

*E. Rezvan*

### PETER THE GREAT KUNSTKAMERA — 290 YEARS

*“I want the people to look and study”*  
Peter the Great

Above the city designed by Peter the Great, and built on his order, hover its three symbols — the angel on the spire of Peter-and-Paul's Cathedral, the ship on the Admiralty building, and the planetary (armillary) sphere on the tower of the Kunstkamera. Three symbols — of Christian faith, of conquering the enemies, and of comprehending the Universe. And though the armillary sphere was lost in the fire of 1747 and reappeared on the tower of Kunstkamera only 200 years later, Russia's first public museum, despite all changes, has preserved the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment by taking part in the grandiose task, willed by Peter [1], of making an inventory of the Universe.

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (MAE RAS) is one of the largest and oldest ethnographical museums in the world. It is the successor to the first Russian state museum, the famous Kunstkamera of Peter the Great, founded by his decree in 1714. The priceless ethnographical, anthropological and archaeological collections housed in the Museum are among the most complete and fascinating in the world. They contain about two million exhibits and reflect the cultural diversity of the Old and New Worlds, forming an integral part of the cultural heritage of all humanity. The Kunstkamera is the oldest museum building in the world. Its outline is used as the symbol of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The history of the Russian Academy over the last three hundred years is linked closely to that of the Museum. The museum shared with the country many important milestones for Russian science and culture, including Peter's breakthroughs, the rise of Catherine the Great's epoch in the 19th century, and the achievements of the “great age” of Soviet academic research. We remember our colleagues — many outstanding researchers who were lost to Russian science in the years of wars and revolutions, Stalin's terror [2], and during the fearful years of the Blockade of Leningrad [3]. The most important historical guidelines for the research of the Museum's staff have always been the primacy of science in the system of cultural values of Russia, and what Cl. Levi-Stross once defined in a maxim — “anthropology is the humanism of the 21st century”.

Throughout its history the Museum occupied a special place in the structure of the Academy of Sciences. Among the people who headed the Museum in different periods were outstanding scholars: the naturalist, zoologist, traveller, member of the Academy L. I. Shrenk; famous orientalists and historians V. V. Bartol'd, B. A. Dorn, V. V. Radlov, V. V. Struve, A. A. Shifner, N. A. Kisiakov, R. F. Its; specialist in Africa, and correspondent member of the Academy D. A. Ol'derogge; philologists and members of the Academy E. F. Karskiĭ and I. I. Meschaninov.

The scientific activity of many outstanding Russian researchers of the 19th century was connected with the Museum, among whom were the founder of Russian and European anthropological sciences, member of the Academy K. M. Baer, and traveller, scholar and public figure N. N. Miklukho-Maklaĭ (traditional cultures of Australia and Oceania). In the Museum, Russian research schools were formed connected with the names and the heritage of such scholars as I. I. Zarubin (Central Asian studies), N. V. Kiuner (traditional culture of East Asian peoples), R. F. Barton (the Philippines), L. I. Lavrov (Caucasian studies), D. A. Ol'derogge (African studies), and Iu. V. Knorozov (deciphering of ancient languages). One can not overestimate the role of the outstanding ethnographers, specialists in Siberian studies, among who were L. Ia. Sisternberg, V. G. Bogoraz and V. I. Iokhelson, who played an important part not only in the development of Russian Siberian studies, but also Russian ethnographical science generally.

Today the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography is not only an academic museum, but also one of the leading research centres of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Here the traditions of the outstanding Russian ethnographers and anthropologists of the 18th—20th centuries are followed. According to the Decrees of the President of the Russian Federation, the MAE RAS ranks among the particularly valuable objects of cultural heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

Today more than 120 researchers work in the Museum, and many of them have been awarded with Russian and international scientific awards and prizes. Many of the Mu-