

**Edyta M. Bojanowska.** *A World of Empires: The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2018. Illustrations, maps. 373 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-97640-5.

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**Published on** H-War (September, 2019)

**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov (1812-91) is best known as the author of the 1858 novel *Obломov*, whose indolent eponymous protagonist embodied the idle and frivolous “superfluous man” of his day. Yet he is equally significant as a travel writer. While employed as a translator in the Ministry of Finance’s Department of Trade in the early 1850s, he served as Vice-Admiral Evfimii Putiatin’s (1803-83) secretary during the latter’s journey from St. Petersburg to Japan in the frigate *Pallada*. (The expedition initially was meant to circumnavigate the globe, but unfavorable Baltic weather and lengthy ship repairs in England forced Putiatin to modify his plans.) Putiatin’s purported purpose was to inspect Russia’s Alaskan colony, but his true—and secret—aim was to open trade and diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan, which for several centuries had barred its gates to the West lest foreign influences such as Christianity disrupt the Japanese polity. The maritime portion of Goncharov’s odyssey began at the Kronstadt naval base in October 1852 and took him to England, Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands, southernmost Africa, Java, Singapore, the Philippines, China, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, and Korea. Disembarking on the Sea of Okhotsk coast in August 1854, he continued onward through Siberia and European Russia, arriving in St. Petersburg in February of the following year. The observations, ex-

periences, and impressions that Goncharov gleaned during this journey began to appear in 1856 as articles in “a wide range of popular journals for the general public” and were published in book form in 1858 as *Fregat “Pallada”: Ocherki puteshestviia v dvukh tomakh* (*The Frigate Pallada: A Sketch of a Journey in Two Volumes*) (p. 348). This seven-hundred-page work—“alternatively humorous and lyrical, ironic and earnest, prejudiced and insightful”—continues to enjoy immense popularity among the Russian reading public (p. 3). In *A World of Empires*, Yale University’s Edyta M. Bojanowska, author of *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (2007) and numerous articles and chapters on topics in nineteenth-century Russian literature, embarks on a thorough investigation of *The Frigate Pallada*. Rather than narrating the voyage or treating the book as “a repository of historical facts,” she provides an astute analysis of the worldview that Goncharov revealed in the pages of his work, in particular his attitudes toward European imperialism and colonialism and his understanding of Russia’s place in this “world of empires” (p. 17).

The book’s first chapter, “From London to Cape Town, or How to Run a Successful Empire,” treats Goncharov’s visits to London, the west African coast, and Britain’s Cape Colony. He

lauded Britain's reliable postal system, cornucopia of consumer goods, and public access to knowledge through museums, public lectures, and cheap books, and he praised the English as diligent, disciplined, and entrepreneurial. Nevertheless, he lambasted their "cold utilitarianism" and "machine-like quality": for the Englishman, he complained, "honesty, justice, and compassion appear to be extracted like coal, for the purposes of entering in the statistical tables" (pp. 30, 31, 30). However, as Bojanowska notes, Goncharov added these criticisms after England had defeated Russia in the Crimean War (1853-56), so they reflect his resentment at Russia's humiliation by its imperial rival. Instead, a grudging admiration was far more characteristic of Goncharov's approach to the English. He envied their successful colonization and exploitation of the Cape territory and the colonists' high standard of living and nodded approvingly at British subjugation of the Xhosa and other native groups. He admitted that "every step forward in this scorched earth is bathed in blood" but deemed this an acceptable price in light of Britain's civilizing mission in Africa and commented that such conflicts had "the same character as our wars in the Caucasus" during the same period (pp. 51, 56).

Bojanowska stresses that "globalization used to be considered a fairly recent phenomenon ... [but] it is now recognized to have a much longer history ... [dating to] the age of empires, especially between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War" (p. 64). Goncharov's experience and evaluation of this budding globalization is the focus of chapter 2, "Pineapples in Petersburg, Cabbage Soup on the Equator." Goncharov observed that Western imperialism, expanded international trade, and increased colonial migration had created not only a lively exchange of commercial goods but also a transnational elite community of European and American merchants and diplomats extending from Capetown to Shanghai; he was pleased that the Russians were included in this elite on a fully equal basis, as fellow Europeans.

