



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Early history of ethnography and ethnology in the German enlightenment : anthropological discourse in Europe and Asia, 1710-1808**

Vermeulen, H.F.

**Citation**

Vermeulen, H. F. (2008, November 12). *Early history of ethnography and ethnology in the German enlightenment : anthropological discourse in Europe and Asia, 1710-1808*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13256>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13256>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Han F. Vermeulen, *Early History of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment: Anthropological Discourse in Europe and Asia, 1710-1808*. PhD thesis University of Leiden / Proefschrift Universiteit Leiden, 12 November 2008. Leiden: privately printed. xii + 411 pp.

pp. 271-286

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The proper object of history is not the past  
but the past-present-future relationship  
(Jennifer Robertson 1991: 72)

The data presented in this book support the thesis that anthropology, in its socio-cultural guise, originated as ethnography and ethnology in the work of German-speaking scholars connected to the Russian Academy of Sciences, the University of Göttingen, and the Imperial Library in Vienna during the eighteenth century. The formation of ethnology (*Völker-Beschreibung* and *Völkerkunde*) took place in two stages: (1) as ethnography (*Völker-Beschreibung*), in the work of German explorers in Siberia (Messerschmidt, Müller, Gmelin, Steller, Fischer) during the first half of the eighteenth century; (2) as ethnology (*Völkerkunde*), in the work of German-speaking historians (Schöpperlin, Thilo, Schlözer, Gatterer, Kollár) during the second half of the eighteenth century. These scholars focused on the early history, geography, linguistics, and ethnography of Central and Northern Asia and Europe. In the first stage, a new study, ethnography, was conceived and developed as a program for describing all peoples of Siberia. In the second stage, a general study of all peoples of the world (*Völkerkunde*) was developed, which ultimately was designated by the term *ethnologia* (1783). These stages need to be distinguished, as they occurred in different contexts and related to different academic and political developments. In very general terms, the contexts of the first stage were: absolutism, imperialism, Early Enlightenment; those of the second stage: absolutism, universalism, Late Enlightenment. Geographically, these contexts differed: in the first stage, 'fieldwork' was conducted in the Russian Empire; in the second stage, research was carried out at the universities and in the libraries of the Holy Roman Empire. Both empires were multicultural and expanding, with one essential difference: the Russian authorities were hiring young, well-educated scholars to investigate nature and culture within their empire. It seems that the combination of the Russian policies for developing their empire and the Enlightenment insistence on empirical, non-speculative descriptions led to the birth of ethnography. The idea of such a discipline was adopted and further developed in the academic centers of Central Europe. The work of Müller, Schlözer, and Kollár was crucial in this respect.

### **Ethnography and Empire**

During the first half of the eighteenth century, ethnography was developed as a new research program for describing all peoples of Siberia. In the work of Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705-1783), this

discipline was given a special position, next to history and geography. Müller participated in the Second Kamchatka Expedition (1733-43) as a professor of history and geography with the additional task of describing 'the manners and customs of all peoples' he would encounter. En route, he widened his focus and shifted from his original plan to write a *historia gentium* (1732), or a 'history of peoples,' to a *Völker-Beschreibung* (1740), or a 'description of peoples.' During and after the expedition, Müller made a distinction between his work on the history, geography, and ethnography of Siberia. He was the first scholar to separate these disciplines. Müller turned into an ethnographer during the expedition and developed an ethnological program in two stages: first a description, then a comparison. He transmitted this program to other expedition members. On the basis of these achievements, Müller may be regarded as one of the founders of ethnography. In a strict sense, ethnography as a description of peoples first began in Siberia during the Second Kamchatka Expedition. This means that ethnography as a descriptive study of peoples emerged from a colonial context in Siberia.

The Second Kamchatka Expedition consisted of a sea party, led by Vitus Bering to discover the North West Passage and an 'academic party,' including scholars to investigate the land masses of Siberia. The latter resulted in abundant material in the fields of natural history, geography, cartography, history, archaeology, ethnography, and linguistics – both in the form of written documents and of objects of nature and culture. The colonizing context in which the expedition was carried out (the expanding Russian Empire, seeking trade and taxation) facilitated ethnographic research, dictated by the Russian interests and the scholarly agenda of the academic members of the expedition. Both factors, state interests and scholarly curiosity, plus the existence of a large number of nations in Siberia and the possible relationship between Northern Asia and Northern America, led to the emergence of a new scientific practice: *Völker-Beschreibung*.

During the Second Kamchatka Expedition and the First Orenburg Expedition (1734-37) tribes and nations (dubbed *Völker*) in Siberia, the Urals, and the Volga region were actively studied in order to describe them and to impose taxes on them. This was the background to the Russian policy to study all things dead and alive in the enormous empire that had been acquired since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In line with this kind of enlightened power-politics, which may also be designated as military fiscalism, the expedition members were given specific instructions regarding the locations and objectives of their investigations and collections. The academic members of the expedition wrote these instructions; the Imperial Academy of Sciences (founded in 1724-25), led by Blumentrost and Schumacher, and the Russian Senate, led by Kirilov, approved them. All reports and correspondence, as well as art objects and items of natural history, were sent to the Senate. From there, the scholarly information was distributed to the Academy of Sciences, the objects went to the Imperial *Kunstkamera* (established in 1714), and the nautical information was forwarded to the naval authorities. The collections, both natural and cultural historical, were extensive. Unfortunately, many of these early treasures were destroyed when a fire raged through the *Kunstkamera* in 1747. This is the main reason why not much is known about these early collections. During the 'Academic Expeditions' (1768-74) under Peter Simon Pallas, and the Billings

Expedition (1785-93) with Carl Heinrich Merck as naturalist-ethnographer, fresh collections had to be amassed, a process taking several decades.

