

In *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia's Wild East*, edited by Eva-Maria Stolberg. Frankfurt am Main : Peter Lang, 2005: 73-85. ISBN 0820473944

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Katorga: Penal Labor and Tsarist Siberia

In Imperial Russia *katorga* (penal labor) signified a discrete penological/administrative regime. Peter I established *katorga* when, in 1696, he assigned as part of the Azov campaign convicts to the lower Don to build and possibly man Russia's first fleet. Before 1767 the state assigned most penal laborers to non-Siberian sites, using them to construct St. Petersburg, Port Rogervik, and fortresses along the Baltic and in Orenburg territory. Not until Rogervik's completion that year did Zabaikal'e's Nerchinsk Mining District take over as *katorga*'s epicenter. Relying mainly on penal labor, Nerchinsk's metallurgical industries provided Russia much of its silver, gold, and lead. Petersburg also assigned penal laborers to such state-owned Siberian industries as the Okhotsk and Irkutsk saltworks, the Aleksandrovskaia and Troitskii distilleries, and the Tel'minsk linen factory near Irkutsk. In addition, fortress (*krepostnaia*) *katorga* involved the use of penal labor battalions until this category's abolition in the 1860s. Thus Dostoevskii served time in the Omsk fortress between 1850 and 1854.

Dostoevskii however did not typify *katorga* convicts. Like most political prisoners sentenced to *katorga* he performed little manual labor, working instead in the prison chancery or serving in the infirmary.¹ Those Decembrists sent earlier to Nerchinsk received similar treatment; and the *narodovoltsy* later assigned to Kara, though treated more harshly, nonetheless were held under an extraordinary regime. Petersburg did assign to manual labor the 3,500 it exiled to *katorga* in response to the 1863 Polish uprising. Still, given that the insurrectionists were exiled for political offenses and that most were freed by imperial amnesty, they, too, remain atypical of imperial Russia's *katorga* population.²

Rather than perpetuate the traditional, elitist focus on political exiles, this chapter shows instead what life was like for the average penal laborer in Siberia and concludes by suggesting tsarist *katorga*'s long-term impact on Russia's penological development. I focus on *katorga* as it existed in Zabaikal'e's Nerchinsk district. Prior to the establishment of an official *katorga* administration on Sakhalin in 1884, no site contained a larger number of penal laborers than did Nerchinsk.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century *katorga* entered a period of crisis, due primarily to the exhaustion of Nerchinsk's silver and lead mines, though the lack of metallurgical work for penal laborers was itself a reflection of a larger problem whereby the state was generating more convicts than it could employ. The influx of thousands of Polish insurrectionists between 1863 and 1868 exacerbated this problem by taxing the exile system's physical plant beyond endurance. In response, the autocracy implemented a tripartite solution. First, it relocated the majority of Nerchinsk's penal laborers to the Kara Valley, 100 miles northeast of Nerchinsk zavod albeit still within both the district's boundaries and the mining administration's jurisdiction; second, it launched what proved to be a protracted effort to establish a penal colony on Sakhalin; third, it built or designated as "temporary *katorga* prisons" several facilities, half of which were located in European Russia, to incarcerate convicts until they could be absorbed by Kara or Sakhalin. Petersburg's hopes for Kara were soon dispelled by the goldfields' insufficient quantities of gold, which relegated to idleness and debauchery most of the convicts sent there. Amidst the Kara debacle and despite recommendations and limited efforts to create a Western-style prison system to replace exile, decision-makers cynically (or just stupidly) fastened onto Sakhalin to solve the penological crisis. The Romanovs especially remained wedded to their anachronistic exilic penology even after it became known that conditions on Sakhalin would not allow for the economically self-sufficient and escape-proof colony planners envisioned. I detail this particular tsarist folly elsewhere,³ but wish to emphasize here its relationship to Nerchinsk *katorga*. Ultimately, tsarist *katorga* signified the old regime's failure to embrace those very institutional reforms necessary for its own survival.

Situated along the Shilka River in Zabaikal'e, the Nerchinsk Mining District occupied a region known before the eighteenth century as Dauriia. Metallurgical operations at Nerchinsk zavod (a *zavod* was a fortified industrial township) began in 1704, but the amount of silver and lead produced before Catherine II's reign was negligible. Following General Vasilii Ivanovich Suvorov's appointment as *zavod* commander, production increased rapidly: "[T]he monotonous life of the mining *zavody* was invigorated by a single event..., namely [Suvorov's] arrival in Zabaikal'e in 1763," writes the ethnographer-historian Sergei Vasil'evich Maksimov. Like Kolyvansk district to the west Nerchinsk was a Romanov *votchina*, or royal fiefdom, one that soon began supplying them

much of the wealth they so ostentatiously spent. Because the Imperial Cabinet exerted direct control over the Nerchinsk Mining Administration (*Gornoe pravlenie*), the district's mines and smelters were called the "cabinet industries." Under Suvorov's personal direction these cabinet industries produced a total of 5,057 *pudy* silver (approx. 81 tons) between 1763 and 1774. After this period silver production declined sharply, as did that of lead and iron.⁴

