NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The eighth General Meeting of the Society for 1982 will be held in the
Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY, 25 OCTOBER, 1982

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of Previous General Meeting.
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held Monday, 27 September,
   1982 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members.
   The following new member was elected to the Society.
   Howard James GROOME

4. Papers and Journals.
   Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be
   tabled at the meeting.

5. Business.

6. Speaker.
   Mr. DICK RICHARDS, Acting Director, Art Gallery of South Australia,
   will give an address to the Society entitled:

   RECENT EXCAVATION WORK AT SISATCHANALAI,
   SUKATHAI PROVINCE, THAILAND
   - A Major 15th Century Asian Ceramic Production Site

7. Supper.

VERN TOLCHER,
Honorary Secretary,
213 Greenhill Road,
EASTWOOD. S.A. 5063.

Telephone  Office  272 2311
            Home    79 2193
Address to the Anthropological Society of South Australia
27 September, 1982

TAIGA AND TIGER

Siberia before the Russians

ANDREW HUGHES

South Australian Museum

Anthropology and Archaeology Section

Why did I come to study Siberia and Central Asia?

Romance. At least that was my initial reason. I knew a few tantalising details of the area's geography, such as Lake Baikal's extreme depth and the severity of the winters. We are all aware also of Siberia's role as a place of exile for dissidents, both of Czarist and Bolshevik rule. More recently of course its large mineral resources have come to our attention.

But is this all there is to Siberia and Central Asia?

No. Slowly I have been uncovering its history. Limited mainly by the relatively small amount of literature available in English. However the search has been exciting and rewarding in the many insights it has given me into tribal culture.

Tonight I will be speaking about the non-Russian peoples of Russian Central Asia and Siberia. Broadly speaking that part of the Euro-Asian landmass East of the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea. I hope to give you a very brief overview of the aboriginal culture of this area. Brief because of the great mass of territory. Brief because of the rapid degeneration of many of the cultures following Russian occupation.

Geography

Siberia and Central Asia stretch East from the Ural Mountains and Caspian Sea to the shores of the North Pacific Ocean. Bounded to the North by the Arctic Ocean and to the South by the Asiatic Plateau. In area, almost 15½ million square kilometres. Greater in area than Europe and mainland U.S.A. combined. The region can almost be considered a sub-continent, certainly in terms of difficulty of access. Until recent times, mountains to the West and South, frozen ocean to the North and dangerous stormy seas to the East, hindered penetration.

Climate, generally, is one of extremes. The lack of mountains in the North allows freezing air from the Arctic to sweep over much of the land. Warmer tropical air cannot enter the region because of the blocking mountains to the South. Temperatures for much of the year are below freezing, in some places, down to below minus 30 degrees centigrade. Whilst in the short summer, warm, balmy days in the plus 30 degrees may be experienced. As a rule precipitation is low. A more moderate climate is found in the West, where agriculture is practiced and in the lower Amur - Sakhalin area in the East.

Several mighty rivers cross the area, flowing from the South and emptying into the Arctic Ocean. Together with their criss-cross of tributaries, rivers such as the Ob, Yenisei and Lena were important routes of travel used by the Russians in exploiting the land after the 16th Century. The Amur, another important river, flows from the West and enters the North Pacific near Sakhalin. Together with their major tributaries most of these rivers are each over 5,000 kilometres in length.

Large lakes, fresh and salt dot the area, the most famous of which is Lake Baikal. At approximately 1,400 metres, it is the deepest body of fresh water in the world and so large, it has a moderating effect on the climate in the area.

The chief mountain chains are, The Altai - between the Irtysh and Yenisei Rivers; The Sayan - between the Yenisei and Selenga Rivers; The Yablonoi - between the Selenga and Amur Rivers and there is a chain of volcanic peaks along the Kamchatkan Peninsula.

Travelling from North to South, the four dominant vegetation types are Tundra, Taiga, Grassland and Desert/Semi-Desert.

Tundra - extreme cold for most of the year, permafrost and soil infertility result in little plant growth in this zone. Lichens are dominant with a few flowering plants appearing in summer.
Taiga - the massive, chiefly coniferous forests for which Siberia is famous. The climate is very cold for much of the year, but in more moderate areas aspens, elms and the like appear.

