteps of the Siberian collection will also be available to the public. A dedicated climate change education programme incorporating the findings of this research will be delivered from September 2021 as part of the school education workshops.

to become a place for big ideas? By creating the collection awareness together with our interlocutors in different places in the North, we tried to responsibly treat it as a chance for meetings and storytelling, to set friendly ground for revealing its value and power of influence. We hope to have at least partially followed the path of understanding the collection and evolving its meanings towards the future.

This text will include excerpts written by Jacek Kukuczka, Grażyna Kubica-Heller, and Andrzej Dybczak, as well as a narrative about the research itself based on reports and accounts written between 2016 and 2019.

## 1.

The voice of Jacek Kukuczka, the curator of the collection on its museum context and the decision not to expand it during the research period:

“The Siberian Collection of the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum In Kraków — or rather the historical Siberian compilation of the museum — date back deep into the 19th century. It is the oldest and probably the most diverse group of unique objects depicting the cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the far north and the eastern parts of Russia that can be found in the Polish museum collections. In Polish historiography and at the same time ethnography, these areas adopted a universal, although quite imprecise, term: Siberia.

The “capital” of the museum’s Siberian collection grew over many decades and the collection itself became one of the showcases of the non-European collections, which were an integral part of the museum almost from the moment it was founded in 1911. The Siberian showpieces came to the museum by various routes, and the process of integrating the collection lasted from 1913 until the last decade of the 20th century. At that time, despite incomplete data, shreds of information and imprecise elaborations, they were featured in many exhibitions in Krakow and outside the museum itself. From its beginnings, in many cases dating back to before the foundation of the museum, the Siberian collection has lived up to the possibilities and constraints of the time, in large part due to the intricate and difficult history of the 20th century. The passage of time, however, moved it further away from the sources — the old labels were fading, documentation circulating between institutions was “losing” historical data, and political changes were not conducive to pursuing facts about “difficult subjects” included in donors’ biographies. The paradox was that the value

of the Siberian compilation grew, but was not matched by knowledge and understanding of the collection itself: — the people who brought it to life and the people of Siberia to whom we owe it.

The 21st century has brought new opportunities and challenges. Archival records and old studies no longer stood the test of time — new questions kept arising but the answers available were either insufficient or unreliable. Having recognized this state of affairs, there emerged an urgent need to describe this collection not so much anew, as from a contemporary perspective, in which the voice from “over there” in Siberia would be equally important, if not more important, than the ethnographic interpretations of the curators. To complete the feat, the museum needed to break through the “glass ceiling” — to leave its homestead behind and go to... Siberia. This turned out to be possible through the implementation of the scientific-research project: *Anthropological reinterpretation of the Siberian collection from the compilation of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków originally gathered by Polish researchers of the 19th century Siberia*, carried out under the NPRH grant in 2016-2019. This interdisciplinary research programme did not only embrace classical field research (carried out in 4 selected and collection-related locations), but also research on analogous collections in Russia and Great Britain. The aim of both was to shift the focus from the past to a contemporary understanding of the collection itself as well as the history disguised within it for over a century. Who acquired these showpieces and why? Why, by whom and for what purposes were these things used before they became a part of the museum collection? Are these objects still functional and used by the descendants of their former owners? What can be learned from them about things, which, with time, have become our heritage? These are only a few questions among many with which the museum set off into to the archives, warehouses and Siberia — from the Kanin Peninsula to Chukotka and Kamchatka. Nearly each of the 350 objects that make up the historical collection needed to be “probed” and clarified. And although the questions seemed simple, finding the answers was not at all easy. The Siberian collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, although may seem small in comparison with similar collections in Russian and Western European museums, turned out to be extremely abundant. The unique objects guarded many personal stories as intimate as the institution of marriage (the Nieniecki kapor — ceremonial headdress 19106/MEK), religious beliefs (the Selkup cult figurines 30609/

MEK and 30610/MEK) or, finally, difficult ones such as the circumstances and methods of obtaining objects or entire collections (e.g. the collection of Konstanty Podhorski).