With the exception of a gloomy excursus on the ravages of the British opium trade in China and the "peremptory, vulgar, or coldly contemptible" British treatment of the Chinese in the treaty port of Shanghai, he took a highly positive view of European imperialism in Asia, considering it economically and culturally beneficial to Westerners and natives alike (p. 102). He dubbed the Filipino workers of a Spanish-owned cigar factory in Manila "the happiest people in the world" and demonstrated Europe's civilizing effects in the East by comparing Singapore's Asian sector, which included "everything offensive to sight and smell" with its clean, orderly, and modern European quarter, which should have served as a model for the natives (pp. 105, 99). At the same time, Goncharov urged Russia to join the Western powers in extending its own diplomatic influence in Asia and staking its own claim on Asia's rich resources lest it lag behind the rest of Europe in the race for empire. (And indeed, within a few years of Goncharov's journey, Russia had annexed Amur territory from China and had wrested new commercial privileges from China and Japan.)

Goncharov's embrace of empire becomes even more apparent in the third chapter, "Prying Open Japan, Prospecting Korea." Following by five weeks the arrival of the American commodore Matthew Perry (1794-1858), who similarly aimed to foster ties with Japan, the *Pallada* reached Nagasaki Harbor in late August 1853. Lest the reader assume a rivalry between the two missions, Bojanowska hastens to explain that Putiatin and Perry were in no way competing in a "race" to open Japan; indeed, Putiatin was instructed by his superiors to "let the Yankees do the heavy lifting and hover just close enough to profit from their actions, whether peaceful or violent" and thereby "piggyback on the Americans' efforts" to break Japan's isolation (pp. 111-12). Putiatin's initial attempts to cement diplomatic and trade relations over 1853 and 1854, when Goncharov was accompanying him, bore no fruit, and by the time Putiatin obtained the Treaty of Shimoda on February 7,

1855, Goncharov had already returned to Russia. For that reason, Goncharov's writings on Japan focus less on diplomacy than on his thoughts on Japan's and Russia's proper roles there. Bojanowska points out that Putiatin's mission largely refrained from the naked aggression and arrogance displayed by Perry, but Goncharov's writings show no such restraint. Offended by his hosts' refusal to allow the Russians to wander inland and rejecting outright any notion that Japan had the right to isolate itself from Russia and other European states, he fulminated that Japan "slyly avoids the ferule of civilization,... dares to live by its own wit and rules,... bluntly rejects the friendship, religion, and trade of the foreigner,... [and] laughs at our attempts to enlighten it.... 'How long will this last?' we wondered, our hands caressing our sixty-pound cannons" (p. 121). He depicted the Japanese themselves in highly negative terms, as "childish," "effeminate," and "sly," and viewed them as obstinate and irrational for their inability to understand that opening up to the West (first and foremost Russia) was in their own interest (p. 120). Yet he held out hope for their eventual Europeanization and even Christianization: blinkered by "imperial narcissism," he imagined that the Japanese were attracted by the modern Russian ship and the Russian mission's diplomatic presents, and took a brief conversation with a young Japanese who showed curiosity about the outside world as proof that many Japanese would eagerly "run out of their prison" of isolation and tradition if given the chance (pp. 124, 128). However, he admitted that Russian force might be needed to abolish the antiquated political system and social customs that held them back: Bojanowska emphasizes that in Goncharov's worldview, "primitive societies need[ed] Europe's help to save them from themselves. European intervention thus emerge[d] as a humanitarian mission" (p. 126). Yet Goncharov's imperial urges in the East were not entirely altruistic. He imagined the Japanese landscape that he viewed from the ship covered with Russian factories, dachas, and churches; he waxed rhapsodic

about the crops and products that the Ryukyu Islands could produce for Russia; and he explicitly advocated Russian annexation of Korea, which he called a "huge, almost untouched virgin soil for seafarers, merchants, missionaries, and scholars" (p. 161). (Tellingly, during their brief stop in Korea, Goncharov and his companions saw fit not only to land without permission but also to enter private homes unbidden and strut about with hunting rifles, which they used to pepper Korean villagers with birdshot when the latter threw rocks at their uninvited guests.)

