For fame and fortune: the origins of St Petersburg's zoo, 1865–1871

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

For fame and fortune: the origins of St Petersburg's zoo, 1865–1871

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Abstract

In the 1860s, the first zoos appeared in the Romanov empire. This article deals with the reasons for their establishment by looking into the early history of St Petersburg's zoo, which has not been explicitly discussed in the historiography. By situating its history in the global context, it argues that, on the one hand, St Petersburg's zoo was founded because the city's officials wanted to enhance the fame of the capital of their empire in the globalizing world of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the founder of the zoo had other motivations and was principally driven by mercantile considerations. Thus, St Petersburg's zoological garden is presented as one of the important social spaces and points of reference of the Romanov empire's capital, which could bring fame and fortune to the zoo's owners and the city in which it was located.

In 1871, 50 leading Japanese officials left their country for a tour around the United States and Europe, a journey which became known as the Iwakura mission. This unprecedented event was the brainchild of high-ranking statesmen whose desire to modernize Japan led them to investigate the latest achievements of the West and the conditions which had produced them. During their travels, members of the delegation visited numerous sites in American and European cities, including zoological gardens.[1] They were in awe of the famous London Zoo in Regent's Park and according to the official chronicler of the trip, Kunitake Kume, there were 'so many things to see that we were oblivious to the fact that night was falling'.[2] The visitors from Japan realized that it had required great efforts to bring all the exotic birds and animals to Europe. As Kume noted:

> Most of the unusual animals kept in these gardens come from South America, Africa, India and the islands of the South Seas, and to buy them requires the

[1]The abridged translation of the expedition diary mentions the delegation's visits to the zoos in Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, London and San Francisco: K. Kume, *Japan Rising: The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe, 1871–1873* (Cambridge, 2009), 16, 124–5, 285, 300–1, 353.

[2]Ibid., 124.

> expenditure of a great deal of money. If they are not kept in conditions appropriate to their natures, then even if they do not die, they will waste away and will not be worth seeing. By that alone can be seen the degree to which the care of animals has progressed as a science in this country…We saw nothing in Europe to compare with the richness of this zoo.[3]

While they appreciated zoos as important symbols of a new age, the Japanese officials considered the gardens as showcases of the greatness of Western countries, their political power, scientific development, wealth and even technical ability to collect and exhibit captured animals from around the world. Inspired by such impressions, shortly after the delegation's return, the Japanese government established a zoological garden in Tokyo in 1882, and in 1903–06 it was followed by state-funded zoos in other major cities of the country.[4]

One of the places visited by the Japanese officials during their world tour in March–April 1873 was St Petersburg. Although Kume never mentioned its zoo in his account of the journey and his companions probably did not visit it, by the time of their arrival, a permanent and public zoological garden had already become part of everyday life in the Romanov capital. It opened its gates in 1865, and by the 1870s it had become a popular social space for leisure and entertainment. Taking the Iwakura mission's appraisal of zoos as a point of departure, this article presents the story of the origins and early years of the zoological garden in St Petersburg, paying particular attention to the reasons for its establishment, which have not been explicitly discussed in the historiography, both in scholarship specifically about the zoo in St Petersburg and on nineteenth-century zoos more generally.[5] Even though the zoo was founded by a family of entrepreneurs keen on turning a profit, when they petitioned the city and imperial authorities for permission to establish the garden, they used a number of different arguments. In particular, they stressed that the zoo would enhance the prestige of St Petersburg. Thus, alongside seeking to enhance their

[3]Ibid., 124–5.

[4]T. Ito, 'Flying penguins in Japan's northernmost zoo', in T. McDonald and D. Vandersommers (eds.), *Zoo Studies: A New Humanities* (Montreal, 2019), 240; I. Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley, 2013), 42–4.

[5]Two contemporary institutional histories of the zoo do not touch extensively upon the imperial part of its history and mainly describe its Soviet past: E. Denisenko, *Ot zverintsev k zooparku. Istoriia Leningradskogo zooparka* (St Petersburg, 2003); *Leningradskii zoopark: proshloe i nastoiashchee* (St Petersburg, 2018). While the first text acknowledges the motives of the private founders of the zoo (p. 46), the second book does not dwell upon this question. Moreover, two historians of popular entertainment in St Petersburg wrongly date the foundation of the zoo to 1871, therefore skipping over the early period of its history and also misidentifying its founder: A. Konechnyi, 'Shows for the people: public amusement parks in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg', in S. Frank and M. Steinberg (eds.), *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1994), 127; L. McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca, NY, 2018), 211. As for the English-language historiography of nineteenth-century zoos in general, the Romanov empire only receives cursory treatment. See É. Baratay and É. Hardouin-Fugier, *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West* (London, 2002), 297–306; L. Solski, 'Zoological gardens of Central-Eastern Europe and Russia', in V. Kisling (ed.), *Zoo and Aquarium History: Ancient Animal Collections to Zoological Gardens* (Baton Rouge, 2001), 132–5. For the most recent example of historiography about zoological gardens which overlooks the Romanov empire, see a special issue 'Science at the zoo: producing knowledge about exotic animals' of *Centaurus*, 64 (2022).

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private fortune, the founders of the zoo promised to bring more fame to the capital of the Romanov empire in the increasingly globalized world of the nineteenth century.[6]

In addition to providing an archive-based account of the establishment of a zoo in St Petersburg, this article also contributes to a deeper understanding of zoos, and of the Romanov empire, in an urban and global historiographical context. First, the story of the creation of a zoological garden in the capital of the Romanov empire reflects the significance of these institutions for cities and states in the nineteenth century. A number of contemporary scholars consider zoos not as neutral and harmless places of popular entertainment but as symbols of Western European imperial and global dominance. They have argued that after going to a zoo and seeing its exotic animals, the people who lived in and visited imperial capitals could feel themselves to be residents of *imperial* cities. At the zoo, hypothetically, its visitors could be persuaded that humans were masters and tamers of nature, while other animals were only their subjects. Additionally, the gardens allegedly imparted to audiences a view of the world that was justly divided into civilized colonizers and inferior colonized people. Colonial control, domination and exploitation were thus not only relevant to the fauna and natural resources of the colonies but also to their population.[7] As Jonathan Schneer observed with reference to the British empire, 'perhaps, nowhere was a Londoner's identity as resident of an *imperial* metropolis more subtly or fully confirmed than at the zoo in Regent's Park' (italics in original).[8] In contrast to these interpretations, I rely on Takashi Ito's critical approach to *empire* as a referential frame for studying the zoos of the time.[9] Drawing on Ito's idea of zoos' 'hermeneutical flexibility', I argue that the zoo in St Petersburg was not an imperial but an urban institution, and that it was not the empire's officials but the local municipal authorities, who were the most active supporters of the project.