Grassland - wide, open grasslands extend from the Kirghiz Steppe in the West, through Mongolia and into parts of Manchuria. The climate is generally milder. Desert and Semi-Desert - may carry a sparse, scrubby type of cover and can be either sandy or stony wastes, the Gobi is the most famous.

Prehistory

Further work still needs to be done before there emerges a clear picture of the area's prehistory.

Assuming modern man migrated from the South-West, it appears he had spread throughout the region by about 35,000 years BP. There is a site of this age on the Aldan River in the East. Good and reliable dates of ca. 20,000 BP come from sites on the Yenisei and Angara Rivers and the Kamchatkan Peninsula.

It is possible that older dates may not be found in the Far North because much of this region would have been under an ice-cap during the Pleistocene. Many sites carry the remains of extinct mega-fauna, mammoth, rhinoceros and the like.

The Aboriginal Tribes

These are the people who inhabited, and in some cases, still do inhabit, Siberia and Central Asia before Russian occupation began in the mid-16th Century. The first settlements were just East of the Urals and shortly before World War II Moscow would have had good control of the Far North-East. The 1897 census gives the non-European population of Siberia as being about one million. The Russian and Polish population was given as five million. These figures are to be taken with a pinch of salt because they were based upon the number of tax (pelt) payers. The Siberians, like people today, were ever-ready to dodge taxes and usually disappeared into the Taiga at the first sign of a tax collector.

Racially the area presents an extremely complex problem, from the familiar Eskimo in the Far North East to the Muslim Tadjiks in the South West. There appears to have been several migrations of peoples into the area. Anthropologists distinguish two primary groups of people. Palaeo-Siberians, a diverse group of tribes mainly living in the Far North and Far East of Asia. Neo-Siberians, a group almost as diverse and spread throughout the rest of the land.

The Palaeo-Siberians are thought to be the earlier settlers of the sub-continent. They were distinguished from the Neo-Siberians by simpler social organization and religious practise as well as by physical characteristics. From this primary grouping may be distinguished about ten different tribes.

1. The Chukchee, of the Far North East, between the Anadyr and the Arctic Ocean.
2. The Koryak, between the Anadyr and Central Kamchatka.
3. The Kamchadal, of Southern Kamchatka.
4. The Ainu, of Southern Sakhalin Island and Hokaido, in Japan.
5. The Gilyak, near the mouth of the Amur and on Northern Sakhalin.
6. The Eskimo, of Bering Strait.
7. The Aleut, of the Aleutian Islands.
8. The Yukaghir, from between the Yana and Lower Kolyma Rivers.
9. The Chuvanzy, of the Upper and Middle Anadyr.
10. The Yenisei Ostyak, of the Lower Yenisei.

Apart from the Yenisei Ostyak, the Palaeo-Siberians were, at the turn of this century, confined roughly to the North East. The Neo-Siberians are probably later invaders of the sub-continent. They did not migrate in any unified fashion, as they also can be sub-divided into secondary groups by their physical and language differences. These secondary groups can be further broken down into the individual tribes, numbering about nineteen.
A. Finnic

1. The Ob Ostyak, from the Central Urals to the mouth of the Ob.
2. The Vogul, along the Urals to the Ob, South of the Ostyak.

B. Samoydric

3. The Samoyd, along the Arctic coast.

C. Turkic

4. The Kirghiz, in Central Asia.
5. The Kazak, in Central Asia.
6. The Uzbek, in Central Asia.
7. The Tadjik, in Central Asia.
8. The Tartars, in Central Asia.
9. The Yakut, wide ranging, throughout Central Asia and Siberia.

D. Tungusric

10. The Tungus, wide ranging, throughout much of Siberia.
15. The Manyarg, in Eastern Siberia.
16. The Orochon, in Eastern Siberia.
17. The Solon, in Eastern Siberia.

E. Mongolic

18. The Kalmuk, in South West Central Asia.
19. The Mongols, chiefly in Mongolia.
20. The Buryat, around Lake Baikal.

Lifestyle

There existed a wide range of lifestyles across the sub-continent.

Social Organization: Throughout Central Asia and Siberia, the family was the basic unit of society. It usually consisted of a man, his wife or wives and their children. The man's parents lived nearby. In most affairs women occupied a lower position than men. As a rule men married women from outside their own clan. Clans united several or more families into a larger unit. They could be loosely based upon geography or have more formal, often ceremonial membership requirements.