As far as concrete descriptions of peoples were concerned, the works of Messerschmidt, Müller, Gmelin, Krasheninnikov, Steller, Fischer, and Lindenau, later of Rychkov, Pallas, Lepechin, Georgi, Falck, and Merck were the most valuable, even if much of the material of Messerschmidt, Müller, Steller, and Merck remained in manuscript. It is astonishing how much ethnographic material was collected among the peoples of Siberia, the Caucasus, Astrakhan (Orenburg District), and surrounding areas during the eighteenth century. In the seventy years after the Second Kamchatka Expedition had set off, the quantity of ethnographic descriptions had grown to such an extent that no other country in the world could boast such a supply.

The relative security provided by the imperial power, the empirical methodology provided by Early Enlightenment philosophers such as Locke and Leibniz, Lafitau's comparative framework, and Müller's systematic mind led to the formation of ethnography in Siberia. The Russian expeditions resulted in a large variety of materials still regarded as ethnographically valuable. Many of the foreign scholars hired by the Russians were German who may have been especially sensitive to cultural diversity. Scholars such as Müller had an ethnological perspective - a way of thinking in terms of peoples and nations. This perspective was conducive to furthering the new discipline called *Völker-Beschreibung* or *Ethnographie*. Such an ethnological perspective was still lacking in seventeenth-century Moscovite thinking which accounted for differences among peoples strictly in terms of religion (Slezkine 1994a-b). However, in the early eighteenth century, Russian authorities began to take interest in descriptions of peoples in their empire. Siberia was seen as one of the 'colonies' (Bakhrushin 1999: 21) and its peoples as 'willing providers of taxes and furs' (Schorkowitz 1995: 331) who needed to be described in order to be taxed. The assignments of Remezov (1699-1701) and Messerschmidt (1718) included a description of peoples and their languages. From 1710 on, scientific expeditions were dispatched to all corners of the Russian Empire in order to study the peoples and natural resources. In 1732, during the preparations of the Second Kamchatka Expedition, the Senate commissioned a 'description of peoples and their manners' and a study of 'the fruits of the earth.' Reacting to this order, Müller offered to write a 'history of peoples' in Siberia (November 1732). During the expedition, he expanded upon this scheme and made it into a program for ethnographic research. Calling it *Völker-Beschreibung* (1740), this study was to be empirical, systematic, and comparative. Building on Witsen, Leibniz, Messerschmidt, and Lafitau, Müller added a scholarly program to the Russian colonial agenda, which was led by their desire to have an inventory of the peoples under their command. Thus, ethnography as a comprehensive description of peoples developed in the Russian colonial practice during the early eighteenth century.

By contrast, the Danish-German Arabia Expedition (1761-67) dispatched to Yemen yielded much less material, even if the descriptions of its sole survivor, Carsten Niebuhr (1733- 1815), are valuable as a documentation of contemporary Arabic culture. Although well prepared, this expedition ended in disaster as most of the members died. Niebuhr's survival is attributed to his ability to adapt to local circumstances,

a capacity he had acquired during the voyage. The purpose of the expedition, to elucidate the Old Testament, was perhaps a more difficult goal than the exploration of Siberia and the North West passage. It sprang from the illusion that the present could reveal the past assuming that in 2,000 years little had changed in Arabia. The thesis of Schultens and Michaelis, that Arabic as a 'conservative' language had kept features lost in Hebrew, proved difficult to test. Although Niebuhr tried to answer the *Fragen* prepared under Michaelis' chairmanship in Göttingen, Michaelis published without taking notice of Niebuhr's official account. Niebuhr's name ranks high on the list of European explorers of Arabia. He was sensitive to cultural distinctions, paying attention to manners and customs of the Arabian people. But he did not have a *Völker*-perspective, in any case not to the extent of Müller, Fischer, Steller and other Siberia explorers. Niebuhr did not develop an ethnological program to describe all peoples of the Middle East. It is probable that this lack of an ethnological perspective was related to his training (he was a surveyor with an interest in mathematical geography and astronomy) and to the colonial context in which Niebuhr traveled. The Ottoman Empire was divided in administrative provinces (*eyalets*). The Ottoman authorities were sensitive to issues of religion, but do not seem to have displayed an interest in a description of peoples under their command. In addition, Niebuhr was not traveling in the service of the Ottoman Empire but of the Danish king.

In comparison to the Second Kamchatka Expedition, the Danish-German Arabia Expedition lacked commercial or political interests. The expedition to Egypt and Yemen aimed at providing contemporary evidence on the Bible. Additional research goals were explorations in natural history, geography, and cartography. The subject of 'manners and customs' of the population was included in the instructions given to von Haven and Forsskål. Unfortunately, they died prematurely, leaving Niebuhr with a task for which he was not prepared. Niebuhr's findings, mainly in the field of geography, are lauded as important contributions to the exploration of Arabia. However, his observations did not lead to the emergence of a description of peoples. Niebuhr considered the Arabian people to be 'one nation' with various dialects. This may be linked to the fact that he did not travel under the relatively safe umbrella of a foreign colonizing power. Although the expedition members possessed a *firman* provided by the Ottoman court in Constantinople, this was not the same as being protected by a party of Cossacks. On the other hand, Müller clearly saw the company of Cossacks as an obstacle towards a free exchange with the inhabitants of Siberia. Sensing the same, Niebuhr adapted himself and went 'undercover,' as so many non-Muslim travelers were to do in Arabian countries. (In this respect, he resembled Steller who adapted remarkably to the harsh conditions in Kamchatka, surviving on local nutrition – without the daily use of wine, as the other members of the Second Kamchatka Expedition and von Haven during the Danish-German Arabia Expedition were accustomed to.) Moreover, in contrast to Müller, Niebuhr did not have a perspective of ethnic diversity (*Völker*). Instead, he spoke about the Arabian 'nation' as if it was a single large group speaking the same language. Despite locally varying customs and dialects, he regarded the Arabian inhabitants as being essentially of one and the same stock. Such a perspective, although politically correct *avant-la-lettre*, is not conducive to the establishment of a discipline such as *Völkerkunde*. It is, therefore,

significant that ethnography, as the empirical study of peoples, blossomed in the context of the Russian expeditions in northern and central Asia, but did not get off the ground in the case of the expedition to Arabia Felix.

