

Waldemar Jochelson—a prominent ethnographer of north-eastern Siberia

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Abstract. This article overviews the biography and ethnographic research of prominent Litvak anthropologist Waldemar Jochelson. It discusses his extensive and influential ethnographic fieldwork among indigenous people in eastern Siberia. The author of the article argues that Jochelson's methodology, comparative research, theoretical approaches, and scientific results can have a distinctive value in history and, in particular, anthropology and ethnology studies in Lithuania.

The establishment of modern anthropology at the beginning of the 20th century is mostly related to the activities and research of two major scientists: Franz Boas (1858–1942) in North America and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) in Great Britain. Both anthropologists became prominent as innovative fieldworkers who ceased to follow the tradition of ‘armchair anthropology’ and spent many years living in remote indigenous communities and learning about them from *inside*. They also established contemporary canons of the discipline based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and the idea of cultural relativism, particularly affirming that *all cultures are unique and equal*. Furthermore, both scientists had a strong influence and monopoly on the training of postgraduate anthropology students in North America and Great Britain. Thus they played an important intellectual role in shaping anthropological theories of future generations of anthropologists and popularising the subject of anthropology among different layers of Western society.

In the same epoch, there were several other scientists bringing their own input into the development of anthropology through extensive ethnographic fieldwork research, detailed ethnographical¹ descriptions, and museum collections of the indigenous people of north-eastern Siberia. One of them, Lithuanian-born anthropologist Waldemar Jochelson (1855–1937), was a leading researcher of the famous large-scale Jesup North Pacific Expedition in Siberia (1897–1902). Jochelson worked in harsh political and natural environments, as well as poverty. Despite lack of support from the government, he managed to lead large expeditions, produce monumental

The writing of this article was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship granted by the European Union Structural Funds project ‘Postdoctoral Fellowship Implementation in Lithuania’ conducted in the Centre of Social Anthropology at Vytautas Magnus University.

¹ By ethnography, I mean the practice of anthropological or ethnological fieldwork.




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Pl. 1. Waldemar Jochelson. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg

monographs, collect a variety of scientific data, and gain worldwide recognition. His main interest was to holistically document the indigenous cultures of eastern Siberia. As a member of the Jesup expedition, he also did comparative studies of north-east Siberian and North American cultures. This chapter does not aim to elaborate on the contribution of Jochelson to the growth of the discipline of anthropology or ethnology. It does however seek to introduce his biography and the scope of his research that is completely unknown in Lithuania.

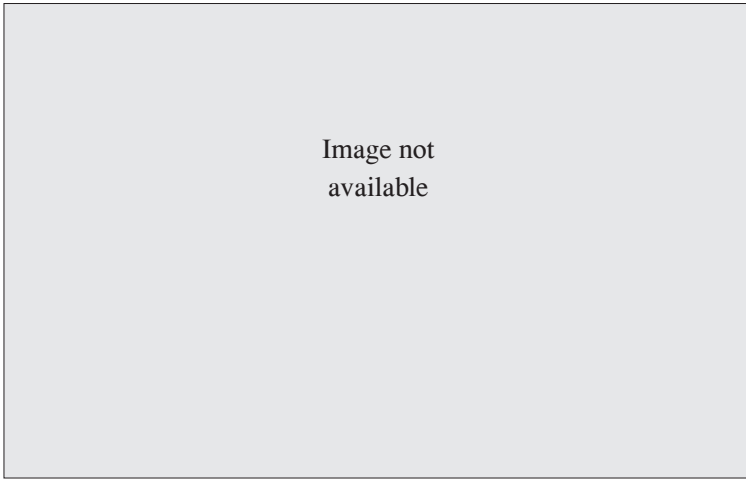
Waldemar Jochelson was born in 1855 in the city of Vilnius (Vilnius Gubernium of the Russian Empire), where he received a gymnasium education in a hedera (Jewish school); he also took classes from a private teacher and was accepted into rabbinical seminary in Vilnius. While at the seminary at the age of 13, he got into a close relationship with a circle of students who were fond of socialist literature and sympathetic to revolutionary anti-tsarist ideas. Under the influence of the active leader of this circle, A.I. Zundelevich, Jochelson became fond of intellectual, socialistic, atheistic and revolutionary literature. As Jochelson wrote later, ‘this instinctive passion for freedom inspired a will to acquire a European education’ (1918, 54). Soon this revolutionary circle grew into a bigger intellectual organisation affiliated with the *Narodnik* (Populism) ideology. The movement was anti-tsarist and one of its main goals was the reunification of the proclaimed intelligentsia with the lay people in order for the former to get a better understanding of the realities and life of ordinary people. These ideas even led Jochelson to learn the craft of shoemaker so