However, the most important decision, which aroused both interest and controversy among ethnographers and museum workers, was the decision not to collect new pieces during the research period and not to expand the collection with physical objects, but with **knowledge, making the historical collection more accessible in terms of understanding**. This was not an orthodox paradigm or an absolute rule — in the course of meetings, conversations or interviews, research participants encountered spontaneous, lively responses, among which the category of the gift required respect for the will of our interviewees. These situations were a kind gesture towards the museum and the researchers themselves, and the objects acquired this way are few in number, which does not diminish their significance. Let us not forget that the most important task behind the work of the researches was to bring this collection back to life by introducing the people behind it — both historical figures and contemporary residents of selected regions of Siberia. It was clear for us that every little item from the Siberia collection has a story behind it. We managed to listen to some of them and today they are available on the [www.etnomuzeum.eu/syberia](http://www.etnomuzeum.eu/syberia) website and at the exhibition “Siberia. Voices from the North.”

## 2.

Personal reflections of Grażyna Kubica-Heller, PhD, social anthropologist, in her work focused on ethnographic archives and methodology:

“Siberia has become one of my historical interests ever since I was researching the biography and work of Maria Czaplicka, the Oxford anthropologist who led the 1914-1915 Yenisei expedition and, prior to which, wrote the book *Aboriginal Siberia. A Study in Social Anthropology*, which is a discussion of the entire ethnography of Siberian aboriginal tribes of the time (mainly in Russian and Polish). It was through her texts and photographs that I looked at the “Canada of the East,” as she used to call Siberia. At the same time, this land evoked implications connected with the dramas of the Polish post-insurrection exiles, as well as with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*, read in samizdat, or Gustaw Herling Grudziński’s *Another World*.

The work on the Siberian collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków combined these two threads: ethnographic and martyrological, as most of the objects came from Polish exiles interested in the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Siberia. They brought richly decorated clothing made of animal hides, objects of everyday use, as well as models of dugout canoes or tools.

Although I was already familiar with the Siberian artefacts in Czaplicka's collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, working on the Kraków collection was a completely new experience for me. First of all, it was amassed in one place: a storage room called "the carpenter's shop". The centre of our activity was located there. The pieces were laying in the drawers of a large dresser as well as in boxes on many shelves. We could take them out at any time to look at and (carefully) touch. This intimate contact with these delicate garments, which nevertheless retained their form and beauty of decoration, was a momentous experience. We looked closely at each piece, trying to figure out what it was made of and how it was made. We found all the information from previous records, compared it with one another and what we knew about the context, searched for similar things on the internet, asked experts. We also tried to combine individual items with one another: pants, jackets, hats, gloves. In doing so, we recreated the original sets of costumes that had been separated in previous museum clean-ups. We laid out individual pieces of costumes from one region on the floor covered with sheets of paper. We tried to imagine the owners of the garments, what they looked like, what they were doing. We came up with biographies of these clothes and stories of people. This work triggered our imagination and prompted further exploration.

A very significant aspect of this activity was that we worked as a team: each of us added something to the common endeavour. Jacek Kukuczka shared his extensive knowledge of many years as curator of non-European collections at the MEK; having visited Siberia many times, Andrzej Dybczak referred to his experiences; Magda Zych exploited her extensive theoretical knowledge of museology and contemporary ethnology. I compared MEK's Siberian collection with Czaplicka's and shared my anthropological and historical knowledge of Siberian research and 'her-story', which proved very useful as some of the women donors participated in courses for women organised by Adrian Baraniecki, also the founder of the Technical and Industrial Museum, the original site from which the MEK's Siberian collection



came from. I was very pleased to learn that it was the emancipating women who sought to acquire higher education who took part in the formation of the rich Siberian collection.

What captivated me the most in this project was the possibility of unhurried and close contact with things, giving them meaning, pondering about their history, accepting their agency. And on the other hand: teamwork in the best sense of the word, based on democracy and collaboration, as well as mutual sympathy and respect, collective decision-making, and negotiating each stage of the project.