Bojanowska comments that for Goncharov, "Europeanness and Russianness [were] fundamentally the same" and that "the deep meaning of empire for Russia [was] belonging to Europe" (p. 126); and in chapter 4, "Eastward Ho!," she turns to Goncharov's travels through Russia's own imperial colony in the East: Siberia. (Siberia was not part of Goncharov's original itinerary; he was slated to visit Alaska, but Crimean War hostilities forced him to seek shelter on the Siberian mainland in order to elude British vessels. Only the first segment of his Siberian travels—from the port of Ayan to Irkutsk—features in *The Frigate Pallada*.) Goncharov took care to highlight Russian colonialism's purportedly positive effects on Siberia's native Asian peoples, in contrast to the tawdrier results of other European states' imperial policies (for example, the British opium trade in China); this was all the more important in the context of the Crimean War that was raging during Goncharov's time in Siberia. As a matter of fact, Goncharov even refrained from directly discussing Siberia in imperialist terms at all in the *Frigate Pallada*—for example, he called the Russians there "migrants" (*pereselentsy*) rather than "colonists" (*kolonisty*)—and in general he "studiously avoid[ed] acknowledging Siberia as a colonial site," although as Bojanowska points out, he explicitly described Siberia as a colony in the official account of the trip that he penned for the Russian government and in his private correspondence (p. 164). Such euphemisms do not indicate that Goncharov was

rethinking the earlier chapters' enthusiasm for west European colonialism in Africa and Asia; rather, when writing for public consumption, he wished to emphasize the legitimacy of Russian rule in Siberia by stressing that in contrast to its British and French rivals, Russia had expanded its realms "supposedly without stepping outside Russia's own national territory" and had done so as a result of Russia's "'natural' growth into its predestined contours" (pp. 164-65). As Bojanowska notes, these circumlocutions, which mirror those of contemporary American proponents of "manifest destiny," helped Goncharov to avoid pouring grist on the mill of Siberian regionalists, such as Nikolai Yadrintsev (1842-94), who portrayed Siberia as an exploited colony in need of autonomy from the metropole. Just as in his account of the Cape Colony (where European colonists, not indigenous Africans, were his main object of interest), *The Frigate Pallada's* Siberian material shows little curiosity about the cultures of the native groups he encountered, such as the Sakha (Yakuts), but he did find them useful in illustrating what he saw as the benevolent, altruistic, and beneficial nature of Russian rule in Siberia. He glossed over the violence inherent in the seventeenth-century conquest of the Sakha; was enthused about their adoption of sedentary farming, town living, and Christianity; extolled and exaggerated their prosperity; contrasted the (ineffective) Russian ban on alcohol sales to natives to the British sale of opium to the Chinese; and confidently predicted that "with time all [the native peoples] will become Russian" (p. 197).

Expanding on themes touched on earlier in *A World of Empires*, Bojanowska steps back in chapter 5, "Russians Confront Human Diversity," to examine in more depth how Goncharov viewed the African and Asian peoples he encountered in his journey. Numerous passages in *The Frigate Pallada* as well as in Goncharov's correspondence and other writings demonstrate that, as a result of his own biases and the influence of Russian and west European accounts he used as background

reading before his travels, he "typically deploy[ed] Orientalist, Eurocentric, and racial rhetoric characteristic of contemporary European writing ... [and] exude[d] the palpable sense of superiority that, as a 'civilized' white-skinned European, he felt over the differently hued people Europeans ruled or aspired to rule" (p. 214). And to be sure, he clearly shared the racial prejudices common in his day. In Goncharov's words, a native San whom he encountered in the Cape Colony appears as "a creature that barely resembled the likeness of a human being, about the height of a monkey"; Japanese diplomats "with their shaven foreheads, cheeks smooth as those of mummies, hung heads, and half-lowered eyelids ... [resemble] corpses that arose from thousand-year old tombs and gathered for a summit"; and native Siberians' hair is compared to "bear's fur" (pp. 221, 223, 236). Yet Goncharov's worldview turns out to be far more ambiguous, complex, and contradictory than we might expect. Alongside such unflattering and "otherizing" portraits of non-Westerners, he sometimes compared them favorably to Europeans, commenting that the Chinese were like the English in their skill at detailed crafts and stating that some even physically resembled white Russians (p. 244). He praised the Japanese for the cleanliness of their buildings and persons, yet gloated at their inability to prevent the Russians from performing forbidden naval maneuvers and compared them to disobedient children needing punishment for persisting in their seclusion. He proudly depicted Russia as belonging to the family of advanced European nations yet treated with amused affection the xenophobia of his peasant servant Fadeev, who "brought on foreign shores his Kostroma element,... did not dilute it with even a drop of foreignness,... [and] treated [foreign customs] with hostility and even contempt" (p. 239). Bojanowska rightly concludes that "anyone seeking logical or ideological consistency in *The Frigate Pallada* will do so in vain" (p. 246).