that he could feel affinity for workers and spread the ideas of revolution further. As an enthusiastic revolutionary, Jochelson soon became in charge of smuggling illegal literature from Europe to Russia, and consequently he was soon wanted by the Tsar's police. Aiming to escape from an arrest warrant in 1875, he urgently fled to Germany. In Berlin, he continued his self-education by attending public lectures and courses in philosophy and political economy and by being introduced to social-democratic ideas through many famous intellectuals and philosophers. After spending a year in Germany, Jochelson returned to Ukraine, which was also a part of the Russian Empire, and continued his political activities among students there. He soon had to return to Berlin, however, to assist his close friends who had been arrested for their political activities. In Berlin, Jochelson continued anti-tsarist agitation by spreading ideas of revolution mainly among groups of emigrant workers from the Russian Empire.

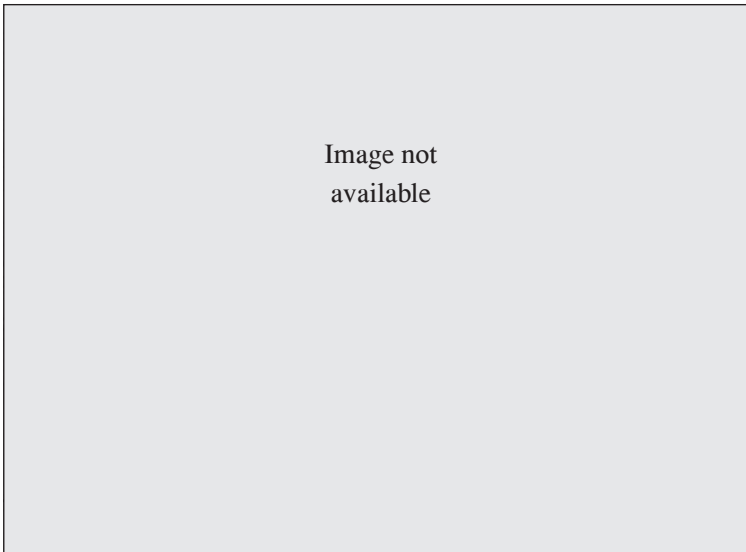
After spending a year in Berlin, Jochelson used his chance to return to Russia and settle down in Moscow, where he was fully accepted in the revolutionary party *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) formed by the followers of the Narodnik movement. As an experienced member of the organisation, he was put in charge of organising the smuggling of illegal literature to Russia and also producing fake documents to help people cross borders illegally. He also worked in a dynamite factory producing dynamite for terrorist acts. Indeed, as the Soviet researcher Shavrov (1935) noticed, 'Jochelson has always been a practical organiser of resistance'. However, following his own dream to settle down in the countryside, Jochelson moved to Kiev, where he studied land surveying in a school. Again, however, most of his time was spent agitating farmers against the Tsar in rural areas of Ukraine.