Additionally, this article was inspired by the idea that thinking about animals and sites related to them has the potential to enrich our comprehension of the history of the Romanov empire and refine our idea of its 'identity, marginalization, and uniqueness'.[10] The history of St Petersburg's zoo helps us to see the empire as an

[6]The intangible nature of prestige means that it is mentioned only in passing in the context of zoos (see for instance D. Mehos, *Science and Culture for Members Only: The Amsterdam Zoo Artis in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 2006), 94, 121; N. Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, 2002), 21); or is simply absent (for examples, see G. Bruce, *Through the Lion Gate: A History of the Berlin Zoo* (New York, 2017); T. Ito, 'History of the zoo', in M. Roscher, A. Krebber and B. Mizelle (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies* (Berlin, 2021), 439–56). On the role of prestige in international relations, see S. Wood, 'Prestige in world politics: history, theory, expression', *International Politics*, 50 (2013), 387–411.

[7]Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier, *Zoo*, 113–30; H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, 1987), 205–42.

[8]J. Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, 1999), 97.

[9]In his history of London Zoo, Ito persuasively shows that thinking of zoos as carriers of particular ideological messages, including imperial ones, is not based on a substantial base of sources. While not denying the importance of an imperial context for the emergence and shaping of zoos, as some animals were acquired via imperial networks and in their turn reflected their empires, Ito stipulates the need to closely study the motivation of the zoo's founders as well as how they were received by their visitors, who did not necessarily view the zoo through the lens of imperial ideology. For more, see T. Ito, *London Zoo and the Victorians, 1828–1859* (Woodbridge, 2014), 1–20, 53–80.

[10]J. Costlow and A. Nelson, 'Introduction', in J. Costlow and A. Nelson (eds.), *Other Animals: Beyond the Human in Russian Culture and History* (Pittsburgh, 2010), 3. Despite a number of recent groundbreaking

entangled part of the wider globalizing world of the nineteenth century rather than as a unique historical entity, as it is often portrayed in academic literature and in the wider public sphere.[11]

My account of the early history of St Petersburg's zoo is substantiated by two kinds of sources. First, it is supported by unpublished documents from the Central State Archive of St Petersburg (TsGA SPb) and the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), which preserve petitions from the zoo's official founder, Julius Gebhardt, to various authorities, as well as the discussions of these petitions. Unlike literary materials, which are often used to interpret the origins and history of zoos, official documents related to the establishment of this institution in St Petersburg provide us with a better understanding of the motives of the principal actors in this story. Second, the article draws on published sources, such as accounts in the contemporary press, guidebooks to St Petersburg and brochures about the zoo. These documents help to determine the public image and perception of the recently opened zoo, as well as its place in the capital's cityscape.

The article starts with an analysis of the first projects to open a public zoo in the Romanov empire, which were led by zoologists in the early 1860s and resulted in the establishment of a garden in Moscow. It then proceeds to examine the proposals for a zoo in the imperial capital and the negotiations between its initiators, municipal authorities and state officials. The final part argues that the Romanov empire was enmeshed in the globalizing world of the nineteenth century, and the story of the establishment of zoological gardens, and of the zoo in St Petersburg in particular, brings this embeddedness into sharp relief.

Prehistory of a zoo in St Petersburg: Moscow, science, patriotism

Royal and private collections of captive animals had existed in Muscovy and the Romanov empire for centuries, but the first projects to establish a permanent public zoological garden in one of its cities started to be discussed only at the end of the 1850s. The plans were put forward by the members of the Committee for the Acclimatization of Animals and Plants of the Moscow Society of Agriculture, who wanted to establish a zoo for several reasons.[12] Just like their colleagues from London in the 1820s, they needed a laboratory in which they could conduct experiments on

studies (see, for instance, B. Bonhomme, 'For the "preservation of friends" and the "destruction of enemies": studying and protecting birds in imperial Russia', *Environment and History*, 13 (2007), 71–100; S. Dixon, 'Horse-racing in nineteenth-century Russia', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 98 (2020), 464–503; O. Petri, 'Song of the ovsîanka: enhanced nature of the urban canary in imperial St. Petersburg (1880–1900)', *Society & Animals*, 29 (2019), 613–37), the history of non-human animals is not yet regarded as part of the mainstream historiography of the Romanov empire. Dominic Lieven's *Russia against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814* (London, 2009), emphasizing the crucial role of horses in the war of 1812–14, is a notable exception to this trend.

[11]For rare examples of other similar studies on the materials from the region, see M. Aust, 'Völkerrechtstransfer im Zarenreich: Internationalismus und Imperium bei Fedor F. Martens', *Osteuropa*, 60 (2010), 113–25; C. Griffin, *Mixing Medicines: The Global Drug Trade and Early Modern Russia* (Montreal, 2022); D. Moon, 'In the Russian steppes: the introduction of Russian wheat on the great plains of the United States of America', *Journal of Global History*, 3 (2008), 203–25.

[12]Created in 1857 by a dozen scientists, mainly zoologists, like many other voluntary organizations, the committee came into being as a result of the relative liberalization of public life in the country following the Romanov empire's defeat in the Crimean War and the accession of a new emperor, Alexander II. For more on

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the adaptation and domestication of exotic animals to the local climate. Moscow enthusiasts were convinced that many scientific questions could only be examined in zoological gardens, which were meant to provide scholars with a place to observe animals and plants and study their ability to withstand and adapt to different climatic conditions. However, unlike their counterparts in London, members of the committee stressed that in addition to the advancement of useful science, zoos also had a didactic and popularizing function: teaching zoology using live animals was much more effective than learning from books and could contribute to wider public engagement with natural science.[13] Thus, in 1860, the ornithologist Vasilii Radakov called for the opening of a zoo by arguing that these institutions provide 'palpable evidence of truths, discovered by modern biology, available to each and every one'; therefore, a proper zoo had to organize public lectures on natural science and be accompanied by a public museum and library.[14] The secretary of the committee, Anatolii Bogdanov, predicted that 'soon zoological gardens will become a *sine qua non* part of higher education and turn from an academic luxury into an urgent need, similar to zoological museums and natural history classrooms…We…have set ourselves the goal of taming and disseminating not only useful animals but also useful thoughts.'[15]

