

Title: The Ethnographic Return to their Own People: Bogoraz and Shternberg
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By examining the works of the Russian Jewish writer-ethnographers Vladimir Bogoraz and Lev Shternberg, I argue that they approached the study of their own people, Jews, quite differently from how they had studied the native peoples of Siberia. Their language changed, and the overall goals of their projects changed as well. Shternberg used physical anthropology to study the indigenous peoples of Sakhalin, but he did not employ this method when he collaborated with An-sky on a Jewish ethnographic project. Depending on their subject, these authors positioned themselves differently towards their interlocutors, their ideal and actual audiences, and the authorities. Broadly speaking, despite the divergences between the two authors, they shared the same “language,” the same discourse. The ingredients of this common discourse included lexical elements (they used shared terms), ideological orientation (writers gave voice to the subjects of the Empire, and privileged objectivity, scientific rigor, empirical verifiability, and quantifiable conclusions), and an orientation towards power (they confronted the state’s imperial and colonizing practices; and insisted on the values of the authentic religious, linguistic, and cultural ethnographic material they collected). In their interactions with the cultures they studied, they strove to promote a deeper understanding of them, serving not only as their observer, but also as their translator within this discursive frame of reference. Bogoraz’s sketches on the Gomel pogrom and Shternberg’s ethnographic essays reveal that even though these ethnographers were writing about Jews, they emphasized different aspects of Jewish daily life and presented different voices, thus showing that their Jewish subjects were not fixed, but rather in flux and constantly evolving, particularly before the 1917 revolution.