In the summer of 1880, Jochelson moved to Switzerland to take a position as editor of the *Vestnik Narodnoi Voli* (News of People's Will), which had a clandestine circulation in Russia. There he remained for four years; he also attended many courses at Zurich and Bern universities. He was also teaching in a Russian school and studied social sciences at the University of Bern. In 1884, he attempted to enter Russia illegally and was arrested by the Tsar's police. He spent several years waiting for trial, imprisoned in the jail of Petropavlovsk Castle in Kamchatka. He was finally sentenced to 10 years of exile in Kolyma, a harsh region in north-east Siberia. The place of deportation was known as the most remote place of the Russian Empire at that time. The first years of exile he spent in the city of Olekminsk (contemporary Sakha Republic, Russia), but once again he was accused of continuing his revolutionary activities and was moved to villages in the region of Kolyma.

Already in his first years of exile, Jochelson showed a great interest in the indigenous cultures of the Kolyma River region and even learned to speak the Yakut language. Indeed, the research of indigenous people was one way an educated person



Pl. 2. Evenk riding a reindeer. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg



Pl. 3. Yakut rider. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg

could realise himself while living in remote and isolated villages. In 1895, Jochelson, working as an amateur ethnographer, was invited by former friend and revolutionist Dmitrii Klements, with whom Jochelson had cooperated in Vilnius, to join a group of exiled intelligentsia on an ethnographical expedition. This was known as the Yakut-Siberian Expedition of the East Siberian Branch and was organised by the Imperial Russian Geographic Society.

For more than two and a half years (1895–1897), Jochelson worked as an ethnographer among the Yukaghir hunters and reindeer herders, who were thought to be extinct by scientists at that time. He migrated with groups of hunters visiting different camps. He studied Yukaghir dialects, compiled a dictionary, and recorded myths. He also gathered unique ethnographic and linguistic material and published his first report in 1898 describing Yukaghir social organisation. During the fieldwork, he continuously took pictures of ritual activities, daily life, and castes and built up a large photo collection on the Yukaghir, Chukchi and Yakut, all people living in the Kolyma River basin. Jochelson believed that ‘the information about the life and history of a tribe which is becoming extinct is particularly important’ (1910, 2). The researcher therefore followed his call to collect information about the Yukaghir since ‘a knowledge of small tribes is equally as important as that of great peoples’ (*ibid.*). In his early publications, Jochelson did not avoid describing the difficulties that the Yukaghir people experienced while dealing with traders and officials; he even criticised state policies concerning the alcohol trade in the region.

This fieldwork and published report earned Jochelson recognition in Russia and Europe. He was granted permission to return to St Petersburg or Moscow and continue processing fieldwork material. Hence, in St Petersburg he was respected as a fieldworker and expert on the remote areas of the Russian Empire who also had a large collection of ethnographic artefacts and linguistic material. The Imperial Geographical Society continued publishing his research reports, and soon he went to Switzerland to continue his university education, aiming to complete his doctoral thesis. At Bern University he met his wife, Dina Brodskaya, who became his main co-researcher on future ethnographical expeditions.

When the Jesup North Pacific Expedition to North Asia was being prepared by the American Museum of Natural History (New York), the head of the Russian Imperial Academy of Science, V.V. Radlov, in answer to a request of anthropologist Franz Boas, recommended two exiled ethnographers, Waldemar Jochelson and his younger colleague Waldemar Bogoras, as the men best suited to contribute to the expedition’s success by their respective knowledge of eastern Siberia and of indigenous dialects. The expedition was funded by Morris K. Jesup, who was a prosperous American banker and the president of American Museum of Natural History. The expedition’s