Various sources provide a rough sketch of convict life at Nerchinsk. In 1823 an anonymous contributor to the journal *Sibirskii vestnik* described a population of 1,500 penal laborers in the district. The cabinet industries then consisted of seven mine complexes (*distantzii*) and their associated *zavody*, including the Petrovsk zavod ironworks, which despite its location miles away in Verkhneudinsk *okrug* fell under the mining administration's jurisdiction. *Sibirskii vestnik*'s author ascribed the need for penal laborers to an "insufficiency of service people [*sluzhiteli*] and laborers for mining and factory work...."⁵ The ethnographer-historian Vasilii Ivanovich Sernevskii identified non-convict laborers at Nerchinsk and other sites as "the *masterovye*, subordinate to military discipline and working in the industries not according to their own decision but removed there for obligatory service, initially without a time-limit and then after 1849 for a term of 35 years...."⁶ Similar in legal status to factory serfs, *masterovye* were skilled artisans hand-picked by the government from urban areas and assigned to state-owned industries in the Urals, Altai, and Zabaikal'e. Their emancipation coincided with that of the state serfs. At Nerchinsk, officials trained penal laborers' sons to become mine laborers and if they proved adept assigned them to the *masterovye*. "[D]ependent upon quality, diligence, and behavior," penal laborers earned "between 24 and 60 rubles [per year], as well as victuals for themselves and family...." Convicts lived in all respects like the other laborers: for example, bachelors occupied barracks while men with families received private *izbas*. The *Sibirskii vestnik* correspondent's description of Nerchinsk zavod suggests the quality of this housing: "[O]ne descends six versts, as if it were into a deep pit. Inside this pit dilapidated structures are scattered chaotically along the slopes, so that when you get to the main street, it is impossible to see [the surrounding hills]." He adds that the nature of the work and settlement made "it is impossible that these criminals... be kept apart from other people. They work in groups with young service people, [non-convict] mine laborers, and boys, and tell them about their own criminal escapades." Under their teachers' influence these boys enthusiastically turned to crime, so that neither "[r]ewards nor punishments [did] little for these ruined children"⁷

But if *Sibirskii vestnik*'s account suggests a casual lifestyle for convicts note must be made of the fact that each year 300 to 400 of them fled Nerchinsk *zavody*, as did an equal number of soldiers and the peasants whom officials assigned to nearby settlements, or *slobody*. What caused these people to flee? One factor was disease. Smallpox ravaged Zabaikal'e in the 1730s and 1740s and again during Catherine II's reign. A typhus epidemic struck in 1786-1789. Syphilis was common among Nerchinsk's laborers, probably spread more by homosexual than heterosexual sex. Petersburg assigned Nerchinsk *zavody* their first doctor in 1741, and in 1767 established a pharmacy in Nerchinsk zavod; but convicts would have benefited little from either. Contrary to claims by Soviet historians, starvation does not seem to have been a major cause of flight prior to the 1860s. A more likely factor was the corporal punishments to which convicts were subject under military justice. Even minor offenses earned up to 200 lashes of the birch rod or twenty-five lashes of the knout, either of which could kill a man. In *Notes from a Dead House* Dostoevskii describes corporal punishments' effects and convicts' desperate measures to avoid them. The latter included escape and the commission of new crimes-both of which typically served only to delay and make severer the inevitable.⁸

That escape was a major problem is shown by administrators' efforts to curb it. In 1777 the mining administration formed a detachment of 260 Tungus cossacks specifically to capture fugitives. Catherine II employed prophylactic measures in 1783, increasing to 24 rubles and in some cases 30 rubles the yearly amount budgeted for each convict; establishing a twelve-hour workday; and ordering that every two weeks of continuous daily labor be followed by one full week of relaxation. These measures also demonstrate the influence of such Enlightenment penal reformers as Beccaria and Montesquieu. Yet, as with so many of her other projects penal reform held Catherine's attention only fleetingly. Another hindrance to effective reform was the disjuncture between legislation and practice. To her credit, Catherine issued *ukazy* limiting the number of lashes to which convicts were subject as part of their *katorga* sentences, abolishing the use of the knout against women, replacing the traditional slitting of the nostrils with branding, and ordering that prisoners who became injured or sick during the march into Siberia be hospitalized. But executioners, guards, and administrators ignored her rules. For example, despite the 1783 regulations, Nerchinsk's commandants transformed the week set aside for relaxation into a kind of extended *subotnik* (Soviet working holiday) by ordering convicts to repair barracks and other prison buildings. Thus exhausted by non-stop labors,

convicts continued to flee Nerchinsk's pitiless regime. Out of desperation, the administration in 1785 announced a bounty of 5 rubles for each captured fugitive; but seven years later Commandant Barbot de Mami canceled the bounty, recognizing as he did the futility of reducing the escape rate.⁹