Like members of many other imperial voluntary scientific organizations, who concentrated on studying and disseminating their knowledge of natural history among non-specialists, Moscow zoologists sought to use the prospective zoo to examine and teach not just nature in general but the relatively unexplored nature of their own country. As Sergei Usov put it, 'it was not a small merit' to study and represent the botany and zoology of the empire in its centre in Moscow and provide an opportunity for visitors to get acquainted with 'the most important animals and plants of our fatherland, familiar to us only from drawings'.[16] The envisaged institution had to evoke curiosity, raise awareness and reproduce the floral and faunal landscapes of the empire. In order to do so, the future zoo needed to buy mostly local animals, and Usov's article listed the mammals that could live there. Some of them, like chamois, were highlighted as being rare animals in Western Europe, which turned them into potential objects for exchange; while others, like porcupines or beavers, were praised for their probable economic value. With regard to foreign animals, Usov stipulated that the zoo should be purchasing only purebred animals, like llamas, vicuñas or zebus, which could be acclimatized and subsequently dispersed around the Romanov empire.[17] Another commentator noted that the zoo's specialization in the animals of the empire could also satisfy visitors who were more

the development of associational life in the empire of the time, see J. Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, 2009).

[13]For more on other similar sites, see A. Fyfe and B. Lightman, *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences* (Chicago, 2007).

[14]V. Radakov, 'Zoologicheskie sady: Berlinskii, Frankfurtskii i Parizhskii', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 452–68, at 462, 464.

[15]'Godichnoe zasedanie komitetov akklimatizatsii rastenii i zhivotnykh', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 142–3.

[16]S. Usov, 'Po povodu ustroistva zoologicheskogo sada v Moskve', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 471.

[17]Ibid.; S. Usov, 'Spisok russkikh mlekopitaiushchikh, kotorye mogut zhit' v zoologicheskom sadu', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 492–7.

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disposed to naturalness and did not want to see 'a cockatoo in spruces or a golden pheasant in a juniper tree'.[18]

Yet, there was also a practical reason for this patriotism: the lack of funds available to the Moscow scientists. Despite their crowdfunding campaign, by the time of the zoo's prospective opening its founders had managed to collect only 100,000 roubles, an extraordinary sum, which nevertheless, they claimed, was only half of the cost of the annual maintenance of London Zoo.[19] Given the scarcity of resources, prioritizing local animals seemed to be the most reasonable option. At the same time, while intending to use the zoo primarily as a centre for research and teaching, the zoologists were faced with a difficult decision when it came to attracting visitors to the garden. Unfortunately for Usov, they recognized that only unusual animals would draw the public to visit the garden regularly, therefore the zoo would need to buy several exotic animals at least to 'lure and arouse curiosity, like lions, tigers, rhinoceroses, elephants'.[20] They realized that the novelty of this institution could preclude the audience from appreciating its scientific significance and would instead encourage them to treat it simply as a new place of entertainment, 'like a new Hermitage, but with a menagerie'.[21]

Gebhardts' zoo in St Petersburg: entrepreneurship, competition, indifference

After several years of preparations, the zoo in Moscow was opened in January 1864. Its establishment was noticed and discussed by the periodicals of other imperial cities,[22] and just one year later, in May 1865, the daily *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* informed its readers of the construction works underway to open a zoo in the capital of the Romanov empire.[23] According to the article, the preparations were initiated and led by a local entrepreneurial businesswoman Sophia Gebhardt (née ter Reegen, 1813–87) – a former waffle-maker and the owner of a shop in the Passage department store, who seems to have been well known around the city. She is said to have arrived at St Petersburg in 1842 from the Netherlands and in 1848 married 'a doctor of zoology' Julius Gebhardt (1817(?)–71), a Prussian subject, who in 1863 registered himself in the capital of the empire as a merchant of the second guild.[24]

[18]Radakov, 'Zoologicheskie sady', 463.

[19]Usov, 'Po povodu ustroistva zoologicheskogo sada v Moskve', 475–6.

[20]Ibid., 472.

[21]Ibid., 469.

[22]See, for instance, 'Moskovskii zoologicheskii sad', *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* (*SPV*), 19 Jul. 1864, 647; 'Inland. Moskau', *Rigasche Zeitung*, 18 Feb. 1846, 2.

[23]'Zoologicheskii sad', *SPV*, 22 May 1865, 2.

[24]'Skorbnyi list: Sofiia Rost', *Peterburgskii Listok*, 49 (22 Feb. 1887), 2; *Spravochnaia kniga o litsakh, poluchivshikh na 1865 god kupecheskie svidetel'stva po 1 i 2 gil'diiam* (St Petersburg, 1865), 118. As a capital of a multinational empire, St Petersburg was a multinational metropolis. According to the first census of 1869, non-Russians constituted around 17% of its population. N. Iukhneva, *Etnicheskii sostav i etnosotsial'naia struktura naseleniia Peterburga: vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka: statisticheskii analiz* (Leningrad, 1984), 24. From the first institutional history of the zoo published in 1890 (A. Zefeld, *Dvatsatipiatiletie S.-Peterburgskogo zoologicheskogo sada, 1865–1890* (St Petersburg, 1890), 1; A. Seefeld, *Der St. Petersburger zoologische Garten 1865–1890* (St Petersburg, 1890), 1) to its most recent accounts (Denisenko, *Ot zverintsev k zooparku*, 48–50), the leading role in founding and running the zoo has been attributed to Sophia Gebhardt, downgrading the role of her husband. It is difficult to state for sure who in the family provided the main

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The Gebhardts' attempt to open a zoo in St Petersburg was presumably inspired by the aforementioned foundation of a similar institution in Moscow. I would argue, however, that the couple's prior experience in the entertainment business was no less important. In addition to travelling around the country with a menagerie for around 20 years,[25] in October 1856 Sophia successfully petitioned the authorities for permission to exhibit 'a young fourteen-year-old Albino girl' to the customers of her shop;[26] in 1858–68, Gebhardt ran 'a children's mechanical theatre' not far from the German Reformed church on Bolshaia Morskaia Street;[27] in 1865, a local newspaper reported that Gebhardt also owned a dancing hall.[28] Most famously, in October 1864 the couple exhibited an armadillo, an Egyptian mongoose, a dozen monkeys and two crocodiles in their shop in the Passage, described by Fedor Dostoevsky in a well-known story.[29] It was in the context of this business activity that one year after the foundation of the Moscow zoo, in November 1864, Julius Gebhardt sent a petition to the governor general of St Petersburg, Alexander Suvorov, asking him for permission to establish a permanent public zoo in the city.