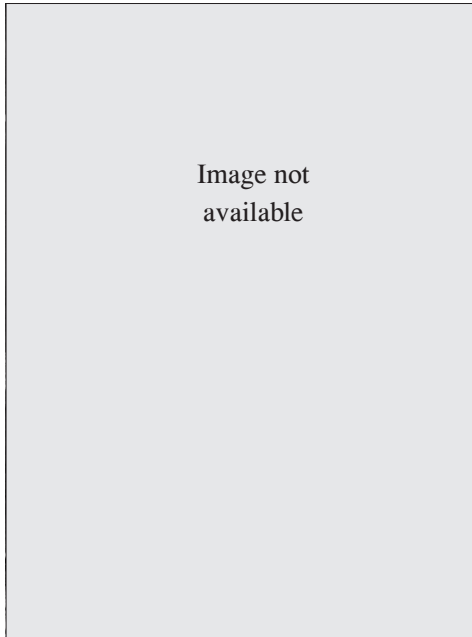
aims were formulated by Franz Boas, who was well-known as a collector of museum artefacts and a researcher of the north-western coast of North America. Boas put forward several objectives for the expedition: exploring the origins of the early inhabitants of North America and the interrelations of the peoples of north-eastern Asia with the peoples of north-western America, as well as comparing American and Asian indigenous cultures.

Boas met Jochelson and outlined the expedition's tasks. The main task was to collect ethnographic information for the American Museum of Natural History, including details such as skilllets; skulls; photos; and linguistic, anthropometric and mythological information. Boas also ensured that all of the expedition's researchers would be well trained in field research and would work under a unified methodology becoming 'his eyes, ears and hands' (Vakhtin 2005). Boas, as a professor at Columbia University in New York (1896–1936) indeed always demanded from his students a holistic approach to culture, which would be investigated through different methods such as physical measurements, biological features, text and grammar analysis, and archaeological excavations. This approach later became known as four-field anthropology and is still prevalent in North America. To introduce the newest approaches, Boas also sent some examples of anthropological literature to Jochelson and his team members. Boas hoped that Jochelson would not follow the unilinear evolutionary ideas that were prevalent in anthropology at the time.

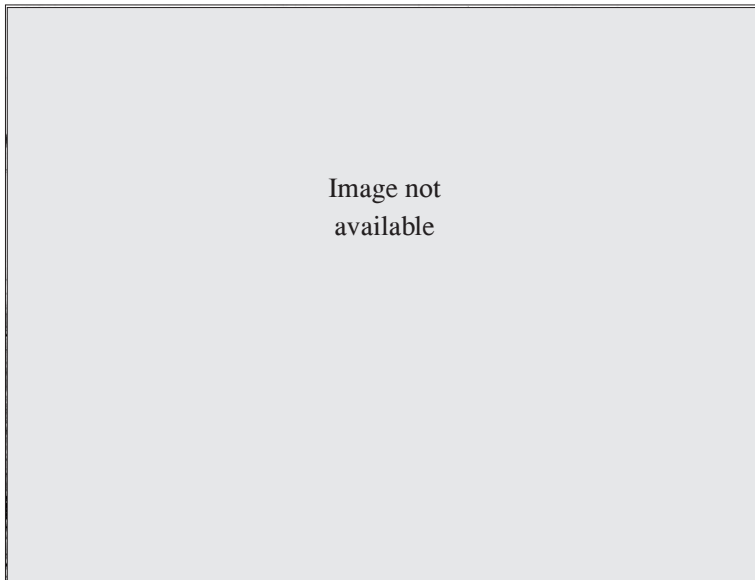
Regarding the expeditions, scientists were promised a salary and the rights to publish all material gathered in the Russian language. In his correspondence, Jochelson also requested that his remuneration should be increased and that he should be provided with travel insurance and additional literature.

Boas agreed with Jochelson's requirements and ensured that the expedition would be provided with all the necessary equipment and tools. Indeed, Boas valued Jochelson and in his correspondence to Jesup advised him to hire Jochelson, who he wrote was the most qualified Siberian specialist in Europe. Boas also stressed his abilities to work diligently and accurately (see Vakhtin 2005, 259).

In 1900, following a long correspondence, Jochelson and Bogoraz arrived in New York to sign a contract with Jesup that guaranteed salaries and funds for the expedition expenses. The Siberian researchers acquired the most advanced equipment available at that time, including a photo camera, an audio recorder, and tools for physical measurements. Jochelson's wife Dina Brodskaya, who had a medical education, also joined the expedition; she wanted to do physical body measurements of indigenous people. She accompanied her husband on all Siberian expeditions and gathered physical anthropological data, which later formed her PhD dissertation for the University of Zurich.