Barometers measuring penal laborers' living conditions, escape rates show these conditions had worsened by the 1850s, after silver production had plummeted and when gold mining was proving itself incapable of providing sufficient employment for convicts instead kept idle and cooped up in their barracks. In 1849 Eastern Siberia's governor-general Nikolai Nikolaevich Murav'ev appointed the mining engineer Ivan Evgrafovich Razgil'deev to be Nerchinsk's commandant. Until his removal thirteen years later, Razgil'deev oversaw a veritable hell-hole of degradation and desperation, inhumanity and corruption. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of provisions and medicines together facilitated both a typhus epidemic in 1850 that may have killed over a thousand laborers and a scurvy epidemic several years later that was just as deadly. Reviving a practice abandoned during Alexander I's reign, Razgil'deev ordered convicts branded with a Cyrillic "C" on one cheek, an "O" on the forehead, and a "K" on the other cheek, thereby marking them indelibly as *ssyl'no-katorzhnye* "exiled to *katorga*." "Razgil'deev was very severe," understated Semevskii. "It is said that as a simple administrative punishment he ordered 300 lashes of the birchrod be administered using both hands." Maksimov calculated that between 1847 and 1859 a total of 3,104 exiles (*ssyl'nye*) and penal laborers (*katorzhnye*) successfully escaped Nerchinsk *zavody*. Including the 508 *masterovye* who also escaped during this period, fugitives (*beglye*) represented a quarter of the cabinet industries' total labor force.¹⁰

Even after the *Razgil'deevshchina* ended Nerchinsk experienced large numbers of escapes. This phenomenon prevailed at all other *katorga* sites as well. An 1833 investigation revealed that less than half the penal laborers assigned to fortresses and distilleries in Western Siberia could be accounted for, and that a quarter of the nearly 3,000 penal laborers assigned between 1823 and 1833 to two distilleries in Tomsk *guberniia* had escaped. During roughly the same period 259 of 285 penal laborers assigned to the Kamenskii distillery in Eniseisk *guberniia* escaped.¹¹ Irkutsk's *guberniia* administration issued a stern warning in 1843 to regional industrial heads, the Nerchinsk Mining Bureau, and local police chiefs holding them personally responsible for the escapes of their convicts.¹² This did nothing to stem the tide. The next year the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) reported almost 200 fugitives arrested in Siberia and neighboring Perm' *guberniia*. But this was just the tip of the iceberg. More significant was its arrest figure of 3,323 passport-less vagrants, or *brodiagi*.¹³

Fugitive exiles typically refused to identify themselves, and so this latter figure is a better indication of the number of escapees. Moreover, the number of *brodiagi* who eluded arrest altogether was huge. Nikolai Mikhailovich Iadrintsev's estimate of as many as 50,000 roaming the Siberian *taiga* during the late nineteenth century was probably accurate.¹⁴

So plentiful were *brodiagi* and so common was their association with crime that the Perm' administration was able to publish a handbook, entitled *Homilies to Convicts and Those Being Deported to Siberia as Criminals*, specifically intended for exiles who had escaped or were contemplating doing so. Approved by Archimandrite Fomii in his official capacity as Spiritual Censor, its advice is couched in an idiom combining Biblical phraseology and earthy colloquialisms. The author, convinced that his readers have turned to crime due to their lack of faith, nonetheless offers the worldly advice that "confession of the crime before the civil court should be early and full" as this could lead to a lighter sentence. He addresses those *brodiagi* who adopted the common pseudonym *Nepomniashchii* ("[Identity] Forgotten") by on the one hand taunting that only those born in a forest would not know their names, and on the other by imploring, "Stop this cunning, good men [liubeznyel, this insincerity which so dishonors You!]"¹⁵

It must be emphasized that despite tsarism's designating vagabondage (*brodiazhestvo*) a serious crime punishable by exile, what really existed in Imperial Russia was an enormous homeless population virtually ignored by the government. Historians have ignored this population as well, and so any conclusions drawn here must be qualified. Nonetheless, it seems clear that although most Siberian *brodiagi* were fugitive *non-katorga* exile-settlers (*ssyl'nye*) principally concerned with finding food and shelter, *brodiagi* as a cohort bore primary responsibility for Siberia's extraordinary crime rates, even if most resorted to petty crime simply in order to survive. Furthermore, although *katorga* fugitives represented a minority of the *brodiagi* population, the sheer quantity of *brodiagi* helps to explain the fate of many of those 50,000 convicts known to have been exiled to *katorga* between 1823 and 1860¹⁶ but who cannot be accounted for by a survey of the rosters of Nerchinsk and other *katorga* sites.