Thus, different colonial contexts yield different results. In the case of Siberia, in a Russian context, colonialism was conducive to the formation of ethnography as an emerging research practice. In the Danish case, in a Turkish context, the absence of a direct link to a colonial agenda may be one factor in explaining the absence of innovative results.

The formation of ethnography was the result of several factors, including scholarly curiosity (Stagl 2002a) and state interests (power, taxes, legal order). The Russian authorities kept to a colonial agenda, seeking to acquire an inventory of the peoples under their command. Müller and other scholars followed a scientific agenda based on: (1) the ethnolinguistic program suggested by Leibniz, tested by Messerschmidt, adopted by Strahlenberg, and carried to its conclusion by Müller and Fischer; and (2) the comparative ethnological program developed by Lafitau and adopted by Müller. The combination of these factors, coupled to the ethnic diversity of Siberia, the German ethnological perspective, and the Early Enlightenment's emphasis on empirical observation, resulted in ethnography becoming a new scientific practice in Russia during the 1730s and 1740s.

It is plausible that the Russian views of the peoples (*narody*) inhabiting their empire and the German views of these same peoples (*Völker*) were different. This matter deserves further investigation, as it seems that the interaction between these varying views was of importance for the formation of ethnography in the Russian colonial context. Another point of interest to be investigated is the way in which the geographical and ethnographic sources resulting from the Kamchatka and other contemporary expeditions in Russia were received and used by the bureaucrats who had commissioned the research in the first place. An analysis of this problem has not yet been presented, as far as I know. This omission is remarkable, as the Russian authorities at the Senate in St Petersburg and Moscow must have studied the reports carefully. Apart from the Academy, the Senate will have been fully informed. Whether the findings were transmitted to the Russian authorities in Siberia is another matter. Information of this sort would be indispensable for any attempt to establish the extent to which anthropological information was used in a colonial context – how ethnography contributed to empire. There is some evidence that data were employed in this way. As we have seen, Mikhail Mikhailovich Speransky based his reformist 'Code of Administration of Siberian Peoples' (1822) on Georgi's work of the 1770s, which in turn was based on Müller's ethnographic research of the 1730s and 1740s.

### **The Foundation of *Völkerkunde***

In the 1760s and 1770s, scholars in the German states adopted and generalized Müller's ethnological perspective. August Ludwig Schlözer (1735-1809) combined Müller's ethnological program (*Völker-Beschreibung*) with the historical-critical views of Johann David Michaelis, building on Montesquieu,

and integrated these into a grand historiographical vision, including both *Ethnographie* and *Völkerkunde*. In Göttingen, between 1771 and 1781, scientific programs were developed in which the terms *Völkerkunde* and *Ethnographie* were repeatedly applied. Schlözer and his senior colleague, Johann Christoph Gatterer (1727-1799), universal historians working at the University of Göttingen, introduced the terms *Ethnographie* and *Völkerkunde* into academic discourse. They did this as part of their attempts to reform world history and expand its scope to include all of the world's peoples. Schlözer's early work, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* (1771), was especially important, as it succeeded in supplanting earlier 'myths' with new ideas on the origins, descent, and migration of nations in northern Europe and Asia, using their languages as a basis for classification. Schlözer borrowed this linguistic method from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), the philosopher who had actively pursued comparative language studies, or *historia etymologica*. In Siberia, Messerschmidt and Strahlenberg first applied this method, followed by Müller, Fischer, and other participants in the Second Kamchatka Expedition.

Schlözer introduced the terms *Völkerkunde* (ethnology), *Ethnographie* (ethnography) as well as *ethnographisch* (ethnographic) and *Ethnograph* (ethnographer) to a German audience in 1771-72. He employed these terms in strategic places in his argument and more often than any of his contemporaries. Schlözer was not the first to use the term *Ethnographie*, but he may well have been the first to use the term *Völkerkunde*. In any case, he was the first to apply the ethnological perspective in Göttingen. As far as we know, the historian Johann Friedrich Schöpperlin (1732-1772) first used the term *ethnographia* in a Latin text published at Nördlingen (Swabia) in 1767. Schöpperlin contrasted it to *geographia* – possibly arriving at the coinage under Schlözer's influence as the two men were connected through Albrecht Friedrich Thilo (1725-1772) and worked on identical historical problems (Vermeulen 1996a: 8-9; 2006a: 129).

While Schlözer generalized Müller's argument, specifying that *Völkerkunde* should describe all peoples of the world, both in the past and the present, he restricted the analysis to specific peoples, namely 'principal peoples' (*Hauptvölker*, 1772: 106-108, 1775: 299-301). The first procedure would result in an 'aggregate' of world history; the second into a 'system' of world history. These 'principal peoples' had brought coherence into world history, and the problem of coherence and interconnectedness represents Schlözer's main interest in world history (Vermeulen 2008b). In this context, Schlözer used the term 'world system' (*Weltsystem*, 1772: 37, 1775: 250) and he can be seen as one of the first global historians.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this material is that *Völkerkunde* was the general concept designating the new research program in the German-speaking countries, while *Ethnographie* was seen as the first stage of this new discipline. This conclusion is corroborated by Müller's and Gatterer's work.