Other endeavours should also be mentioned: conversations with the former director of the MEK, Maria Zachorowska, a long-time caretaker of non-European collections, Alicja Maleta, Andrzej Rataj, Magdalena Dołęńska and others working close with the collection in the museum itself, and a conversation with curator Dr. Jerzy Czajkowski in Sanok, the author of an early study of the collection in the 1950s. We received guests from Russia, Dr. Yuri Kwashnin of the Russian Academy of Science in Tjumen, and Dr. Erich Kasten, head of the Foundation of Siberian Cultures and former head of the Siberian Studies Program at the Max Planck Institute, Germany. We also consulted the collection with Dr. Peter Kulchyski, a *native studies* specialist and Canadian researcher at the University of Manitoba, as well as with Prof. Tim Ingold of the University of Aberdeen, who visited our warehouse in 2019. Our study trips to St. Petersburg were equally important. We visited ethnographic museums there with vast Siberian collections and knowledgeable curators who assisted us enormously in contextualizing our collection, while being critical of past item acquisition practices by ethnographic expeditions during the communist era, ravaging the ‘villages of inorodcy’. The trip to Oxford and visit in the Pitt Rivers Museum was also very productive, although this time it was us who helped our British colleagues. This trip was focused on trying to figure out whether the cult figurines in the Kraków collection were not accidentally donated by Maria Czaplicka, as a similar figurine was also found in the Oxford museum. However, the field expedition of Andrzej Dybczak did not confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, no documents were found to prove Czaplicka’s connections with Kraków’s scientific institutions after her return from Siberia.

Another intriguing thread of our project was researching the donors of the Siberian collection. Some of them, such as Benedykt Dybowski, an exile-sci-



entist, we were quite familiar with, although in his case we also managed to find interesting sources. Another important figure was Konstanty Podhorski, a landowner from the Kresy (Eastern Borderlands), who sold his property and set out for Alaska in search of gold, co-founding a trading company to exploit Chukotka. He wrote a travel log, with numerous ethnographically interesting passages about the representatives of the indigenous peoples, and also amassed a large collection of Chukchi art objects. He was murdered by the husband of the woman he seduced. Certainly, there were also many donors-exiles who donated their Siberian clothes and souvenirs to Krakow's museums after returning from exile. Other donors included specialists who worked in Siberia: in forestry or administration.

We obtained all these contextualised knowledge in a process of collaborative work and interest we shared.”

### 3.

The above voices of Jacek Kukuczka and Grażyna Kubica-Heller provide ample insights into our team work. Let us now return to all the places where the Siberian collection theme came up during the research. Photographs or video recordings of the collection were regularly taken on the road and served as a basis for discussions. The trips were very demanding administrative-wise -- anyone who wishes to work in the Russian border area must obtain special permits. Permits are issued by the Federal Security Service, supervising the course of such studies conducted by foreigners. To obtain a permit a candidate must provide a personal guarantee from a local institution, presented upon entry to the Russian Federation. Many times, the staff and heads of local museums, who had not even met us yet, vouched for us, which was actually the only way the research could be carried out. In several cases, their applications were refused and they had to try again. All these actions prove that the museum world is full of relationships surpassing issues limiting cooperation.

Another important thing to mention is the technological chance this project has exploited, which consisted of audio-visual recording with devices that could be handled by single person. Certainly taking notes and making drawings are the most handy ways of recording during research, but in many circumstances, unobtrusive audio-visual documenting that does not disturb anyone may be of a great assistance to the history of the collection. Our baggage thus included: two cameras supporting video

recording, various lenses, laptop, recorder, tripod, external drives, microphone, microports, sets of cables, batteries and accumulators.

Together we decided on the most important geographical directions, following the selected pieces of the collection.

Two cult figurines were a reason for Andrzej Dybczak to conduct his studies twice in the Selkup community in Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District in Western Siberia. This is the area around the river Taz, the villages