That on average half of Nerchinsk's convicts were missing indicates how serious a problem criminal fugitives were for Siberian civil society.¹⁷

MVD reports for the period 1836-1855 consistently show that Siberia with the highest violent crime rates of any region in the empire. In 1836, for example, its murder rate was *eight and a half times* that of the empire as a whole. In June 1845 Siberia had twenty-one murders. These accounted for nearly 25 percent of Imperial Russia's murders that month, despite the fact that Siberians made up only 5 percent of the population.¹⁸ Other evidence shows that crime remained appallingly high throughout the second half of the century. Stories such as the following appeared regularly in Siberian newspapers:

“From Alzamai. Robbery and brigandage continue with all energy in our region; indeed, a gang of scoundrels has formed under the leadership of a fugitive from Nizhneudinsk prison, the penal laborer O--v, who acts without any restraint, unhindered by our *zemskii* police.”¹⁹

This and other popular accounts are corroborated by official records. A Kara police registry from the early 1870s describes as quotidian murders, assaults, and robberies, committed for the most part by convicts and former convicts.²⁰ The exile-crime nexus helped spark the Siberian separatist movement (*oblastnichestvo*) led by N. Iadrintsev, G.S. Potanin, and other Petersburg students during the 1860s. Iadrintsev, who was charged with “separatism” and exiled to Arkhangel' guberniia, later devoted a chapter of his magnum opus *Sibir' kak koloniia* to describing exiles' crimes in gruesome detail.²¹ The Irkutsk newspaper *Sibir'* shared his outrage at Petersburg's use of Siberia as a dump for human detritus, editorializing that

“... Siberia, suppressed in its moral, economic, civilian, and even political development by the exile here of all of Russia's societal excrement, should unceasingly announce its protest until that time when the issue of exile has passed through its final phase of development.”²²

These concluding words were nothing less than a call for exile's complete abolition. Unfortunately for Siberians, abolition never came. The Nerchinsk administration appears to have assigned few penal laborers to Kara prior to 1850, yet by decade's end 2,200 penal laborers, including 146 women, were assigned to Kara (*kariiskii*) *katorga*. As of 1864, 2,608 convicts were equally divided among Kara Valley's four mines and the Shakhtaminsk mine, north of the valley but administratively linked to it. Each mine had a corresponding prison. Kara's convicts represented a quarter of Nerchinsk district's combined convict and non-convict labor force.²³

During the period 1863-1868 the impact of thousands of Poles sentenced to *katorga* overwhelmed the system so that it simply collapsed.²⁴ Recognition of this collapse led Alexander II in 1869 to convene the Committee for the Reconstruction of *Katorga* (KUKR²⁵), on which sat representatives of the interior, justice, and finance ministries. In addition to ordering the establishment of the Sakhalin penal colony and the temporary incarceration of penal laborers in prisons located in Simbirsk, Vil'no, Tobol'sk, and elsewhere, KUKR decided to “reconstruct” *katorga* with Kara as its locus. In addition to transferring the bulk of Nerchinsk's penal laborers to a series of new prisons to be built in the Kara Valley, the operation involved a curious arrangement whereby the Imperial Cabinet was to continue employing convicts yet cede administration over them to Zabaikal'e's military government. An 1867 *ukaz* from the Imperial Cabinet's Mining Division stated: “In the past five years Nerchinsk silver production has not only not given a return to the Cabinet, but has incurred losses. From 1858 through 1863 such losses were over 200,000 rubles ...”²⁶ This and other memoranda confirm that while Alexander II wanted to realize profits he did not want the burden of feeding, clothing, and housing his laborers. In December 1869 the State Council formalized this arrangement, compromising the imperial treasury so as to benefit the royal family.²⁷

The following summer a chaotic transfer of penal laborers from Nerchinsk *zavody* to Kara began, made so by a dispute between the mining administration and Kara's new *katorga* command over the number of transferees and who would pay for what. The transfer deprived the *zavody* of nearly all their penal laborers. By late 1870 only 487 of Nerchinsk district's 2,685 penal laborers were still in *zavody*; and by July 1871 only 183 were. Those who remained formed a pathetic assemblage of cripples, old men, and the mentally ill. By mid-1871 40 percent of those left behind had died. Conditions at Kara had begun unpromisingly as well. In 1872 the Imperial Cabinet complained that the Kara command was not providing convicts sufficient food or clothing.²⁸