The idea of this study caught on rapidly, as is shown by a new body of literature, especially in journals that carried these new terms in their titles and featured the corresponding contents. The first of

these journals appeared in 1781 in Leipzig and St. Petersburg, with the naturalists-*cum*-explorers Johann Reinhold Forster and Peter Simon Pallas and the historian Matthias Christian Sprengel as editors.

In Vienna, the subject was defined as *ethnologia* in the early 1780s. After Russia and Germany, Austria and Switzerland seem to have been the countries in which these ideas first took root. It has long been assumed that the Swiss theologian Alexandre-César Chavannes (1731-1800) coined the term ethnology. He defined *ethnologie* in 1787 as ‘l’histoire des progrès des peuples vers la civilisation.’ We now know that this term first surfaced in the work of the Austrian-Slovakian historian Adam Franz Kollár (1718-1783) in 1781 and 1783. In 1783, Kollár defined *ethnologia* as *notitia gentium populorum-que*, that is, ‘the science of peoples and nations, or, that study of learned men in which they inquire into the origins, languages, customs and institutes of various nations, and finally into the fatherland and ancient seats, in order to be able better to judge the nations and peoples in their own times’ (Kollár 1783, I: 80; cf. Vermeulen 1995b: 57 fn. 3).

Not only was Kollár’s use of the term earlier, it was also much closer to the meaning Schlözer had given to *Völkerkunde* than the one Chavannes gave to *ethnologie* (Vermeulen 1995b: 46-47). Kollár relied on Schlözer’s work and concentrated on the same research problem, the origin of peoples and nations, with the same methods, namely historical linguistics and the comparison of languages. While ethnography as a scientific way of describing peoples or nations was first practiced in Russia and in Siberia by German-speaking historians, ethnology originated in the academic centers of East and Central Europe and dealt with a comprehensive, comparative and critical study of peoples – in principle, of *all* peoples and nations.

In the eighteenth century, the scientific interest in the plurality of peoples was not restricted to German scholarship. The Germans did not invent the ethnological discourse but, rather, built on it. This is illustrated by Chavannes’ and Lafitau’s work, as well as by Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des loix* (1748), aiming to study ‘the laws, manners and diverse customs of all the peoples of the earth’ (*les lois, les coutumes et les divers usages de tous les peuples de la terre*). The fact that Müller held Lafitau’s comparative work (1724) in high regard, indicates that he wanted to situate his ethnographic research in a larger comparative framework encompassing all peoples in the Russian Empire. Their descriptions should be compared with descriptions of the ‘other Asian, African, and American peoples.’ If Lafitau’s work entailed a comparative program, Müller developed a comprehensive ethnological program as a first step in that direction.

Characteristic of the German tradition was an ethnological perspective (*Völker*-perspective), rather than an urge to contrast levels or stages of civilization. This perspective was dominated by the idea that a classification of peoples could only be based on their languages. Leibniz first propounded this idea, stating in 1691 that ‘the harmony of languages is the best means of determining the origin of nations, and virtually the only one that is left to us where historical accounts fail. It seems in fact that all languages from the Indus river to the Baltic Sea have a single origin’ (quoted in Aarsleff 1982: 85, 95 n. 4). In his early work, Schlözer drew primarily on Leibniz in an attempt to find solid evidence for classifying the



peoples of the North. As he wrote in 1771: ‘Fashionable was, thus far, to look for the origin and affinity of peoples (*Ursprung und Verwandtschaft der Völker*) in writers of annals (chronicles). However, writers of annals, says Leibniz, neither the old, nor those of the Middle Ages, are sources of information for these investigations, only grammarians and compilers of vocabularies are’ (1771: 288 n. T). ‘In the entire field of historiography,’ Schlözer continued, ‘I know of no work as hard as the study of languages in relation to the study of peoples (*Sprachenunter-suchungen in Rücksicht auf die Völkerkunde*)’ (1771: 288 n. U). Although Müller’s research program was broader, and included a worldwide study of ‘manners and customs,’ Schlözer insisted that in the study of prehistory only historical linguistics could be employed as the basis for comparison. Following Leibniz, Schlözer consistently argued that a correspondence in customs does not provide us with sufficient evidence to establish the affinity between nations. This principle presented the German-speaking historians, ethnographers, and linguists with a powerful tool for studying the peoples of their day and age. It provided them with an method to distinguish among the multitude of peoples in the Russian Empire. And it gave them a head start in historical and comparative linguistics. This is demonstrated, for example, in Vater’s linguistic study of the migration of Amerindians from Siberia over the Bering Strait (Vater 1810), in the *Allgemeines Archiv für Ethnographie und Linguistik* (Bertuch and Vater 1808), set up ‘to complement collections of geography and ethnography (*Länder- und Völkerkunde*),’ and in the foundation of comparative linguistics by Franz Bopp (1816, 1820, 1833).