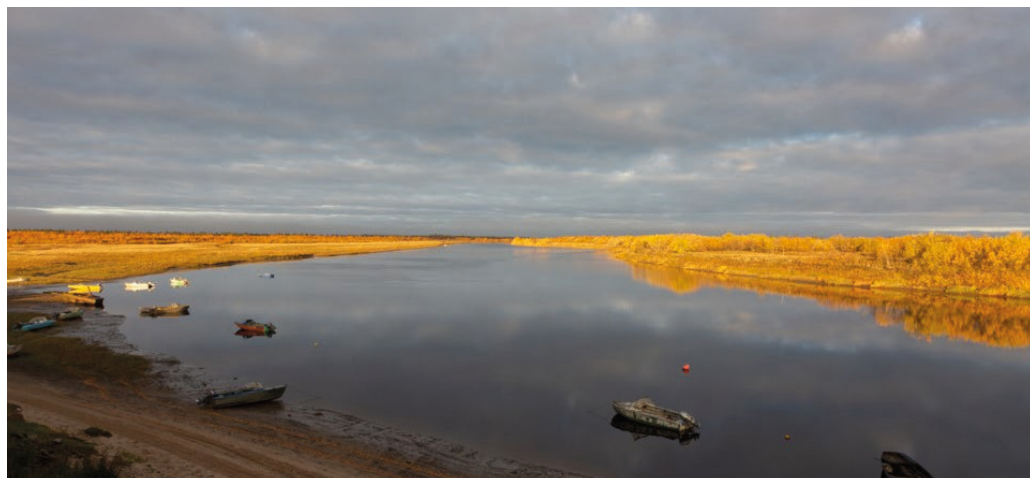


Fot. 1. Aleutian objects from the collection of Benedykt Dybowski,  
pic. W. Wilczyk, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków





Fot. 2. Even objects from the collection of Benedykt Dybowski,  
pic. W. Wilczyk, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 3. The Oma River, near the Barrents Sea, Nenets Autonomous Okrug,  
pic. A. Dybczak, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 4. Consultations in Nelmnyi Nos, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, 2017, pic. by J. Kukuczka, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 5. Boys on the day of the reindeer race, Ratta, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, 2017, pic. by A. Dybczak, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków





Fot. 6. Lidia Innokientovna Chichulina, Yelizovo, Kamchatka, 2017,  
pic. by A. Dybczak, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 7. Granddaughter of Lidia Innokientovna Chichulina at the MEK, Kraków, 2018,  
pic. by M. Wąsik, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 8. Lidia Innokientovna Chichulina's ensemble at the MEK, Kraków, 2018,  
pic. by G. Kubica, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków



Fot. 9. Fragment of the exhibition "Siberia. Voices from the North",  
pic. by A. Dybczak, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków

of Ratta and Krasnoselkup and the forest settlements at the tributaries of this river. The first project trip took place in October 2016 and lasted a month; the second trip was similar, except that it ensued in March/April 2017 and we were accompanied by Yuri Kwashnin, who prior to that visited Krakow himself. During the first trip, the help of Pavel Kubolyev was instrumental in the interpretation of two figures from the MEK collection. In the spring, material for a documentary “The Race” was shot in Ratta. Filming was made in close cooperation with the Bojakin family, Selkup reindeer herders. The moving picture will premiere at one of the anthropological film festivals.

In the early autumn of 2017, Andrzej Dybczak and Jacek Kukuczka traveled to the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (the Polar Regions of the East European Lowlands on the Barents Sea), in search of Nenets clothing, in particular a special fur headgear called *kapor*, these are gifts from the exile Izydor Sobański. We selected the appropriate location with the assistance of Yuriy Kvashnin’s contacts, archival records and profuse communication (in writing) with various people from that area. They worked there for two months. The researchers were assisted by Larysa Prokofievna, the head of Nenets Regional Museum, and Olga Latishevna, the author of “On the Track of Ancestors. The collection of materials from the expedition to the Khandeyar Nenets villages”, as well as many local women sharing what they know about the objects from the MEK collection. Research was conducted in Narian Mar, and also in Oma, Nelmin-Nos, Krasnoye. It resulted in the story “The Girl from the North Country” speaking about the fate of people connected with — as it turned out — Nenets female wedding attire, which is also a shaman dress. My contact with Michał Sobański allowed me to give more exposure to the biography of the donor and surprise his contemporary relatives with the Siberian story.

The background to the research of Benedict Dybowski’s ethnographic collection made it possible for Andrzej Dybczak to carry out fieldwork over a period of two months (March-April 2018), some of which focused on the settlements of Milkovo, Esso, Anavgai and pastoral habitats in the mountains of Kamchatka, as well as in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. A great deal of administrative help was provided by Natalia Tatarenkova, an ethnographer who worked at the local museum in the past. She was responsible for compiling the Aleutian part of the MEK’s Siberian collection. The connections to local communities contributed by Erich Kasten were also very useful.