As “old” Nerchinsk fell into desuetude new prisons appeared in the Kara Valley. Besides the seven prisons eventually built near correspondent gold fields, the privately-owned industries of Urium and Zheltuga, 111 and 181 versts respectively from the Ust'-Kara administrative headquarters, represented a unique aspect of Kara *katorga*. Because Kara's cabinet industries could not provide enough work for penal laborers the administration allowed some to work at Urium and Zheltuga, where despite the government's 15 percent tax on their earnings they could earn up to 200 rubles a year. Petr Kropotkin,

always one to emphasize the worst aspects of tsarist penology, admitted that in comparison to the cabinet industries conditions at these private industries were quite good.²⁹ And during his 1871 inspection of *katorga* sites, MVD and Eastern Siberian official V.I. Vlasov found convicts at Urium and Zheltuga living indistinguishably from the free laborers there, that is, without guards and sharing the same barracks, apartments, and artels. When in late autumn these convicts' eleven-month contracts ended they would return *en masse* to Ust'-Kara. Unescorted by guards, most stopped in villages along the way to barter or buy "vodka, delicacies, and especially decorous clothes...." Vlasov furthermore reported: "[T]hey go several versts into the *taiga* to meet [fellow] workers and there, congratulating them on the conclusion of work, try not to let their significant earnings slip through their fingers [through gambling, theft, etc.]" But these hardened men, who labored assiduously through Zabaikal'e's sun-drenched summers and bitterly cold winters, inevitably gave in to "every conceivable weakness" and once in the villages so availed themselves of the pleasures to be had that when they returned to Kara, most were broke.³⁰ According to Vlasov's otherwise critical report, in 1870 only 4 of 404 convicts assigned to Urium or Zheltuga escaped. Given the complete lack of surveillance, this figure suggests that what these "criminals" really wanted more than anything were paying jobs. However, in 1871 these private industries' escape rate rose to nearly 10 percent of 245 convicts, and figures for Kara in general show that convicts escaped in large numbers. In 1870, 314 of the command's 2,478 convicts were at large (*beglye*); comparable figures for 1871 were 237 of 2,307. Moreover, these figures do not account for the much larger numbers of escape attempts.³¹

Kara's escapes reflected problems referred to in a July 1871 report authored by a Major Zagarin. Boasting that even those convicts not assigned to Urium and Zheltuga were proving productive, he nonetheless confessed, "The percentage of those among the prisoners who are working and have died or are sick is significantly high...." Other documents show that Zagarin's and other officials' embezzling exacerbated convicts' sufferings.³² Similarly, Vlasov, after visiting Ust'-Kara, blamed malfeasance and incompetence for the chaos he found there. Several "dilapidated, dark, and dirty" barracks stood inside a stockade overcrowded with convicts and their families. Most wore rags – further indicating officials' embezzling of funds and supplies – and as for their behavior, Vlasov hints darkly that "games which could only exist in *katorga* are played in secret cells." The *maidan* – a criminal institution combining the black market and gambling den – was in full swing, with vodka aplenty made possible by arrangements between *maidanshchiki* and guards. Several prisoners went about stark naked because they had gambled away or sold their clothes for booze. The guards, adds Vlasov, were "unfit for duty."³³

As defined by the 1845 penal code, *katorga* consisted of two convict categories. When a convict first entered *katorga* he became a "probationer" (*ispytuemyi*). At Ust'-Kara, probationers were restricted to the stockade compound. Officials assigned a few to work in the prison garden and allowed others to pursue the artisanal trades for which penal laborers were renowned. Vlasov calculates that the latter earned an average of 67 rubles a year, after cabinet taxes, primarily by manufacturing personal items on consignment for guards and officials. After a certain number of years, and if well-behaved, probationers graduated to become "correctionals" (*ispravliaiushchikhsia*). Correctionals could live outside prison, marry, enjoyed extra holidays, and had every ten months served count as a full year toward their sentences. The majority of Kara's correctionals worked in the goldfields, though a small number served as domestic servants in officials' homes, despite the fact that such employment had been outlawed decades earlier. Still other correctionals were allowed to live with their families in private izbas in return for providing the administration with firewood.³⁴

Both convict and free women lived at Kara but it is unclear in what numbers Vlasov describes women working inside the Ust'-Kara stockade but says most were left to their own devices, meaning that like most women swallowed up by the exile system they probably relied upon prostitution to survive. A rare children's shelter existed at Ust'-Kara, meagerly supported by a 2 rubles tax on each convict who worked at Urium or Zheltuga. The building for it had been donated by a (presumably former) exile-settler named Makeev. When Vlasov visited, it housed eighteen boys and seven girls, all apparently orphaned convict offspring.³⁵