### **State, *Volk*, and Nation**

The linguistic criterion for defining a *Volk* was a major innovation in the study of peoples. Until the founding of nation-states in the nineteenth century, the terms *Volk* and ‘nation’ were by and large synonymous. The German term *Volk* was used interchangeable for the term *Nation* that is derived from *natus* (past participle of the Latin verb *nasci*, ‘being born’). During the eighteenth century, *Volk* or nation referred to a group of people with a common descent, a homeland, a common history, and language. However, the concept of *Volk*/nation is ambiguous. As we have seen, Schlözer distinguished three conceptions of a *Volk*: ‘(1) in the geographical sense, people belong to a class; (2) in the genetical (or historical) sense, they make up a tribe (*Stamm*); (3) in the political sense, they belong to a state’ (1772: 104, 1775: 298).<sup>1</sup> These terms were applied to members of a geo-historical unit (a country or *Land*); people with a common heritage (*gens*); and a nationality or citizenship (in a political sense, people belonging to a state). In the first (geographical) conception, Germans and Czechs are both members of the ‘Bohemian Nation.’ In the second (genetical) conception, the people of Swabia belong to the tribe of Swaben. In the third (political) conception, Strahlenberg was of German descent, born in Pommern, but a citizen of Sweden; Niebuhr was of German descent, born in Holstein, but a citizen of Denmark. In both cases, their mother tongue was Low German. Kollár described himself as *Hungarus*, but his mother

---

<sup>1</sup> Building on these distinctions, Fabri 1808: 98, added: (4) in a journalistic sense and (5) in the popular sense.

tongue was Slovak and contemporaries called him the ‘Slovak Socrates’ (Tibenský 1983). Schlözer’s fatherland was Franconia, and he was known as a *Franke*, not as a German. Although the idea of a German nation is older, the idea of a German nation-state appeared only in 1871 when the German Empire was founded. Until the nineteenth century, students were registered when immatriculating at a university according to the countries (*nationes*) in which they were born: Michaelis, Halensis; Niebuhr, Hadelensis; Schlözer, Franconia. These entries refer to territories and are related to a political conception of *Volk*.

Kollár’s definition of ethnology (*notitia gentium populorumque*) makes clear that Latin has two concepts: *gens* and *populus*.<sup>2</sup> The first can be translated as tribe (clan), the second as people (nation). The difference seems to be that the first term relates to a homogeneous people (related by descent), the second to people in a heterogeneous, composite, sense (consisting of different tribes or *gentes*). However, eighteenth-century German-speaking authors were not consistent in this regard. They usually opted for *gens*, but sometimes used *populus*. The following examples may illustrate this. Müller’s first instruction was titled ‘De historia gentium’ (on the history of peoples), but it began with the phrase: ‘*Ad promovendum studium Historiae populorum ...*,’ that is, to promote the study of the history of peoples ... (quoted in Hintzsche 2004: 145). Nevertheless, Müller usually employed the term *gens*. In his lecture ‘The origins of the Russian people and their name’ (written in 1749), Müller spoke of *Origines gentis et nominis Russorum* (1768). His colleague, the historian and linguist Fischer, compiled a vocabulary that counted thirty-four ‘Siberian peoples’ (or *gentes*) (*Vocabularium ... trecenta vocabula tringinta quatuor gentium, maxima ex parte Sibiricarum*, 1747). The same applies to Leibniz and his interest in the origins of peoples (*origines gentium*). Schlözer also spoke of *origines gentium* (1771) but, at a later stage, in his memoirs (1802), switched to *origines populorum*.<sup>3</sup> It is an open question, whether Schlözer was confused or wrote this on purpose. In any case, the German language glosses over the differences, because *Ursprung der Völker* (Leibniz 1716) can mean *Volk* (*gens*) and nation (*populus*). On the other hand, one also finds *Nationen* (Niebuhr 1774-78; Georgi 1776-80; Schlözer 1771, 1772; Herder 1784- 91) or *Nazionen* (Niebuhr 1784; Falck 1786; Lang 1809-17) in the contemporary literature.

The complexity of these problems was presumably one of the reasons why scholars throughout Europe felt a need to study these phenomena. This feeling was particularly strong in the German states where there had been no political unity since the sixteenth century. During the eighteenth century, the feeling increased that Germany represented a cultural unity and formed a *Kulturnation*. From the 1770s on, this feeling became the subject of the ‘German Movement’ (*deutsche Bewegung*) that was seminal in promoting German language and culture (Meinecke 1936; Antoni 1951; Nohl 1970). Ever since Thomasius had begun lecturing in German and had published the first journal in German (1687-88), the importance of the German language had grown. If the main criterion for the constitution of a *Volk* was

<sup>2</sup> Greek also discerns *polis* and *demos*. The latter served as the basis of the term ‘démographie’ that was coined by the French statistician Achille Guillard in the mid-nineteenth century (Guillard 1855).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Den Leibnitzischen Grundsatz, *origines populorum* nach ihren Sprachen aufzusuchen, wußt ich schon lange’ (Schlözer 1802: 187). We remind the reader that Schlözer also wrote: ‘Es ist ein *Systema Populorum in Classes et Ordines, Genera et Species*, redactum möglich ...’ (Schlözer 1771: 210-211, note A; cf. 1768: 72, note 22).

language, this provided the German scholars with a problem because in the German case at least two languages played a role, Low German and High German. Whereas Müller and Schlözer found it sufficient to employ a single concept in German (*Volk*), Kollár seems to have wanted to grasp the full complexity of the problem by including both *gens* and *populus* in his definition of ethnology.

After the introduction of the nation-state at the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), matters became even more complicated. The political definition of people came to dominate. The United States, made up of representatives of many peoples (British, French, Spanish, German, Iroquois, Delaware, to name but a few) and at least three races (whites, blacks, Indians), is considered one 'nation.' In general, politicians refer to it as 'the nation.' Even here, there is doubt. The Iroquois were considered a tribe (by the English and the French colonists), but they spoke and still speak of themselves as 'the Five Nations.' How do these concepts relate to each other? All sorts of questions related to scale, nationality, citizenship, and legal rights play a role in this discussion.