The Gebhardts were not the only entrepreneurs who wanted to open such an institution in the capital of the Romanov empire; a few months later, in February 1865, the authorities received another similar proposal. However, by that time, bureaucrats at all levels were already discussing Gebhardt's petition, in which he asked Suvorov to allow him to establish a zoo in the very centre of St Petersburg – in Alexander Park – and lease him part of the park free of charge for the next 20 years. This particular part of the park (Figure 1: area in the red ellipse, at the location of the present-day Gorkovskaia metro station) was also important because it was located right next to the Troitskii bridge across the Neva, which could enable more visitors to come from the left bank of the river. Gebhardt promised to enclose this area 'with a beautiful fence', build houses for animals inside it and keep the garden's trees and ponds in order. To cover the costs of the maintenance of the zoo, he planned to charge the visitors 'a modest entrance fee as it is done everywhere'.[30] At that time, however, the park belonged to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transport, and according to the recent edict of 1863 the emperor prohibited the construction of any new buildings there. Therefore, to approve Gebhardt's request and smoothly integrate the

impetus for the opening of the zoo, but since until Julius' death in 1871 all correspondence with the authorities was handled by him, in this article I consider the zoo to have been a common family venture.

[25]'Skorbnyi list: Sofiia Rost'.

[26]Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), fond (collection, hereafter f.) 497, opis (inventory, hereafter op.) 2, no. 15754 (O dozvolenii prusskoi poddannoi Sofii Gebgardt pokazyvat' v Passazhe dlia publiki al'binosku i panoramu), 1–3.

[27]Central State Archive of St Petersburg (TsGA SPb), fond (collection, hereafter f.) 787, opis (inventory, hereafter op.) 17, no. 58 (Po prosheniiu soveta nemetsko-reformatskoi tserkvi o ponuzhdenii inostrantsa Gebgardta k sneseniiu emu prinadlezhashchego detskogo mekhanicheskogo teatra); f. 787, op. 17, no. 1523 (O slomke dereviannogo domika inostrantsa Gebgardta v Bolshoi Morskoi ulitse).

[28]L., 'Zoologicheskii sad v Peterburge i Elaginskii amfiteatr', *SPV*, 3 Aug. 1865, 3.

[29]'Nil'skie krokodily', *SPV*, 6 Oct. 1864, 2; F. Dostoevskii, 'Krokodil. Neobyknovennoe sobytie ili passazh v passazhe', in F. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. V (Moscow, 1973), 180–207.

[30]RGIA, f. 218, op. 4, no. 2675 (Po otnosheniiu Sankt-Peterburgskogo voennogo general-gubernatora o dozvolenii prusskomu poddannomu Gebgardtu ustroit' zoologicheskii sad v Aleksandrovskom parke v Peterburgskoi chasti), 8–10. This means that unlike London Zoo during its early years, the zoo in St Petersburg was not meant to become a social space solely for the privileged classes.

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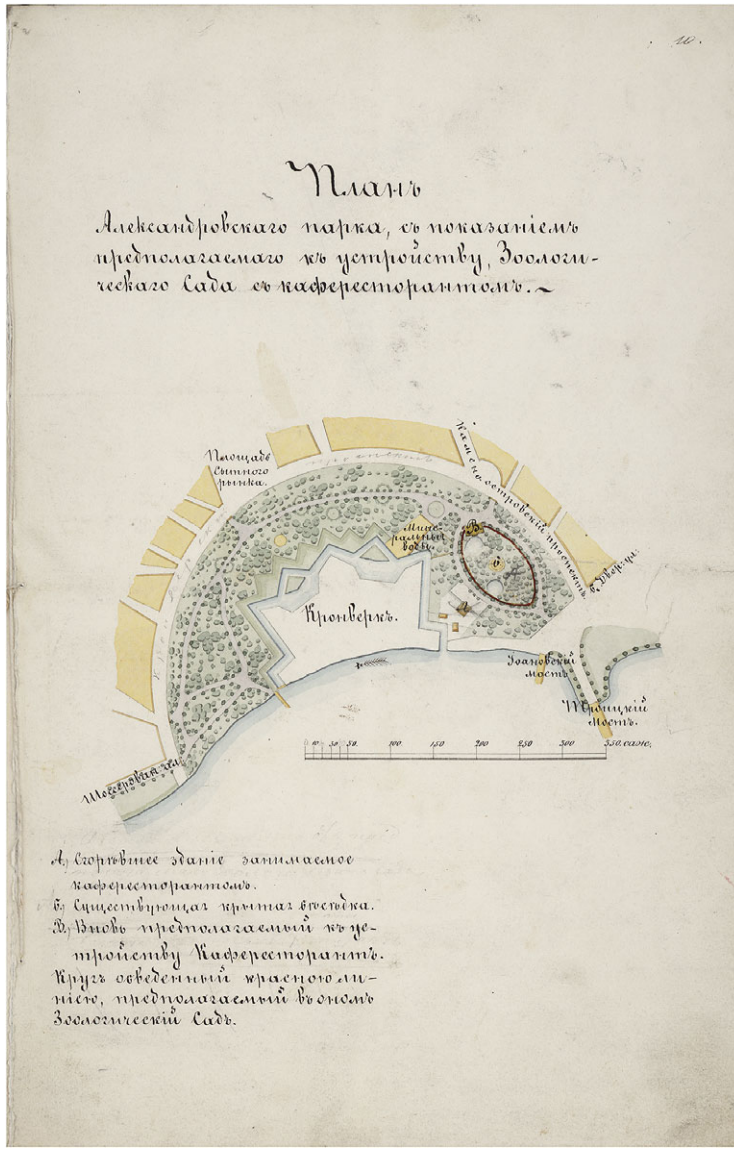

Figure 1. Map of Alexander Park indicating the place of the future zoo, which was submitted by Julius Gebhardt to the general governor of St Petersburg in November 1864. *Source:* Russian State Historical Archive, f. 218, op. 4, no. 2675 (Po otnosheniiu Sankt-Peterburgskogo voennogo general-gubernatora o dozvolenii prusskomu poddannomu Gebgardtu ustroit' zoologicheskii sad v Aleksandrovskom parke v Peterburgskoi chasti), 10.

zoo into the urban fabric, the governor general of St Petersburg, who apparently approved the idea, had to obtain the agreement of the minister of transport, Pavel Melnikov, who, in turn, had to secure an amendment of the emperor's decree.

