
THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY OF PETER THE GREAT KUNSTKAMERA (1714—2014)

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FROM “ZOO HUMAINE” TO ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM (CHRISTIAN THOMSEN, JENS WORSAAE, ARTHUR HAZELIUS, ERNEST HAMY, FRIEDRICH RADLOFF)*

Neighbours that are near and those that are far have always interested mankind. The first collectors of the “wonders of the world” known to us were Egyptian pharaohs and Roman and Chinese emperors. The citizens of Rome marvelled at the conquered barbarians that were driven along the Eternal City by the victors. From ancient time man's ideas about *what is normal* and that, which is a *deviation from the norm*, have been interpreted rather broadly. It has become one of the favourites of artists and sculptors. The medieval Muslim science was not only devoted to the study of the human world, but also came close to the task of scientific systematization of “lands and peoples”. The works of *‘ajā’ib al-makhūqāt* (“wonders of creation”) genre were unique “kunstkameras” on their own [1]. Europe, which along with control over the trade routes took over the scientific initiative from the Muslims, became the successor of this tradition. Great geographical discoveries made enormous contributions to Europeans' perception of the world. Like never before, they were able to see where and how *other* people, so different from them, existed. Cabinets of curiosities or kunstkameras, already known from the 15th century, displayed unusual items in its collections — some of those items were created by nature and some by men. Oftentimes they exhibited people with various pathologies as well as people who were of differing anthropological types (*figs. 1, 2*). The collections of court kunstkameras were overseen by scientists who also compiled the first catalogues.

In 1714 Petersburg Kunstkamera — the first national public museum in Russia — was created in accordance with the decree of Peter the Great. It was a part of a greater academic project. In 1776—1780 the world saw the release of the fundamental work of the famous scientist and traveller, member of St. Petersburg Academy Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *A Description of All the Nationalities That Inhabit the Russian State*. It was a unique collection of essays describing the settlement history, language, economy, customs and beliefs of many Russian peoples. 74 colourful illustrations portray the inhabitants of Russia dressed in national costumes. The engravings for the book were made by masters of the Engraving Chamber of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and then coloured by hand. This first composite ethnographic work about Russia has not lost its relevance and importance even in our day.

In the meantime, the town squares and various fairs helped a different perception emerge of “others” in the context of the culture of the common people. It was produced by circus booths and *lubok* (*figs. 3, 4*). Sometimes kunstkameras became a part of the street culture, as for instance, the House of Ice (1740), known well beyond Russia. It was one of the amusements of Empress Anna Ioannovna. It was a part of the ceremony of the comedy marriage of the court jester of the Empress, Prince Mikhail Galitzin and an elderly Kalmyk woman Avdot'ia Buzheninova. The special masquerade committee chose a place on the River Neva between the Admiralty and

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