Nations are 'imagined communities,' as Anderson wrote (1983), that is, an abstraction, impossible to observe. Yet, they exist in people's minds. Even then, they were a factor to be reckoned with, perhaps even more in the eighteenth century than now, in a globalizing era.

Nations that develop into states were of particular importance to Schlözer. His interest in this subject is a typical theme of the Enlightenment: if there is progress, peoples can achieve a higher level of organization within the state. It is not a coincidence that Schlözer, in the second half of his career, concentrated on the comparative study of states (*Statistik*). He even succeeded Achenwall as professor of political studies. In his early years, Schlözer had been fascinated by the study of peoples that could be advanced by concentrating on a study of their languages; in his later career, he shifted his focus from peoples that are developing (*werdende Völker*) to 'principal peoples' (*Hauptvölker*) that unite others through conquest and civilization.

If German scholars such as Müller and Schlözer established the new field of ethnography and ethnology, where did they obtain their ethnological (*Völker-*) perspective? Or, more generally, whence did they derive the idea of a plurality of peoples that needed to be described?

There are many different answers to this question. First of all, the Russian Empire counted a large variety of peoples and the authorities expressed a pragmatic interest in having them described for political and economic reasons. At that time, Siberia was seen as one of the 'colonies' and its peoples as 'providers of taxes and furs.' Thus, the Russian view on peoples (*narody*) was rather limited: as payers of taxes, they were seen as resources that needed to be tapped, as contributing to the empire's wealth in much the same way as natural resources.

Second, the idea of a multitude of peoples (*Völker*) is prevalent in the Bible. The 'genealogical table' (*Völkertafel*) in the book of Genesis traces all known peoples back to the three sons of Noah: Japhet, Sem, and Cham. In order to fill the 4,000 years separating the present from Noah and the Flood, rulers tended to construct genealogies of their dynasties and forefathers. Historians lent a helping hand by producing fictive genealogies that interrelate historical figures from the Bible and Antiquity to the rulers of their day

and age. In the Holy Roman Empire, 'imperial history' (*Reichsgeschichte*) was important for making such claims. Historians such as Müller and Schlözer took a critical stand against this practice.

Third, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years' War, influenced German thinking about peoples and their relationship to the state. This conflict between Protestants and Catholics was mainly fought out in the central European territory of the Holy Roman Empire under the Habsburg Dynasty. It also involved most of the major continental powers, including Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Sweden, England, and Holland. The war led to the collapse of Spanish hegemony, the break-up of Spanish and Portuguese colonial possessions, the recognition of the United Provinces as an independent state, and the establishment of Sweden as a leading power in Europe. The Holy Roman Empire lost its coherence after 1648 and was divided in about three hundred sovereign entities, nominally governed by an emperor who was also the ruler of Austria (Schlözer 1775: 207, 281). The Treaty of Westphalia meant the beginning of European Absolutism (1648-1789). However, its edicts are also seen as having been instrumental in laying the foundations for the basic tenets of the sovereign nation-state (Wagner 1948; Sagarra 1977; Vierhaus 1978). The nation-state is generally held to have taken center stage in Europe at the Congress of Vienna, but it became a real issue during and after the French Revolution (1789) when the cry became '*Vive la Nation*' (long live the people), rather than '*Vive le Roi*' (long live the king). The territorial states in the Holy Roman Empire made the problem of the nation vis-à-vis the state manifest. This may have played an important role, especially in Central Germany where most of the students conducting ethnography in the field hailed from. The Thirty Years' War also partly provided the background for Leibniz's philosophy, as he strove to overcome the religious antitheses that had created such a devastating war (Richter 1946).

Fourth, the division in three hundred political entities had been superimposed over the ancient division in 'tribes' (*Stämme*) that was characteristic for *Germania* in the days of Tacitus. When Napoleon dissolved the Holy Roman Empire in August 1806, the *de facto* sovereignty of the territories came to an end. As mentioned above, Germany became a nation-state as late as 1871, when Bismarck united the German states, transforming the king of Prussia into a German Emperor. Even today, Germany is a tapestry of dialects. National diversity is a topic of interest in Germany and the cultural and linguistic differences between Bavaria, Swabia, Franconia, Prussia, Saxony, Thuringia, etc. are noticeable even today.

This basic pattern was reflected in the German scholarly agenda. The varied development from tribe and nation to a territorial state and the nation-state became an issue for historical study. The idea that languages are characteristic for peoples, that language is a marker of ethnicity, that a people (*Volk*) is especially but not exclusively defined by its language (*Sprache*), was seminal in German scholarship during the eighteenth century. It became the foundation for Leibniz's thesis that the comparative study of languages was the only reliable tool for tracing connections among peoples in prehistory, that is, before the existence of historical documents. This thesis fits well in the Early Enlightenment's emphasis on empirical observation. It seems that the German scholars developed the historical-genetic conception of *Volk*,

characterized by language. This new view on peoples was apparently adopted in Russian administration. Leibniz's program of historical etymology was carried out by students from Central Germany and exported into the Russian field by Messerschmidt, Bayer, Müller, and later Schlözer. Tatishchev had learnt of it through Strahlenberg, who had heard about it from Messerschmidt. In North America this program was applied by de Charlevoix (1766) and Smith Barton (1798).