The sixth and final chapter, "The Bestseller and Its Afterlife," examines *The Frigate Pallada's*

reception and fate from its initial appearance to the present. The book was such an immense success (indeed, more so than *Oblomov*) that by 1900 it already had appeared in ten editions in an age when few Russian works saw two or three. A few reviewers grouched at the book's "scanty knowledge value" but most gushed over its "mastery, vividness, and plasticity" (pp. 267, 265). Additionally, the narrator's "felicitous combination of Europeanness and Russianness resonated most strongly" with patriotic readers, since "while being European, he was somewhat better than Europeans by virtue of being Russian" (p. 273). *The Frigate Pallada* helped shape late imperial Russian views of the outside world, particularly with regard to empire, race, and cultural difference, but during the Soviet period its imperialist assumptions and racist tropes discomfited Communist authorities, since they contradicted the regime's anti-imperialist and egalitarian ideology. Yet its literary merits (the Bolshevik official Mikhail Kalinin [1875-1946] even recommended it in 1934 as a model for aspiring writers) and its wide popularity ruled out banning it. The solution was to sanitize the text by removing Goncharov's overtly racist descriptions of nonwhite peoples and his paeans to colonialism; and when the post-war party line began to extol the benefits of Russian rule for the nationalities, Goncharov's comparison of the Xhosa and Caucasus wars similarly fell prey to censorship. At the same time, Cold War sensibilities led to a foregrounding of his scattered critiques of British imperial policy, while the Soviet alliance with North Korea prompted the removal of passages showing the Russians' imperious behavior on the Korean Peninsula. In the post-Soviet era, *The Frigate Pallada* has enjoyed a resurgence, and the racist stereotypes and pro-imperialist musings excised earlier from Soviet editions have reappeared without critical comment, suggesting that the editors do not find them particularly problematic. As Bojanowska informs us, the book now appeals to Russians who are "seeking [their] own reconnections with imperial-era

grandeur" in the context of the current Russian administration's assertive foreign policy (p. 289). The book's enduring significance is exemplified by the Russian media's enthusiasm about the long-distance cruises of the Far Eastern State Technical Fisheries University's new sailing frigate *Pallada* and President Vladimir Putin's bestowal of the Order of Alexander Nevsky upon its commander.

*A World of Empires* is an outstanding contribution to the study of imperialism, nineteenth-century Russian history and literature, and Russian foreign and colonial policy. (As a student of Siberian nationality issues, I found the sections on the Sakha and other native Siberians particularly interesting.) The book is all the more valuable since, as Bojanowska informs us, the two existing English translations are marred by significant omissions and errors. In addition to nimbly and exhaustively dissecting Goncharov's attitudes and assumptions and juxtaposing them with those of other European travel writers of the period, the author deftly supplies background information on historical events and processes necessary for understanding his work (for example, the Dutch and British colonization of southern Africa, the Russian absorption of Siberia and the Caucasus, the expansion of European industry and trade networks prior to the *Pallada's* voyage, the Opium War, and earlier European attempts to establish relations with Japan). She provides a thorough bibliography of the Russian, English, French, and German travel and ethnographic works available to Goncharov, and throughout the main body of the text and the endnotes, she demonstrates those works' influences on him. Future editions could benefit from a full bibliography of the phenomenal number of secondary works cited in the endnotes.

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**Citation:** Robert W. Montgomery. Review of Bojanowska, Edyta M, *A World of Empires: The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2019.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=53785>



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