Headmen or chiefs had varying qualifications, however seniority was often one of them. Throughout the land other qualities required were: period of residence at a particular settlement, wealth and physical strength, clans sometimes combined to form nations, witness the Mongols. Most groups kept slaves, usually captured in war.

Economy:

In order to simplify matters, it may be said that the four main economies were:

1) Fishing and Hunting;
2) Reindeer Breeding;
3) Cattle Breeding (bovine cattle, sheep, goats, horses and camels); and
4) Agriculture.

Having said that, few peoples carried on any one of these activities to the exclusion of at least one of the others. Nearly all groups fished and hunted at times and many agriculturalists kept a few cattle.

Religious and Spiritual Life

Three of the world's great creeds were, and in some cases still are to be found in Central Asia and Siberia. Islam, Buddhism and Shamanism. Followers of Islam were chiefly found in the South West and numbered among their faithful the Turkmen, Tadjiks and some of the Kirghiz and Kalmuks. Some of the Mongols and Buryat were followers of Buddha. These two religions should be familiar to us all and I shall leave off describing them, suffice to say that in this part of the world both were tainted with Shamanism.
The great bulk of the peoples of this region were believers in a whole host of supernatural beings and spirits, some benevolent and others harmful to man's existence. They ranged in type and style from real and famous deceased ancestors (Blue Wolf and Jenghis Khan are still worshipped by some of the Mongols) to Supreme Beings - Gods of Creation, to various totemic spirits of animals and plants.

Ceremonies were performed at most important functions, births, different ages of man, death, marriage, war, etc., to appease and or to thank figures from the world of the supernatural.

Shamanism is found in varying forms throughout the world, but possibly not nearly so developed as in Central Asia and Siberia. The word itself comes from the Tungus - Saman.

Amongst the Palaeo-Siberians, it appeared to be less highly developed, few professional shamans were known, often any member of the family shamanised and women were considered better shamans than men. Professional shamans were well known amongst the Neo-Siberians. The position often, though not always being hereditary.

The shaman was the communities' chief priest, their liaison with the supernatural world. He was the master of ceremonies at births, initiations, deaths, marriages and before battles. He was an augury or fortune teller, medicine man and finder of lost objects. He had under his control a number of spirits, good or bad - white or black, whom he called upon to assist him at his work.

Candidates for shamanism were always nervous, excitable people, almost insane. They were often weak and sickly. Certainly before taking it up as an occupation they were seriously ill for long periods, often for nine or ten years. Through dreams, in which spirits came to them, the guidance of their families and advice from shamans, it became apparent to the candidate that the spirits were demanding him to start shamanising. If the candidate accepted this and came under the tutelage of a senior shaman, his illness ceased. If he resisted the call of the spirits, the candidate often died shortly afterwards.

During his period of apprenticeship the shaman learnt his tricks; ventriloquism, singing, dancing, trickery and the ability to fall into a deep trance-like state. It was during this trance that the shaman entered the spirit world and wrought his craft for good or evil. Necessary to the shaman's work were a number of accessories; a large round or oval drum, a dress, deliberately similar in style to those worn by women and bedecked with many tassels and metal plates, a mask, cap, handkerchief and horse-staves.

The Russians and the Present

As has occurred elsewhere, the invaders, in this case the Russians, believed in their own superiority. Although resistance, often severe, was offered, the aboriginal tribes eventually succumbed to Russian authority. The Chukchee held out until the 1930's. The Mongolians and Central Asians, with more complex social and economic structures, fared better than others in the face of this threat from the West.

Right from the start, diseases such as smallpox, ravaged through the tribal lands. Tragic epidemics are recorded from the 17th to the 20th Century. Early Russian settlers in Siberia included amongst their number less desirable elements of society, criminals and the like, evading the police in remote areas. Those folk often held the aboriginal population in greater contempt than other immigrants.

Cultural domination has continued under the Soviet system. Religious beliefs and hierachical structures often found amongst the Siberians and Central Asians are an anathema to the Marxists.

Some Useful References

Czaplicka, M.A.  Aboriginal Siberia, Oxford University Press, 1914.

Jochelson, W.  Peoples of Asiatic Russia, the American Museum of Natural History, 1928.