Among the consultants for the collection are: the local specialist in the ornaments of Even clothing, Maya Petrovna Lomovtseva, the shepherd Kiriak Petrovich, and the entertainer Lidia Innokientovna Chichulina, who visited the MEK in May 2018 with a group of teenage girls from the folk group she is the head of. On their return from Cannes from a folk festival, the dancers, who instead of sightseeing in Krakow spent the whole day studying the Even clothing from Benedict Dybowski's collection, also performed for the museum staff in the museum's courtyard. It was a unique experience for both of the (meeting) groups. Research in Kamchatka has also helped to unravel the story of an Even business partner, who sold his reindeer to Dybowski, helping to improve the economic situation among the Aleutian community, Even Gawryla of the Adukan family. On the relevant webpage you will find a compiled photo album of Dybowski presenting the Museum's collection in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

The very last area surveyed was the capital of Anadyr district and the Chukotka coast, the settlements of Lavrentiya and Uelen, where Andrzej Dybczak carried out his work for a month and a half in the early autumn of 2018. It was only possible through obtaining a permit by Olga Rostorguyeva, the head of the Chukotka Heritage Centre in Anadyr, which proved to be quite a difficult, but not impossible feat. The course chosen was based on Konstanty Podhorski's collection, part of which can be found at the MEK (tools, applied art, clothing), as well as in the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (over a hundred figurines and amulets carved in walrus tusk). Uelen is the easternmost town of the Russian Federation, only a few dozen kilometres away from Alaska. Podhorski was inspired by the life of the Chukchi people, described their life in his travelogue and took numerous photographs. By courtesy of Adam Sobota of the National Museum in Wrocław, we were able to access photographs from his album. Podhorski, the short-time governor of Chukotka and a child of his time, used a colonial perspective in his records<sup>4</sup>, a fact which is discussed both in the exhibition and in the materials presented on the Internet. The story of Podhorski is called "Gold of Alaska, Gold of Chukotka", the narrative of which is peppered with quotes from his travelogue, photographs, and the memoir book of his acquitted killer.

The Uelen study subjects' glimpse of their own selves, and of the instant in which they are caught up have been presented in the material accompa-

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Partyka transcribed a travelogue scan into text as part of a student internship at MEK.

nying the story of the Aleutian drum in the MEK collection — the retained frame is one of the few Aleutian relics; other individual examples of Aleutian objects are in Washington and Khabarovsk. The story of Stanislav Nuteventin, an artist sculpting in walrus tusk, looks particularly interesting in the feature “Daughter’s Song” published on the Siberian website of the MEK.

#### 4.

Of course, not every item in the collection could be subjected to such detailed examination, but our decisions were based on careful consideration of the most challenging pieces in the MEK’s Siberian collection, in terms of their significance within the common heritage of humanity, and in the process we decided on the priorities of our research.

The theoretical background for the research decisions derived from contemporary reflections on the decolonisation of collections and museum practices, we also learned from examples of self-critical reflection undertaken by other institutions, as many museums today work creatively with their collections in search of inclusive solutions<sup>5</sup>. In research planning, I have tried to identify the potential for the inclusion people involved with the collection in different ways, so as to develop a more collaborative nature of such encounters. It was the responsibility of the museum’s research team to establish relevant contacts on the basis of the collection, but further developments were the result of these encounters, and the resulting dynamics often went beyond the research itself.

I am convinced that the work with the research results should be continued. At the very least, it is important to investigate to what extent the concept of reinterpreting a collection on the basis of this particular set of practices meets the objectives of the idea I have tentatively named “field museology” in the research project, i.e. activities focused on exploring the living contexts of a museum collection in its geographical places of origin, but not confined to this dimension alone. What would be the potential research activities to feature more prominently in this programme? To what extent does this scenario of proof-of-concept research, yet backed by anthropological tools of interpretation produce the results we expect from contemporary eth-

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<sup>5</sup> A case in point is the Dutch Research Center for Material Culture, headed by Prof. Wayne Modest, or a Berlin-based centre with a theory focused profile, CARMAH, led by prof. Sharon Madonald. The aforementioned sites which have undertaken these reflections have been in operation roughly since 2015-2016.

nographic museums? How might these practices be exploited in the area of other collections and themes? These questions remain open.