Whether there was an influence of 'natural law' (*Naturrecht*) on the formation of ethnography and ethnology in the German states remains to be established. Developed by Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, and John Locke, natural law was an ethical theory positing the existence of a law whose content is set by nature and which, therefore, has validity everywhere. Sometimes opposed to the 'positive law' of a given political community, society, or nation-state, and used as a standard by which to criticize that law, natural law was highly influential in the Scottish Enlightenment and the American Revolution. Achenwall, who taught *Statistik* at Göttingen from 1748 onwards, was a scholar of law. It is conceivable that principles from the study of natural law and the law of nations (*jus gentium*) found their way into the new ethnological discourse. Understandings of natural law may have changed definitions of *Volk* and nation in the German Enlightenment and have given them more validity, thereby influencing the formation of ethnology. In addition, there may have been an influence of the idea of natural law on the rights of small peoples *vis-à-vis* the state. Müller as a historian paid attention to their rights and especially to the violation of what would be called human rights of small peoples in the expanding Russian Empire (Elert 2003). The problem of basic human rights was also an issue for Schlözer, who in 1791 demanded human rights (*Menschenrechte*) for serfs in Poland and Russia (Mühlpfordt 1983a: 154).

The emergence of this ethnological discourse was related to the universalist tendencies of the Enlightenment and to processes of state-formation and nation-building in the German-speaking countries, the Russian Empire, and what later became the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918). Another factor was the increasing amount of knowledge regarding peoples recently discovered in Siberia and in other parts of Europe, Asia, and Oceania. The *Völkervielfalt* (ethnic plurality) in the Russian Empire, forming a multinational state linking the European parts of Russia with the peoples formerly under Tatar control and the small peoples of the North and Northeast, appealed to Messerschmidt, Müller, Steller, Fischer, Schlözer, Pallas, and many others. The growing knowledge of peoples of the world was incorporated into the study of history and geography at the University of Göttingen. Schlözer and Gatterer processed field studies by Müller and others in their writings, raising the discussion to a theoretical level. How many peoples are there? What makes up a people (*Volk*)? Which peoples should be included? Which aspects of these peoples should be studied? Kollár extended Müller's and Schlözer's argument and generalized the problem, drawing on a more pressing subject at hand: the management of ethnic diversity in the Austrian, later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this way, the past, present, and future of the peoples of Eastern Europe were connected to the politics of multicultural states.

## Anthropology and Ethnology

Shortly after its introduction in Göttingen (1771), the philosopher of history Johann Gottfried Herder (1772) forcefully criticized the term *ethnographisch*. He developed a new, organic concept of *Volk* and claimed that a particularistic approach was necessary to do justice to the inherent value of nations and peoples (and of their culture). Herder devised a view of peoples unfolding towards humanity (*Humanisierung*) and avoided the new ethnological vocabulary, as did Kant, who left the topic out of his *pragmatische Anthropologie*. Herder's views entered American anthropology through Franz Boas. In the eighteenth century, anthropology was either a biological or a philosophical subject, dealing with the question, 'What is Man?' subdivided into the three questions pertaining to the relations among humans, between humans and animals, and the evolution of humankind. Generally, the definition of humans and their place in nature played a central role in these debates. By combining natural science with the history of humankind, Herder added a philosophical perspective on anthropology as a holistic science.

Philosophical anthropology may have been born out of philosophy, as Zammito (2002) argues. Yet, ethnography and ethnology, as forerunners of socio-cultural anthropology, were born out of history. They resulted from attempts to understand the bedazzling diversity of peoples and nations in Europe and Asia, particularly those brought together in multinational states such as Russia and Austria. Scholars introducing the ethnological perspective were primarily dealing with historical problems: Where do peoples come from? How are these peoples related? These attempts dealt both with the present state of these nations and with the historical analysis of their origins, languages, migrations, and states. Ethnography and ethnology, as prerunners of socio-cultural anthropology, resulted during the eighteenth century from the theoretical and practical need to study these processes.

A clear indication that ethnology and anthropology were formulated alongside each other, as separate branches of learning, is to be found in Theophil Friedrich Ehrmann's work (1808a-b). It makes explicit that there was a difference between a conception of the world inhabited by *Völker* (peoples) or *Volksstämme* (tribes) as sub-categories of humankind, and a conception of humankind as subdivided in human 'races' (varieties). The scholars dealing with these subjects worked in different fields. The early ethnographers were historians, geographers and linguists; the physical anthropologists were physicians and anatomists.

Whereas the anthropological tradition of Blumenbach and Kant has received a great deal of attention, the ethnological discourse has largely gone unnoticed in recent scholarship. This new way of thinking in terms of peoples (as such, without a political connotation) has been overlooked not only in France, Great Britain, the United States, and even partly in Russia, but also in Germany. These processes deserve more attention, for 'peoples' are not the same as 'races' – even if the concept 'anthropology' seems to include both.

## ***Nomen est Omen: Ethnography, Ethnology, and Socio-Cultural Anthropology***

The central thesis of the present book is that in order to get at the roots of anthropology, we have to look at the eighteenth century, and that in order to understand what anthropology is about, we have to focus on ethnology and its elder sister ethnography, that is, on the study of peoples, tribes, and nations called *Völker* in German (*volken* in Dutch).

The most important research finding is that, during the eighteenth century, an ethnological discourse developed parallel to, and partly in debate with, an anthropological discourse, reflecting on humans, human races or varieties, and human-animal relationships. This ethnological discourse, a way of thinking and communicating about peoples or nations as subdivisions of humanity, resulted from history, under the influence of historical linguistics, and as a complement to (physical and political) geography, moral philosophy, and physical and philosophical anthropology. The existence of such an ethnological discourse was postulated for French-speaking Switzerland by Michèle Duchet (1971: 12) but has never been fully documented. By continuing the work of Hans Fischer (1970, 1983), Justin Stagl (1974b, 1981, 1995b, 1998, 2002b), and by building on primary sources published by members of the Eduard Winter School in East Germany, such as Mühlhpfordt, Donnert, Hoffmann, as well as by Wieland Hintzsche (2002, 2006), it has been possible to demonstrate that an ethnological discourse developed in Central and Eastern Europe, in the German states and Russia, in Europe and Asia during the eighteenth century, from 1710 onward. By the end of the eighteenth century, this discourse had reached Holland, Bohemia, Hungary, France, and the United States.