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Unlike the city authorities, Melnikov was not an immediate advocate of the project. This is why on 4 February 1865 he asked Suvorov whether the significance and public benefits of the prospective zoo were sufficient to justify leasing a large part of the park to a private owner for free for 20 years. In his reply, the governor general affirmed that the garden 'could bring significant benefits to people, who would be visiting it for the most moderate payment and would get acquainted with different breeds of animals. The garden would also be useful in a scholarly sense as it will provide people studying zoology with means for practical education and for scientific observations.'[31] Suvorov added that Gebhardt should be obliged to 'keep this place in order, not harm the paths, driveways, trellises, trees, and shrubs adjacent to it, and allow pupils of state educational institutions to visit the garden free of charge three or four times a year'.[32] He also approved the opening of a restaurant in the garden. Melnikov was persuaded by these arguments. In his further report to the emperor, which listed all the above-mentioned conditions, he specified, however, that the restaurant should be opened only after the authorization of the garden by another ministry, namely the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On 25 February, Emperor Alexander II agreed to the report but changed the location of the prospective garden by ordering it to be moved to the other side of the park, further from the bridge, where it is still situated today.[33]

Gaining the endorsement of the minister of internal affairs, Petr Valuev, turned out to be the most complicated task for the Gebhardts and their supporters. After he was informed that it was his ministry that had to inspect the construction and authorize the opening of the zoo, Valuev doubted both that the zoo could be organized in a satisfactory way and whether it would bring any public benefit. According to him, Gebhardt's previous entrepreneurial activity did not guarantee the zoo's success. Because of the novelty of this institution in the empire, Valuev was unsure about who could inspect and approve the zoo and what criteria they should use. In the end, he suggested that the minister of transport discuss the proposal with other ministers and then submit it for the emperor's approval again; this could have been an attempt to shelve the project.[34] Melnikov, however, refused to follow Valuev's advice (the two were not on good terms) and recommended his subordinates simply check whether the general building regulations were followed and whether the garden was established 'according to the example of similar institutions existing abroad'.[35]

Meanwhile, even though the Gebhardts were not allowed to realize all of their ideas,[36] the construction works continued and were over by the end of July. The zoo's opening took place on 1 August 1865, and it was widely advertised in the public sphere. The *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* characterized the garden as a large and stylish place where one could spend time and not become bored for a

[31]Ibid., 19.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid., 21–5.
[34]Ibid., 35.
[35]Ibid., 36–7.
[36]For instance, he wanted to build a private pier in the Kronverk Strait, but the commandant of the Peter and Paul fortress rejected the project as it could have breached the secrecy of the fortress's prison: ibid., 59–66.

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comparatively moderate price – 25 kopecks for adults and 15 kopecks for children.[37] At the same time, another of the newspaper's authors criticized the zoo for its small cages for animals, who seemed to him very tired.[38] According to the official report made in late August, the garden consisted of 42 buildings, which housed up to 70 species of mammals, birds and amphibians (totalling around 200 animals). The most remarkable mammals in this collection were a jaguar, leopard, serval, armadillos, nilgai antelope, reindeer and several marsupials. Parrots, various types of chickens and duck breeds predominated among the birds.[39] At the end of 1865, the owner boasted that he was in touch with all the world's major dealers in animals but, importantly, admitted that he still lacked local ones; therefore, he called upon all enthusiasts to support the zoo by supplying it with animals from all over the empire.[40]

During the first four years of the garden's existence, the Gebhardts published four guidebooks to attract more visitors by making their time at the zoo instructive and enjoyable. None of these brochures led the audience through the garden along established routes in accordance with ideological messages from the owners, but instead provided factual information about the animals. The first and the last two guidebooks simply listed the animals with their Russian and Latin names, places of origin and their location in the zoo.[41] The second guidebook, published in three editions in 1866, was the most informative and introduced all the animals of the garden with short, specialized articles about their natural habitats, physical appearance and food preferences. Notably, it included not only the Russian and Latin but also the German names of the animals, perhaps targeting prospective visitors from the German community of St Petersburg.[42]

Meanwhile, Valuev was looking for an expert who could examine the garden and confirm whether the zoo was fulfilling its aim. Following the advice of the minister of education, he asked the professor of zoology at St Petersburg University, Karl Kessler, to accompany two representatives of his ministry to inspect the zoo. On 4 September 1865, their commission submitted its report. Unlike the article in *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* mentioned above, the report considered that most of the enclosures were comfortable and attractive, and that the animals were well

[37]L., 'Zoologicheskii sad v Peterburge i Elaginskii amfiteatr', 3. Yet another author in the same paper thought that the entrance price was too high ('Nevskii nabliudatel', *SPV*, 8 Aug. 1865, 1). For comparison, the price of a single issue of *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, which published these articles, was 10 kopecks.

[38]V. Fedorov, 'Zoologicheskii sad', *SPV*, 7 Aug. 1865, 2.

[39]RGIA, f. 1287, op. 29, no. 1733 (Po otnosheniiu glavnoupravliaiushchego putei soobshchenii i publichnykh zdanii ob ustroistve zoologicheskogo sada v Aleksandrovskom parke), 41.

[40]A. Akkerman, *Kratkii putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu na zimnii sezon 1865/6 goda* (St Petersburg, 1866), 3. Earlier that year, calls to donate local animals to the zoo in St Petersburg were published in the provincial newspaper *Courland Provincial News*, which promised the donors that their names would be recorded on a plaque in front of their animal's cage: 'Localer Theil. Officieller Abschnitt', *Kurländische Gouvernements Zeitung*, 27 Mar. 1865, 233–4.

[41]Akkerman, *Kratkii putevoditel'*; *Putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu* (St Petersburg, 1867); *Putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu na letnii sezon 1868 goda* (St Petersburg, 1868).