Pl. 4. Jochelson in exile in Kolyma. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg



Pl. 5. Tent of Jochelson on an expedition. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg

Russian Tsar Nikolai II gave permission for Jochelson to lead and organise the Jesup expedition in the Russian Empire, but at the same time he issued an opposite order for officials in the remote regions not to support the expedition led by the former revolutionist. Three groups of scientists had been organised to study different groups of indigenous people living in Siberia. Jochelson did his fieldwork among the Koriaks, Yukagirs and Yakuts, while Bogoraz worked among the Chukchi (from 1900 to 1902).

At the end of his expedition and on his way back to Europe, Jochelson also worked among the Yakut people and communities of Old Believers. The research was performed in a very harsh environment and hard travelling conditions as most indigenous people were hardly accessible because of their nomadic lifestyles. During those two years of the expedition, Jochelson lived with the local inhabitants in their dwellings. These dwellings varied from skin-made conical chums to permanent underground structures. The modes of transportation used to carry the gear and provisions of the expedition included walking, rafts, locally constructed boats, horses, dog sleds, and reindeer. His crew was challenged by wild animals, storms, the difficult terrain, and diseases (see Jochelson 1910, 5). Nevertheless, Jochelson collected a large number of specimens of stone and bone tools, pottery, and beadwork and also documented indigenous ways of subsistence. He described religious practices, recorded folklore and mythology, and obtained physical measurements.

Jochelson collected nearly 3,000 ethnographic artefacts (clothing, ritual gear, tools), conducted measurements of 900 people, made 41 casts of faces, took 1,200 photographs, made over 100 audio recordings, and collected skulls, archaeological materials, and zoological specimens. In addition, he made daily meticulous meteorological observations. The success of the Jesup expedition brought him world recognition, and he became a member of the American Association of Anthropologists. However, the Tsar's officials continued to hinder Jochelson's activities and therefore he could not get a permanent position in St Petersburg, forcing him to move to Europe to work on his expedition material. Jochelson's expedition data was turned into five monographs covering the period from 1908 to 1926: the Koryak—two tomes, the Yukaghir and the Yukaghirivewed Tungus—three tomes, and dozens of articles (see list of publications in Slobodin 2005).

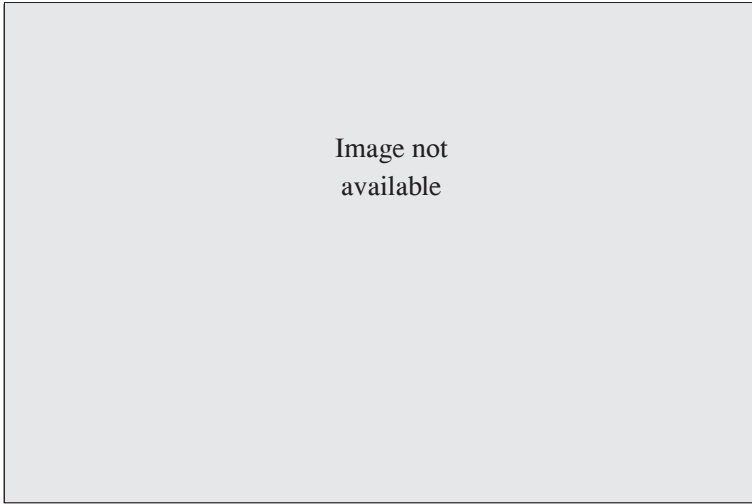
This rich ethnographic data and the ongoing discussions between Jochelson, Bogoraz and Boas allowed Boas to formulate his theoretical postulates. Boas aimed to reveal the complexity of indigenous societies by describing their cultural history and how cultural traditions and materials diffused across cultural areas.