George Kennan visited Kara in 1885, coincident with the transfer of most prisoners there to Sakhalin. He judged the Ust'-Kara men's prison to be the worst of the Kara Valley's seven *katorga* prisons:

"We ascended two or three steps incrustated with an indescribable coating of filth and ice an inch and a half thick, and entered... a long, low, and very dark corridor, ... whose atmosphere... was very damp, and saturated with the strong peculiar odor that is characteristic of Siberian prisons....[T]hat odor... is so unlike any other bad smell in the world that I hardly know with what to compare it. I

can ask you to imagine cellar air, every atom of which has been half a dozen times through human lungs and is heavy with carbonic acid; to imagine that air still further vitiated by foul, pungent, slightly ammoniacal exhalations from long unwashed human bodies; to imagine that it has a suggestion of damp, decaying wood and more than a suggestion of human excrement-and still you will have no adequate idea of it.”

Keenan found the prison at Sredne-Kara better: it was of more recent construction and less crowded. Nonetheless, like the large communal cells (*kamery*) in other prisons, Sredne-Kara's were without any furnishings whatsoever, and its *nary*, or sleeping platforms, bereft of government-issue bedding, while that which substituted for bedding – “thin patchwork mattresses improvised out of rags, cast-off foot-wrappers, and pieces cut from the skirts of [convicts'] gray overcoats” – were filthy and vermin-infested. Keenan writes that scurvy, typhus, typhoid, anemia, and tuberculosis threatened life at Kara.³⁶ During the period 1884-1905 Sakhalin eclipsed Kara as the locus of *katorga*. Kara continued to serve as a penal labor site, however. In 1885 it had 1,800 penal laborers, who along with their families composed an exile population of 2,507. Despite what was still a significant convict population, that same year marked at 52 *pudy* the nadir of annual gold production, which averaged 109 *pudy* between 1874 and 1895. Kara always contributed a small percentage of Siberia's overall gold production. In 1873 the government assigned the first political exiles to a special prison at Kara. Eighteen years later, responding to what Soviet historians would term the “Kara tragedy,” involving the suicides of Nadezhda Sigida and six other prisoners after she received 100 birchrod lashes, Petersburg stopped sending politicals to Kara. Between 1893 and 1900 it assigned no exiles whatsoever to Kara, though small numbers seem to have been there after 1900.³⁷

In place of a traditional synoptic conclusion, this section is meant to indicate the very real significance and resonance of a history of tsarist *katorga*. It must first be noted that continuities existed between tsarist *katorga* and the Soviet GULag. Both depended upon penal labor to achieve statist goals. Peter I established *katorga* coincident with his creation of the Russian service state; Stalin used the GULag to amplify the power of his own version of that service state. However, bureaucratic malfeasance and corruption under both the Romanovs and the Communists undermined *katorga*'s functioning and purpose. Officials assigned to Siberia knew that the Tsar, and later, the Boss, was far away, and that distance allowed them certain liberties impossible to take nearer the capitals. These liberties were taken often at the expense of the convicts sentenced to Siberia.

There were of course major differences between the two penal systems. One concerns the scope of operations: during a much shorter period many more people suffered and died in Soviet than in tsarist *katorga*. Another difference is abstract yet related. Whereas cruelty and inhumanity within tsarist *katorga* occurred primarily as by-products of a maladministered system, in the GULag they were intended *end products*. Sadistic guards and commandants certainly existed at Nerchinsk; but the GULag systematized and institutionalized sadism towards the very end of dehumanizing not just those immediately subject to it, but everyone else potentially threatened by it. And yet, did not tsarist *katorga* have the same effect? It humbled a people, made them loathe their government, and perpetuated a kind of enslavement supposedly abolished in 1861. The Bolsheviks merely perfected the teachings of their predecessors for their own ends. Contemporary Russia's treatment of its convicts suggests the lingering influence of this ancient and destructive catechism.³⁸

Notes

1 Gromyko, M.M. “Zapiski iz mertvogo doma” F.M. Dostoevskogo kak istochnik po istorii ibirskoi katorgi 50-ch godov XIXv.”, in: Ssylka i katorga v Sibiri (XVIII-nachalo XXv.). Ed. L.M. Goriushkin, et. Al. Novosibirsk, 1975: 131-152.