The ethnological discourse in the German Enlightenment cannot be adequately circumscribed as a 'biblical paradigm' (Stocking 1990: 713-5, 1992b: 347-9) or a 'biblical-historical model' (Bieder 1972: 18). These characterizations may have been valid for late eighteenth-century ethnology in the United States. In the German states, however, ethnology related to a historical paradigm that dealt with peoples and nations, as distinct from states. In 1732, Müller added a *historia gentium* to the previous *historia civilis* and *historia naturalis*.

The method of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) has shown great advantages. By focusing on the history of the names of sciences from an emic perspective, it has become possible to distinguish two stages in the conceptualization of ethnology: (1) the formation of *Völker-Beschreibung* in the field, 1732-1747, and (2) the invention of *Völkerkunde* in the study, 1767-1787. Although much of this process remains unclear, with a gap between 1747 and 1767, it is certain that Gerhard Friedrich Müller developed a research program for the ethnographic description of Siberia, that August Ludwig Schlözer postulated a general *Völkerkunde* to be based on a series of ethnographies, characterized by linguistics, and that Adam Franz Kollár introduced and defined the term *ethnologia*. Nevertheless, the method has limitations. Thus, Steller has ethnographic accounts but not the term. Müller has a program for ethnographic research, and the German term *Völker-Beschreibung*, not yet its neo-Greek equivalent *Ethnographie*. Yet it is clear that Müller envisaged a 'general description of peoples' (*allgemeine*

*Völkerbeschreibung*) and saw his program for the description of Siberian peoples as part of a comparative program intended to document human diversity at large.

Names of sciences, of course, form a special sub-set of conceptual history. Being linked to institutional positions, names of sciences are of strategic importance. Moreover, sciences in the past, and to a certain extent in the present, had to be designated with names derived from the Greek. It is therefore significant that the *ethnos*-names first surfaced in German (*Völker-Beschreibung*, *Völkerkunde*), and only later occurred in Greek (*ethnographia*, *ethnologia*). The idea existed before the technical term. Since Thomasius introduced the use of German instead of Latin in academic instruction (1687), German scholars had become more confident in using their own language. It was natural for Müller and Schlözer to use the German terms *Völker-Beschreibung* and *Völkerkunde* in their writings. The fact that Schöpperlin, Schlözer, and Kollár introduced the Greek neologisms *ethnographia* and *ethnologia* as proper names, means that these historians had scientific ambitions. It is noteworthy that historians, rather than philosophers and biologists, first formulated these terms. In the German Enlightenment, it were especially the historians who reflected on the peoples of the world and their diversity.

Despite Bastian's statement of 1881, this period did not represent the prehistory of ethnology (*Vorgeschichte der Ethnologie*) but, rather, its *early* history. The fact that Mühlmann incorrectly assumed the concepts *Ethnographie* and *Ethnologie* to have first occurred during the seventeenth century, has seriously hampered historical research into the origins of this science. In response to Lubbock, one could say that ethnology is not an older word than anthropology and that it may or may not be prettier, but it certainly is more distinctive.

The importance of ethnology as a subject was clearly recognized in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Claims that apart from philosophical anthropology and physical anthropology on the one hand, and social anthropology on the other, there existed an 'ethnological anthropology' were made by Daniel Garrison Brinton (1892a-c, 1895) and Juul Dieserud (1908). Brinton was the first to hold a chair in ethnology in the United States, at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia from 1884, and in archaeology and linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, from 1886. He distinguished Ethnography, also defined as 'Geographic and Descriptive Anthropology,' from 'Somatology,' that is, from Physical Anthropology (Brinton 1892a: 265; Steinmetz 1892; Fischer 1970: 178). Dieserud was a librarian at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. He devised a classification of anthropological sciences, distinguishing among others physical anthropology or somatology from 'ethnic anthropology,' which he claimed was also known as 'psychical or culture anthropology' (Dieserud 1908: 17). Dieserud preferred '*ethnic* anthropology, already freely used in many lands' (1908: 17), probably because the use of the term ethnology in a physical sense had created confusion. In the actual classification of anthropological sciences, he defined ethnic anthropology as 'psycho-socio-cultural anthropology' (1908: 63). The influence of Dieserud's book on *The Scope and Content of the Science of Anthropology* has been limited, despite the importance that has to be attached to the



study of terminology for historiographical purposes. In any case, future developments led to the use of the terms cultural anthropology (in the United States) and social anthropology (in Great Britain). The ethnology-anthropology name-switch in Britain in 1864-71, the United States in 1869-79, and France in 1876-91, has led to a hierarchical rearrangement of the relationships between these disciplines and obscured their earlier parallel development in different domains of science.

The present study shows that parallel to moral philosophy in Scotland, France, the United States, and elsewhere, and to biological anthropology that came to appropriate the term anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an ethnological discourse that developed in the Russian Empire and the German states during the eighteenth century. This discourse dealt with peoples, *Völker*, large and small, some becoming nations, others turning into states, some becoming extinct. It focused many of the earlier Renaissance interests in ‘manners and customs,’ religion and morals, etc. into a new object: *ethnos*.

The study of that object is now alternatively denoted with concepts such as cultural anthropology, social anthropology, European (or German, French, Dutch) ethnology, or just anthropology. Under whatever name, ethnography still lies at the basis of this effort.