[42]A. Akkerman, *Putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu* (St Petersburg, 1866); A. Akkerman, *Putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu*. Izdanie vtoroe (St Petersburg, 1866); A. Akkerman, *Putevoditel' po Sankt-Peterburgskomu zoologicheskomu sadu*. Izdanie tretie (St Petersburg, 1866).

kept and tidy. The report expressed no doubts that the zoo had the potential to function not only as a centre of entertainment but also of education, especially if its plaques correctly stated the names of all the animals and their places of origin. Even though the commission acknowledged that this zoo was a private venture and thus could not be expected to be of much scholarly value, its members still thought that the Gebhardts' establishment might be useful for the science of acclimatization, as its owners needed to take care of animals during the harsh St Petersburg winters. While fully endorsing the garden, the commission, however, insisted that it should be called a 'private zoo' to avoid any misunderstandings or unreasonable expectations about its scientific purpose.[43] Even after having read the commission's favourable report and giving his authorization for the continued functioning of the zoo, Valuev personally remained sceptical. At the end of August, he visited the park with his wife, grumbling later that day in his diary that it was 'not a zoological garden, but a menagerie located in the garden'.[44]

By 1871, the inhabitants of St Petersburg reportedly knew the zoo well, and it became an important part of the capital's cityscape. Even though the press claimed that not all parts of the garden were well kept, that many of its animals did not look healthy (almost none of them seem to have survived their first winter in St Petersburg) and that many of its cages and buildings remained empty, all of which dissuaded visitors from returning, the papers claimed that this situation was the result of a lack of funds for the maintenance of the garden and acquisition of new animals. At the same time, the owners were praised by the press for doing everything they could under the circumstances to help poorly educated and simple people become acquainted with exotic animals and to arouse their interest in natural science.[45]

The indifference of the authorities towards the Gebhardts' endeavour could be one of the reasons why their zoo did not become an even more important part of St Petersburg's social space. In the second half of the 1860s, for instance, despite support for his application from the head of the St Petersburg police, Julius Gebhardt did not manage to obtain credit from St Petersburg's city council and the ministry of internal affairs.[46] But most importantly, although they clearly understood the importance of such backing, the Gebhardts did not manage to win a royal endorsement for their institution. In August 1865, during the very first days of the zoo's existence, Gebhardt sent a petition to the emperor in which he appealed to Alexander II to accept the garden under his patronage. Having noted that in other countries zoos were founded and maintained by scholarly societies with the help of governments, he also asked the emperor to grant the zoo two bison from his private menagerie. Two weeks later, the minister of the imperial court, Vladimir Adlerberg, replied that the emperor had not

[43]RGIA, f. 1287, op. 29, no. 1733, 23, 33, 40–5.

[44]P. Valuev, *Dnevnik*, vol. II (Moscow, 1961), 64. His disregard of the Gebhardts' zoo could have been reinforced by the immensely influential Moscow newspaper *Moskovskie Vedomosti*. In early August, the paper criticized the decision of the authorities of St Petersburg to transfer part of Alexander Park to a private owner: *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, 5 Aug. 1865, 2. The author of the news mistakenly stated that the authorities gave not a part of but the whole park to Gebhardt. This claim provoked an angry rebuttal by its St Petersburg rival a few days later: 'Nevskii nabliudatel', 1–2.

[45]'Zoologicheskii sad v S.-Peterburge', *Vsemirnaia Illiustratsiia*, 7 Aug. 1871, 83.

[46]TsGA SPb, f. 787, op. 1, no. 151 (Po khodataistvu inostrantsa Gebgardta ob otvode emu ostal'noi chasti zemli v Aleksandrovskom parke), 1–20; RGIA, f. 1287, op. 29, no. 1733, 70–2.

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approved the request.[47] Alexander II's indifference towards St Petersburg's zoo is even more significant considering that at approximately the same time, in 1862, he allowed two bison to be caught for the Amsterdam zoo, and in 1864 he granted three bison to the Moscow zoo.[48] The history of the zoo in St Petersburg reveals that the alienation of the Romanovs from the bourgeois and middle-class milieu of the empire's capital could have started even before the assassination of Alexander II on 1 March 1881, and therefore much earlier than usually thought by historians.[49]

Nowhere was the Gebhardts' lack of success in their communication with the imperial authorities more visible than in their attempts to get permission to open a restaurant at the zoo. The interactions around this seemingly ordinary issue vividly revealed the difference between the private and the official reasons for establishing the zoo, as well as private and official visions of this institution. The Gebhardts clearly acted as entrepreneurs, and imagined the zoo to be a place for entertainment and part of the commercial space of St Petersburg. In September 1865, after the commission of the ministry of internal affairs submitted its favourable report, Gebhardt asked the authorities to allow him to open a cafeteria in the zoo. Minister Valuev reluctantly permitted it but prohibited the sale of strong liquor there; in his opinion, this could turn the zoo into an institution which would not fulfil the initial scientific and educational purpose for which, in his opinion, it had been established.[50] However, according to the current laws, as it was not possible to limit trade in the cafeteria, the Gebhardts did not get a licence to open it at all. This made them appeal to the municipal authorities, who then again redirected this petition to the lukewarm minister of internal affairs. For three years, Gebhardt sent petition after petition to the ministry, pointing out, among other things, that there was no similar prohibition at the Moscow zoo, that the emperor himself had granted permission to open a restaurant and that the profits from the restaurant could have provided funds necessary for the further development of the garden. Remarkably, Gebhardt even argued that it was unthinkable to maintain the zoo in St Petersburg without a restaurant with a right to sell alcohol because of the local climate. In June 1866, he was bold enough to write that 'alcohol constitutes the need of the local public due to the harsh climate, to such an extent that a prohibition to sell these drinks in the zoo's restaurant can have very harmful consequences for the garden, depriving it of most visitors and thereby bring this useful institution to decay and frustration'.[51] Valuev clearly thought differently: 'If his cafeteria cannot exist without selling strong liquor, then he has to close it since the cafeteria does not constitute a necessary part of the zoo, which was established only to bring public benefit by popularizing science.'[52]

[47]RGIA, f. 472, op. 15, no. 83 (Po prosheniiu prusskogo poddannogo Iuliusa Gebgardta o priniatii Sankt-Peterburgskogo zoologicheskogo sada pod vysochaishee pokrovitel'stvo i o pozhalovanii v onyi dvukh zubrov), 1–2.

[48]T. Samojlik, P. Daszkiewicz and A. Fedotova, 'Żubrze eksponaty z lat 1811−1914 w europejskich kolekcjach naukowych', *Sylwan*, 161 (2017), 345. According to a contemporary journalist, Alexander II did eventually grant the zoo some animals: 'Zoologicheskii sad v S.-Peterburge', 83.

[49]E. Berard, *Imperiia i gorod: Nikolai II, 'Mir Iskusstva' i gorodskaia duma v Sankt-Peterburge, 1894–1914* (Moscow, 2016), 14–59.

[50]RGIA, f. 1287, op. 29, no. 1733, 39.