2 Distinguishing between typical and atypical penal laborers is important because both Soviet and post-Soviet historians have focused almost solely on political exiles. Western historians, with the exception of British scholar Alan Wood (e.g. Alan Wood, “Siberian Exile in the Eighteenth Century,” *Siberica* 1 (1) (1990): 38-63), have ignored tsarist exile and *katorga*. Nonetheless, numerous Western accounts of Russia's revolutionary movement foster the mistaken notion that exile and *katorga* served primarily as tools of political repression. Data show that before 1906 the state actually exiled very few political dissidents to Siberia, and that even after Petr Stolypin began relying upon exile and *katorga* to repress political dissent, that political prisoners never accounted for more than 10 percent of all penal laborers in tsarist Siberia. The related question of the number and proportion of political dissidents among the exile population is a complicated one, which I discuss elsewhere. See Andrew A. Gentes, *Roads to Oblivion: Siberian Exile and the Struggle between State and Society, 1593-1917*. Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2002, esp. 16-19, ch. 14, and appendix 1 (bibliographic essay); idem, *Kritika* 3 (1) (2002). Readers interested in political exiles will find a vast (though problematic) literature in Russian.

3 Gentes, Andrew A., The Institution of Russia's Sakhalin Policy, from 1868-1875, in: *Journal of Asian History*, 36 (1) (2002): 1-31.

4 Bogoliubskii, I. *Istoriko-statisticheskii ocherk proizvoditel'nosti Nerchinskogo Gornago Okruga s 1703 po 1871 god.* St. Petersburg 1872: 4-8, 16-17; Maksimov, S.V. *Sibir'i katorga*, third edition, St. Petersburg, 1900: 446. V.I. Suvorov (1705-75) was the father (not first cousin, as LeDonne writes) of the famous war hero A.V. Suvorov-Rymnikskii. Contrary to other sources, it does not seem he ever served as Siberia's governor. Cf. LeDonne, John P. *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984: 283; Fedorchenko, V.I. *Imperatorskii Dom. Vydaiushchiesia sanovniki: Entsiklopediia biografii*, vol. 2: 410-16; "Suvorov Vasilii Ivanovich," *O proekte Oglavlenie Rossii Portray Gerby Zvuki Disk Aviary*, <http://kolibriy.astroguru.com/01180558.htm>.

5 *Sibirskii vestnik* 3 (15 February 1823): 41n. On the number of Nerchinsk industries see *Sibirskii vestnik* 17 (15 September 1823): 127-144.

6 Semevskii, V.I. *Rabochie na sibirskikh zolotnykh promyslakh: istoricheskoe izsledovanie*, vol. 1, St. Petersburg, 1898: xxxi-xxxii.

7 *Sibirskii vestnik* 3 (15 February 1823): 27-48.

8 Okladnikov, A.P., et. Al. (Eds.). *Istoriia Sibiri s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, vol. 2, Leningrad 1968: 339-40; Braginskii, M.A. *Nerchinskaia katorga: Sbornik nerchinskogo zemliachestva*, Moskva, 1933:9-11, 14. Writing in 1933, Braginskii argued that "[c]hronic starvation was one of the causes of massive flight by exiles from *katorga* sites." But the economic historian Arcadius Kahan found that prior to Catherine II's reign, the treasury budgeted 18 r. 85 3/4 k. per annum per convict, from which each man received 6 k. cash plus a "monthly ration of 1 pood and 32.5 pounds of rye flour." Such rations would seem to have been sufficient, and were in any case increased under Catherine (see below). Moreover, convicts planning escapes must have known that starvation was far more likely in the Zabaikal'e wilderness than in the *zavody*. Cf. Braginskii, 9; Kahan, Arcadius. *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Chicago - London, 1985: 372n.14.

9 Sources as above. On Catherinian penology see Anisimov, Evgenii. *Dyba i knut: politicheskii sysk i russkoe obshchestvo v XVIII veke*, Moskva, 1999; Gernet, M.N. *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*. 5 vols. Third edition, Moskva, 1960-1963; Adams, Bruce F. *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917*, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996, intro. and ch. 1; Cizova, Tatiana, "Beccaria in Russia", in: *Slavonic and East European Review* 40 (95) (1962):384-408; de Madariaga, Isabel. *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*. New Haven - London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981 : 155ff.; LeDonne, 184-201 *et passim*. There is a much larger literature on penal history in the West. See, e.g., Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977; Morris, Norval, and Rothman, David J. (Eds.) *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; Beirne, Piers. *Inventing Criminology: Essays on the Rise of 'Homo Criminalis'*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

10 Semevskii, 1: 314-24; Maksimov (1900), 474-75; *idem*, (1871), 1: 102n, 182.

11 Investigation reported in *Ssylka v Sibir'*: 29n.

12 GAIO, f. 435, op. 1, d. 227, 1. 11.

13 *Zhurnal Ministersiva vnutrennykh del (ZhMVD)*, 8-10 (1844-45): Table(s) B. Data is missing for Tobol'sk guberniia during November-December, suggesting that arrest figures were actually higher. ZhMVD published comparable figures throughout the years of Nicholas I's reign.