This scientific perspective was later named historical particularism. Boas held that the goal of anthropology was to reveal cultural diversity that evolves under the

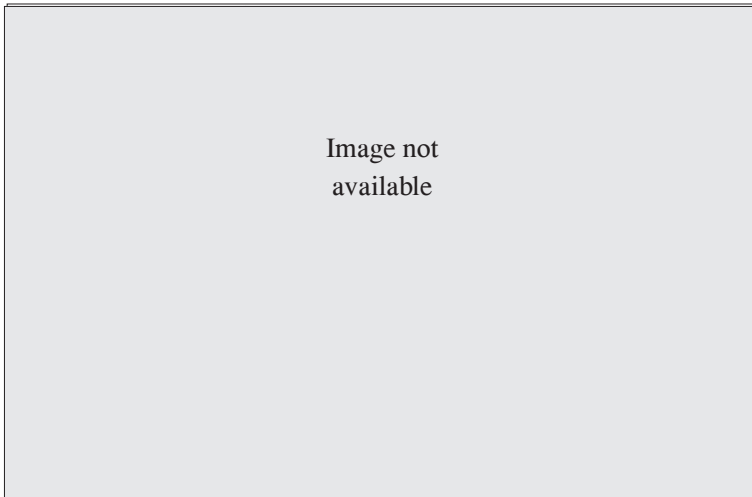
influence of specifiable factors of history, rather than evolving from one social and cultural form. In contrast to the proponents of unilineal evolution, Boas stressed that the culture we inherit from our ancestors shapes our perception of the world. Indeed evolutionists still believed that some races were more primitive than others and had amorphous bodies and primitive (i.e. inferior) mental capabilities and values. Members of the Jesup expedition demonstrated through a wide scope of research that racial features are not linked to speech, customs, ways of subsistence, or social organisation.

Boas always taught his students to study human cultures as distinct configurations producing a diversity of human conditions and lifestyles that conditioned the variety of humans. In this context, culture is described in its own terms and perceptions. Boas also criticised supporters of unilineal evolution for their lack of empirical data and for their ethnocentric approach. Indeed, most proponents of unilineal evolution at the time wrote monographs using only the memoirs of explorers and missionaries. These writings often reinforced widespread stereotypes about indigenous peoples in Western society. Both Boas and Jochelson moved their fieldwork research closer toward participant observation, though Boas still worked with sitting informants, interviewing them and working with texts. This kind of approach aimed to document cultural forms that were about to become extinct; hence it was referred to as 'salvage anthropology' by Boas and his students.

Waldemar Jochelson produced a wide range of research papers that later served as an ethnographical source for generations of scientists in crafting their interpretations of their own ethnographic data. Hence, thanks to the members of the Jesup expedition, the science of anthropology acquired new standards based on rich empirical descriptions. Indeed, Jochelson's works represent a rich ethnographical bounty of data about different groups of indigenous cultures occupying large areas of eastern Siberia. What makes his works even more significant is his attempts to compare his field data with that of his colleagues—Bogoraz and Boas—when delineating the interrelations of Asian and American cultures. He scientifically compared the mythology, religious practices, material culture, decorations, dwellings, subsistence practices, and methods of transportation of the peoples of north-western America and eastern Siberia. Jochelson compared the mythological narratives of the Koryak and north-western American Indians and discerned their similarities, saying that the Koryaks of Asia and the Indians of the north-western coast of America have a common origin (Jochelson 1904). He also argued that Eskimos living on the seacoast are emigrants from the eastern coast of North America and therefore are only slightly related to other native American Indians and to paleo-Asians (Yukaghir, Chukchi, Itelmen and Aleuts). Jochelson also believed that paleo-Asians originated in North



Pl. 6. Koryak shamans. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg



Pl. 7. Camp of Koryaks. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg

America, while Boas believed that paleo-Asians were a western branch of North American Indians. Published in English, Jochelson's monographs introduced into the scientific lexicon a popular metaphor, 'shamanic complex', which has been widely used since then by generations of scientists studying Siberian and North American societies. According to Znamenski (2003, 65), 'American scholars, who rarely operated with the definition of shamanism prior to 1900, now increasingly began to juxtapose Native American spiritual practitioners against their "classic" Siberian analogies'.