## 5.

Creating connections between collections and people, or exploring the existing ones, as well as the shared time when we learned from and about each other was one of the most important components of the whole endeavour. To conclude our multi-voiced account, let me present reflections by Andrzej Dybczak, who performed all the field research for this project and also authored the videos and stories about the collections presented on the “Siberian Collection — the New Look” portal:

“When I first entered the warehouse of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow to see the pieces of the so-called ‘Siberian collection’ I had no idea that one of the most interesting adventures of my life was about to begin. It lasted over three years. These days, when I step into that same institution, walk down the stairs to its basement gallery, which still features a “Siberian” exhibition until the end of 2021, I ask myself about the essence of what I experienced. We are not always able to answer the questions we ask ourselves, it is not always an easy task. There are two objects in the dark hall, where the tour should end, and where I always start and more and more often end my visits. On the wall I see a wallpaper of a winter forest just after dark, in the background a small wooden hut with a grey trail of smoke coming from its chimney. It was as if I had descended into the underworld of my own memories, as, after all, I had taken the photograph myself. I look at the black display case, turned away from the room, and see these familiar beady eyes, the well-known wooden shapes dressed in the fur of two squirrels, the winter, silver one and the red one from the summer. And a mouth carved out of wood. Their creator, it is quite intriguing, was able to form them in a manner that, without giving them any particular expression, resulted in many different ones. This reminds me of Leonardo and Mona Lisa, but that story belongs to a different museum. Six years ago, the museum at Krakowska 48, let me in, allowing me to look through a drawer containing catalogue cards of exhibits from North Asia and Siberia. I opened it at random and my eyes were caught by the same beady eyes, the same puzzled lip line. They were looking at me then from the black and white photographs, stuck to the catalogue cards. I was intrigued. Their description suggested that the objects came from the USSR,

they were “Dolls”, and there was a blurred name: I. Żurawski, Żurowski? I was disappointed. Is that really all there is? These two impressions lingered with me after a visit to the warehouse itself. Figurines, costumes, various items of fur, leather and beads, laconic information. What a shame that objects can’t talk. Perhaps they would recount at least a little of the grandeur of the world or worlds they were created in? Something about the people wearing them and their own stories? I don’t know about other cultural anthropologists, but I selected this course programme, as it was “the place” to listen to the best stories. Sitting in the museum’s warehouse amidst silent objects smelling of a medley of leather, age-old dirt and chemical preservatives, I could almost hear the stories coming from the cardboard boxes. Well, almost. Because the devil is in the details and the way from almost to truly is a long way. But after all, it cannot be that far to be impossible to traverse. The team gathered. The foundation for the research project was laid: to find a person who is able to tell us anything about these objects. Let’s find an individual who can still appreciate these items. A person as close as possible to its origins.

Each person on the team involved had their own contribution and their own journey. Yet for me, the three years of the research project were spent looking for stories in the whereabouts the objects stored in the Krakow warehouse originated from. And sometimes I did find them indeed. You can listen to them or have a read at the museum exhibition and its website [www.etnomuzeum.eu/syberia](http://www.etnomuzeum.eu/syberia). But most remarkable moment for me was when, after all those days and nights of meetings, travelling and sitting in front of the computer, days and nights of work, I realised that we are not really doing ethnographic or even museological research. We are building an invisible bridge. The bridge connecting 48 Krakowska Street and the Keriak Kykol forest, and the Kanin peninsula, the vast highlands of Kamchatka and the Chukotka beach. In the middle of this bridge, at certain times of the day or even night, objects, people, and stories meet. Tongues unravel. Forgotten facts of childhood come to mind. Practices and events are recalled. Plans are being made for the future. Although the bridge is fragile and can be blown away by a streetcar passing by, it was worth stepping on it. And that gesture, this is it.”



fol. Andrzej Dybczak

Fot. 10. Fragment of the exhibition „Siberia. Voices from the North”,  
pic. A. Dybczak, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków

## A timeline of works with the Siberian collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, mentioned in the text:

- 2008 presentation of the documentary “Gugara” (dir. A. Dybczak, J. Nagłowski) at the MEK, consultation of Even objects with Andrzej Dybczak; a researcher staying in Siberia among the Even reindeer herders in 2003, 2004 and 2006.
- 2014 Andrzej Dybczak search query among the Siberian collection of MEK and his decision to join the project;
- 2014 concept and development of an individual application to study selected elements of the Siberian collection, submitted in the Prelude competition of the National Science Centre, application rejected;  
Change of strategy: decision to include the entire collection in the research, composing the research team and preparing for the competition for research bodies announced by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education as part of the next edition of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities (2016-2019), module “Development 2a”.
- 2015 work on the competition application: establishment of research objectives and hypotheses based on selected theories, production schedule, cost estimate; project title: “An anthropological reinterpretation of the Siberian collection from the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, elaborated by Polish researchers of the 19th century Siberia”; in December, my visit to the exhibition “Esthétiques de l'Amour. Sibérie Extrême-Orientale” at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris as part of own research;

- 2016 announcement of competition results, update of work schedule and working database of artefacts (April), signing of contract no. 302/NPRH4/H2a/83/2016 on 12 May and commencement of work under the grant: selection of associates for selected tasks (Zofia Noworól, Alicja Połukort, Dr Anna Rogulska, Marcin Zybala), setting up the studio warehouse, visual documentation of the collection for research purposes; queries (e.g. Science archives of the Polish Academy of Learning and the Polish Academy of Sciences, National Archive in Kraków, Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg, Kunstkamera — Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg, Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford), consultations (including material studies), arrangement and implementation of field research in Western Siberia in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District near the Taz River;
- 2017 continued queries (including National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, archives of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, National Museum in Kraków, Foundation of Siberian Cultures in Havel, Nenets Landscape Museum in Narian-Mar, Centre for Ethnic Culture of the Nenets Autonomous District of Narian-Mar); follow-up research — in spring, revisiting the Taz River, in autumn, conducting research in the Oma settlement in the Kanin Tundra of the Nenets Autonomous District;
- 2018 queries and field research in Kamchatka (Petropavlovsk Kamchatka, Esso, Anavgai) and Chukotka (Uelen, Lavrentiya); commencement of work on the presentation of the collection and research results on the MEK website in cooperation with an IT company, drafting and releasing textual and visual content (including renewed photographic documentation of the collection — this time for presentation purposes);
- 2019 continued work on the presentation of the results online, now under MEK's own funds after the completion of the grant; preparing the script for the exhibition "Siberia. Voices from the North" and submitting an application in the competition of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; securing a sponsor for selected activities — the company Gaz System S. A.; working on two grant applications under Horizon 2020, with partners from other countries, aiming to continue research in a larger network, participating in competitions, yet with no success;
- 2020 announcement of the results of the competition of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; the awarded grant enabled the organisation of the exhibition; alongside this, developing a portal with research materials and a database on the "Siberian collection — a new look" completed under the grant; production and opening of the exhibition on 16 October (the scenario was modified and adapted to the circumstances; the operator of the programme was NIMOZ);
- 2021 the exhibition continues to be presented at MEK with a programme developing its themes (online), described above in a footnote.  
The results of the research were presented in Polish, English and Russian conference proceedings; there have also been academic papers published, e.g. in "Muzealnictwo" (Year 2020), in the volume concluding the conference "Darczyńcy polskich muzeów" (in print).



**Magdalena Zych, Jacek Kukuczka, Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Andrzej Dybczak**

## **Four Perspectives. The Story about the Research Project on the Siberian Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.**

The article examines the process, methods and results of a 3-year-long research project (2016-2019) concerning the 19<sup>th</sup> century Siberian collection from the resources of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków which was donated by political prisoners, scientists and travellers. The authors discuss how the contemporary knowledge of many local experts from different ethnic groups (such as local residents, reindeer herders, whale hunters, museum staff, donators' families) combined with archival sources could help to understand the unique connections between the past and the future of such heritage and its consequences in our lives. After the research, the collection is now accessible in a digital repository along with audio and visual materials from the fieldwork and the available archive data. Some of the stories are presented also in the exhibition "Siberia. Voices from the North".

**Keywords:** collection, The Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, Siberia, museology, fieldwork, exhibition