14 *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (3 September 1887). Iadrintsev edited this newspaper. He gives somewhat lower figures in: Iadrintsev, N.M. *Russkaia obshchina v tiur'me i ssylke*. St. Petersburg, 1872: 363; *idem*, *Sibir' kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i dopolnennoe*. St. Petersburg, 1892: 268.

15 Anon. *Poucheniia k podsudirnym i k peresyalaemym v Sibir' prestupnikam*. Perm', 1859: 23, 38-39.

16 Maksimov (1871), 2: table, p. 320.

17 Goriushkin, *Nerchinskaia katorga*, doe. no. 74. This document is typical of others found in the archives

18 ZhMVD 8 (1836): table no. 2; ZhMVD 12 (1845): Table B.

19 *Sibir'* (1 February 1887). Alzamai was a village 600 km. northwest of Irkutsk on the Toporok River

20 RGIA DV, f. 1395, op. 1, d. 4.

21 See Iadrintsev, *Sibir' kak koloniia*, ch. 8.

22 *Sibir'* (26 February 1878).

23 Maksimov (1871), 2: 106 *et passim*; Semevskii, 1: lxvi, 296ff; *idem*, 2: 565, 577; Sapozhnikov V.V. and Gavrilov, N.A. "Zemli Kabineta Ego Velichestva", in: *Aziatskaia Rossiia. Tom pervyi: Liudi i poriadki za Uralom*, St. Petersburg, 1914: 433-35.

24 GARF, f. 122, op. 5, d. 1, 11. 17-30; d. 3, 11. 38-51; GAIO, f. 24, op. 3, k. 41, d. 46; d. 47; Goriushkin, *Nerchinskaia katorga*, doe. nn. 86, 92, 93, 94.

25 Komiteta ob *ustroistva katorzhnykh rabot*. KUKR's activities are described in GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 648, 11. 8-29; and in V.[I.] Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii predstavlenykh Kollezhskim Sovetnikom Vlasovym [na] General-Gubematory Vostochnoi Sibiri, ob ustroistv katorzhnykh rabot na o. Sakhaline," c. autumn 1871, 1. 38.

This and all other documents authored by Vlasov and cited in this chapter were found in the "Sakhalin" *delo* in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, BIGU, cat. no. RUK. 345. Vlasov (full name unknown) was both a councilor in the Eastern Siberian administration and an MVD official.

26 GARF, f. 122, op. 5, d. 3, 11.38-51.

27 Ibid., 11. 141-144. See also *ibid.*, 1L 66-140; RGIA DV, f. 701, op. 1, d. 14, 11. 5-6, 18, 40-43, 62-70, 71-76; d. 16, 11.4-10, 263-269, 272-297.

28 RGIA DV, f. 701, op. 1, d. 14; d. 16.

29 Kropotkin, Peter. In *Russian and French Prisons*. New York, 1971:159.

30 [V.I.] Vlasov, "Kratkii ocherk neustroistv, sushchestvuiushchikh na katorge," 31 January 1873: 7-8.

31 *Ibid.*; Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," 11.39-40.

32 RGIA DV, f. 701, op. 1, d. 16, 11. 66-69, 84, 93-99, 113-114, 138. Kropotkin characterized Zagarin (first name unknown) as a sadistic psychopath. See Kropotkin: 188.

33 Vlasov, "Kratkii ocherk" : 3-9.

34 Vlasov, "Kratkii ocherk": 3-9. The relevant articles of the 1845 penal code are in: *Dopolnitel'nyia postanovleniia o praspredelenii i upotreblenii osuzhdennykh v katorzhnyia raboty. Polozhenie o ispravitel'nykh arestantskikh rotakh grazhdanskago vedomstva. Dopolnitel'nyia pravila k ustava o soderzhashchikhsia pod strazheiu*. [n.l.], 1845.

35 Vlasov, "Kratkii ocherk": 3-9.

36 Kennan, George. *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. 2, New York, 1891: 148, 157-58.

37 Semevskii, 2: 565-66 and table, p. 911; Dikovskaia-Iakimova A. and Pleskov, V. (Eds.). *Kara i dingle tiur'my nerchinskoi katorgi: Sbonnik vospominanii, dokumentov i materialov*. Moskva, 1927: 16, 287-88; Sapozhnikov and Gavrilov: 435.

38 On present day conditions in Russian prisons see Amnesty International. *The Russian Federation: Denial of Justice*, London, 2002.