The success of the Jesup expedition brought worldwide recognition to Jochelson. He became a member of the American Association of Anthropologists. Despite such recognition, he was ignored by the Tsar's officials, and therefore he had difficulties getting a permanent job. Jochelson had to move from one academic institution to another while processing his fieldwork material. Nevertheless, soon a wealthy Russian capitalist and a promoter of science, Fedor Riabushinskii, invited him to join another grand expedition. The aim of this expedition was to collect zoological, botanical and geological specimens and to conduct climatologic and ethnological research in Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands. Again Jochelson spent more than two years conducting research among the Aleut in 1909–10. He studied their dialects and compiled their folklore in the Russian and the American part of their territories. Jochelson (1909, 304–5) believed that scientific results belonged to all people, and therefore they were not owned by any particular nation. In addition, he did meteorological observations and archaeological excavations of villages and caves used for the dead. He also made audio recordings of indigenous storytellers and even made a film recording. After this fieldwork, Jochelson had an even larger and more impressive collection of field data. Later all this research was published in two monographs dedicated to the archaeology of the Aleutian Islands (Jochelson 1925) and to the ethnography and language of the islands (Jochelson 1933). In 1910–1, Jochelson continued his fieldwork research in Kamchatka, where he did archaeological excavations around the city of Petropavlovsk and in the southern part of Kamchatka. This extensive work yielded some rich archaeological data about the old culture of the Itelmens still residing in Kamchatka (Jochelson 1912, 1930).

After this fieldwork in eastern Siberia, Jochelson embarked on a trip to disseminate his collected data. He published articles and books and also gave public lectures and organised exhibitions. He gave a presentation entitled 'Three years in the Aleutian Islands' in St Petersburg, and he was also invited to present a paper at the annual meeting of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in Moscow and at the International Congress of Americanists in London. Finally, in St Petersburg he opened an exhibition of archaeological and ethnographic items gathered in the

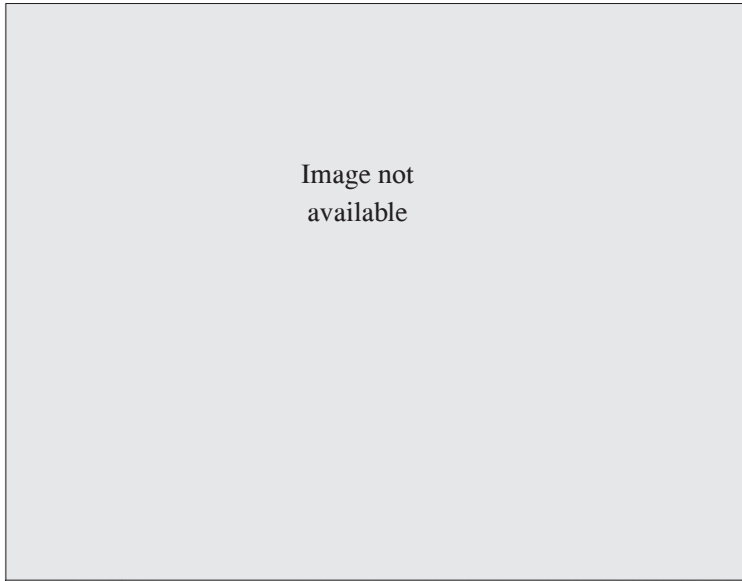
Aleutian Islands and Kamchatka. These achievements were evaluated by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO) and he was awarded a gold medal in 1914.