[51]Ibid., 53.

[52]Ibid., 54–5. It was only after the new minister, Alexander Timashev, took over that the Gebhardts succeeded in their appeals in August 1868. Initially, Timashev was also surprised by Gebhardt's request. In May 1868, he was clearly astonished by the latter's statement that 'two years of experience have shown that

Globalizing the history of St Petersburg and its zoo: emulation, comparison, fame

The history of the first period of the zoo in St Petersburg ended in late May 1871 when Julius Gebhardt died in Berlin while on a trip to buy new animals. The place of his death is symbolic for the history of his garden: from their first appearance in Eastern Europe in the 1860s, local zoos were part of a global history of these institutions. Therefore, to understand the reasons behind the establishment of the zoo in St Petersburg and of zoos in general, it is necessary to situate them in a global context. The Romanov empire and its capital were an integral part of the world of nineteenth-century empires and imperial cities, which compared, emulated and competed with each other.[53] The global diffusion of an idea of permanent public zoological gardens should correspondingly be viewed as part of this relationship.

The Romanov press had started to provide occasional information about Western European zoos, their history and contemporary condition since the mid-1830s.[54] But many more such publications appeared in the late 1850s – early 1860s; some as original articles by local authors, others as summaries of foreign-language publications about zoos, especially German ones.[55] Western European zoos were models to be looked at, imitated and referred to by the members of the Committee for the Acclimatization of Animals and Plants during the first discussions about the need to establish a zoological garden in Moscow in the late 1850s. As early as March 1858, the secretary of the committee, Anatolii Bogdanov, informed his colleagues about his recent visits to the zoos in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Haarlem.[56] In September 1860, other members of the committee, Vasilii Radakov and Alexander Mein, presented papers about their impressions of the zoos in Berlin, Frankfurt and Paris.[57] Moreover, Radakov not only informed his audience about

without alcohol there can be no cafeteria, and without a cafeteria the zoo itself cannot exist'; Timashev left a question mark in the margin opposite this sentence. But in July of the same year, Timashev visited the zoo himself. In Gebhardt's words, the minister was satisfied with the way the garden was run, spent some time in its cafeteria, was surprised that it was forbidden to sell alcohol there and 'expressed his hope for a satisfactory outcome of the case'. On 2 August 1868, three years after the foundation of the zoo, Timashev wrote a letter to the chief of the St Petersburg police confirming that he was allowing Gebhardt to open a restaurant with the right to sell alcohol, but with an obligation to follow the rules of decency. Ibid., 59, 67–9. However, as late as 1871 the zoo restaurant was not considered to be good: 'Zoologicheskii sad v S.-Peterburge', 83.

[53]For further discussion in the context of London's history, see D. Gilbert and F. Driver, 'Capital and empire: geographies of imperial London', *GeoJournal*, 51 (2000), 23–32.

[54]See, for instance, 'Znamenitosti zoologicheskogo sada v Londone', *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, 18 (1836), 58–67.

[55]For the examples of the first category, see P.E. Tesh, 'Akvariumy zoologicheskogo sada v Londone', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 4 (1863), 55–6; 'Zoologicheskii sad v Vene', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 4 (1863), 57–8; A. Bogdanov, 'Ocherk istorii zoologicheskikh sadov', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 4 (1863), 296–329; A. Bogdanov, 'Ocherk istorii zoologicheskikh sadov', *Zhurnal ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv*, 83 (1863), 35–65. For the second, see Alexander Engelhardt's feuilleton about aquariums (A. Engelhardt, 'Estestvoznanie', *SPV*, 13 May 1864, 1–2), which summarized the article 'Zur Geschichte der zoologischen Gärten', *Zeitschrift für die gesammten Naturwissenschaften*, 22 (1863), 144–8. Another popular source of information about foreign zoological gardens among the local scholars was the journal of the Zoological Society in Frankfurt am Main, *Zoologische Garten*.

[56]'Godichnoe zasedanie Komitetov akklimatizatsii rastenii i zhivotnykh', 142–3.

[57]Radakov, 'Zoologicheskie sady; 'Protokol zasedaniia mammalogicheskogo otdeleniia komiteta akklimatizatsii, 15 sentiabria 1860 goda', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 478. According to Mein, the zoo in Frankfurt

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details of buildings for specific animals but even provided layouts of buildings for bears, cats, crocodiles, monkeys and snakes in the Berlin zoo and for eagles in Frankfurt (Figure 2; Figure 3). As a result of their travels abroad, Moscow zoologists identified two types of contemporary zoological gardens. The first group was defined as consisting of zoos like those in Berlin or Brussels, which presented rare animals gathered together without any scholarly aim and which resembled permanent menageries. In the second group, they categorized zoos like the one in Marseille, which resembled farms of domestic animals that could be purchased in the local