Despite his popularity among the scientists of Russia and Europe and his friendship with many influential scientists and science administrators, he never received any financial support from the Russian Imperial Academy of Science. He was only given a junior ethnographer position at the Museums of Anthropology and Ethnography in St Petersburg. Also, he never received a university position and mainly lived on a small stipend provided by the American Museum of Natural History. These funds were given to him for his collections gathered during the Jesup Expedition in Siberia. His work and collaborative projects were terminated by the October Revolution in 1917, and Jochelson resided in Russia for a few years, having no contacts with his colleagues living abroad. His plans to publish monographs in Russia were also postponed. Only in 1918 did he win a position as curator of the Asian Museum in Petrograd (St Petersburg). During the Kronstadt revolt, Jochelson was even arrested by Soviet officials. In 1922 he used the excuse of visiting a museum in the USA to settle down there permanently. As Sergei Kan (2006, 210) notes, 'this was an escape from communist Russia'.

His years in New York were mainly spent working full time on publications dedicated to the cultures of Kamchatka (1928), the Yakut (1933b) and the Aleuts (1933a). He was provided with a stipend from the American Museum of Natural History. The American Association of Progress and Science accepted Jochelson into its ranks. His emigration to New York was understood as a lack of loyalty by Russian scientists, and his works and theoretical approaches were highly criticised in the scientific journals of Russia (see Shavrov 1935). His involvement with the *narodniki* revolutionary movement was not suitable for the Marxists who came to power in Russia either. Jochelson nevertheless made some attempts to return to Soviet Russia, but he never managed to return. Nobody in Soviet Russia paid attention to his death in 1937.

Today, anthropologists consider Waldemar Jochelson and his colleague on the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Waldemar Bogoraz (1865–1936), to be the founders of the discipline of anthropology in Russia; Jochelson is also called a 'founding father of Siberian studies' (see Vakhtin 2006, 242). Nevertheless the writings of Jochelson were ignored for decades in Russia. Not one of his five books on the Koriaks and Yukaghir was ever published in Soviet Union. At the same time, historians of science in the West focus on the American branch of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition and the establishment of anthropology in North America, paying little attention to the researchers of Siberia (*ibid.*).

Jochelson had to work in the hardest political and natural environment on the margins of the Russian Empire for long periods. He had an extraordinary life



Pl. 8. Koryak wrestling. From the CD *Siberia through the eyes of ethnographers of the early 20th century: collections of photographic illustrations of W. Jochelson and A.S. Forshtein in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography*. Courtesy: Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St Petersburg

experience, which brought him from his place of birth, Vilnius, to remote places of Siberia against his will and made him an anthropologist by accident. His scientific success was mainly powered by his energy, dedication and passion for the indigenous people of Siberia, enabling him to lead big expeditions in the most remote areas of the Russian Empire. His fieldwork was accompanied by acts of humanism, since Jochelson always acted as an advocate for indigenous people and helped them with food and medical support, even though such help posed physical and logistical challenges. Over his 40-year-long academic career (1894–1937), Jochelson wrote monumental ethnographical studies of the Siberian inhabitants of the eastern part of the Russian Empire and enriched museums with large collections. There are few anthropologists whose works cover such geographic breadth as his embracing studies of physical anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, linguistics, and the material culture of past and present indigenous societies. Anthropologist Anna Sirina (2007, 332) noted that because Jochelson was an alien scientist for the Russians, Americans and Soviets, his works and biography were little researched. Until recent publications (Vakhtin 2001; 2003), Jochelson's input into the Jesup expedition and into the development of Siberian studies had been little acknowledged in the world. Today, Jochelson's works continue to be a part of Yakut, Yukaghir, and Koriak cultural inheritance, as well as

an important ethnographical source for many generations of anthropologists and new generations of Siberian fieldworkers. Had he been better known and acknowledged by Lithuanian historians, anthropologists, ethnologists and archaeologists, he could have served as an example of a great scientist whose values, ethnographic works, and academic activities extended his name far beyond the region of his birth.

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