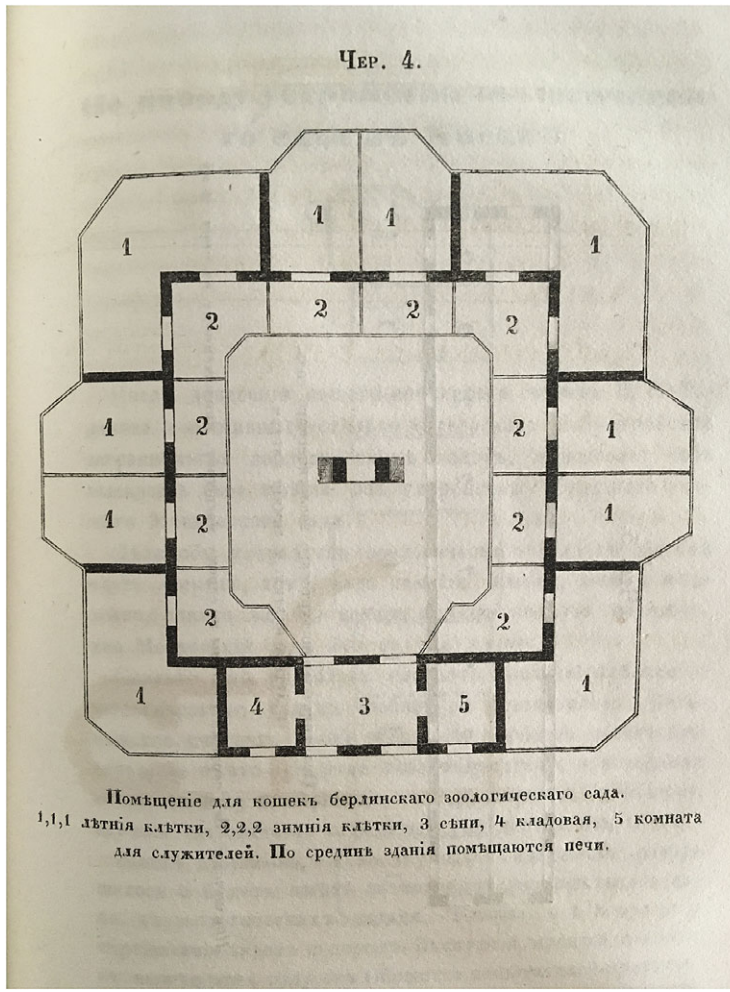

Figure 2. Plan of a building for cats in the Berlin zoo made by Vasilii Radakov during his trip around Western Europe in 1860. *Source:* V. Radakov, 'Zoologicheskie sady: Berlinskii, Frankfurtskii i Parizhskii', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 467.

was the best example for the future zoo in Moscow to follow, both because of its 'comparatively cheap and convenient organization' and the selection of its animals.

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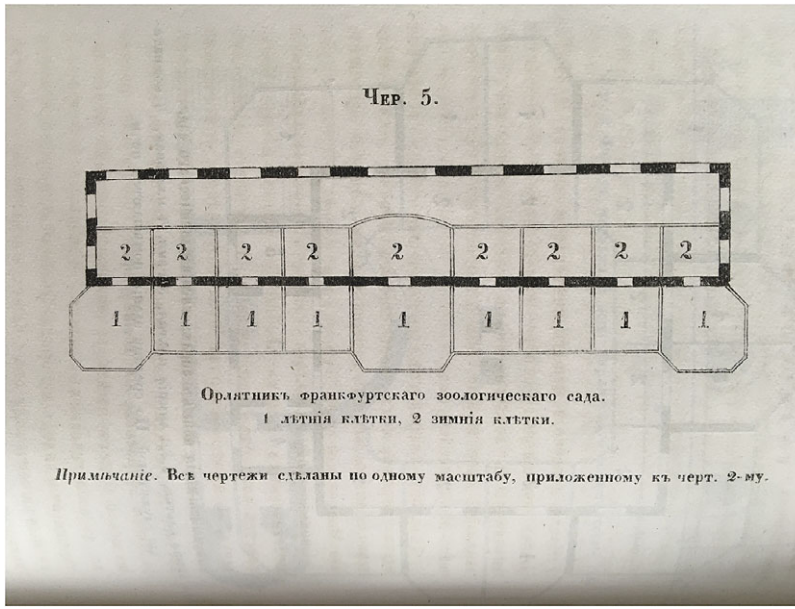

Figure 3. Plan of a building for eagles in the Frankfurt zoo made by Vasilii Radakov during his trip around Western Europe in 1860. *Source:* V. Radakov, 'Zoologicheskie sady: Berlinskii, Frankfurtskii i Parizhskii', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 1 (1860), 468.

vicinity. The idea of the Moscow zoologists was to find a middle ground between these two extremes by presenting a limited number of both exotic and domestic animals and plants. On the one hand, the organizers hoped that their garden would become a significant landmark for the inhabitants of Moscow, including, importantly, common people, since as they could attest, blue-collar workers (*bluzniki*) willingly visited Western European zoological gardens.[58] On the other hand, they also hoped that the zoo would become an important international scholarly institution and a centre of animal exchange between local and Western European zoologists.[59]

Archival materials related to the establishment of the zoo in St Petersburg complicate this account. The municipal authorities' support for the establishment of a public zoo could have been motivated by their desire to enhance the city's fame and by their understanding of zoos as symbols of modernity. The idea, which was clearly noticed by the members of the Iwakura mission in the 1870s, was most unequivocally declared by a representative of the New York Zoological Society in 1895: 'The establishment of a superb zoological collection is one of the things

[58]N. Viniarskii, 'Moskovskii zoologicheskii sad: fantaziia ili delo?', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 3 (1862), 505. A few years later, a St Petersburg newspaper repeated the same judgment that common people were interested in visiting the (St Petersburg) zoo: 'Nevskii nabliudatel', 1.

[59]Usov, 'Po povodu ustroistva zoologicheskogo sada v Moskve', 471–6. In 1863, the commission responsible for the organization of the zoo reported that they had already been in touch with the zoos in Cologne and Marseille about exchanging 'duplicates' of their animals: 'Otchet rasporiaditel'noi kommissii po ustroistvu zoologicheskogo sada', *Akklimatizatsiia*, 4 (1863), 44.

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necessary to the true greatness of New York.'[60] It was precisely for this reason that numerous non-Europeans, who arrived in European capitals in the nineteenth century, like the members of the Japanese mission in the 1870s, were drawn to their zoos.[61] The significance of animals was recognized in the Romanov empire as well. For instance, in 1868 the *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* praised the Museum of Comparative Zoology (established in 1859; today part of the Harvard Museum of Natural History) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and compared it to St Petersburg's Zoological Museum of the Academy of Sciences (established in 1832). According to the article, the latter, 'one of the main sights of the capital', was so underfunded that it was not growing at all. The author sadly concluded with a prediction that 'very soon the museum in Cambridge, one of the third-rate American towns, will far surpass the one in our capital'.[62]

The ability of exotic animals on display to boost the city's prestige was emphasized by those competing to establish a zoo in St Petersburg. While they promised to organize the garden at their own expense and without any financial help, the Gebhardts still asked the authorities to back this project. Their petition listed three main arguments. First, they argued that the zoo would contribute to the beautification of the empire's capital. Second, they promised that it would provide its inhabitants with another venue for entertainment. Third, according to the Gebhardts, in 1864 'all capitals and big cities of Europe, even Moscow', had zoos; therefore, one might add, establishing one in St Petersburg would finally make the Romanov imperial capital equal to the rest.[63] The idea of enhancing its prestige and helping it keep up with other European cities was considered a persuasive line of reasoning not only by the Gebhardts. They were not the sole family seeking to open a zoo in St Petersburg, and a few months later another applicant submitted a similar proposal to the city's governor general. While trying to persuade the authorities, this petition also pointed to the larger European context and argued that the zoo would embellish the capital of the Romanov empire with an institution akin to the ones found in all '*grandes villes du continent*'.[64] Julius Gebhardt himself repeated this argument one year later when he claimed that he had 'by his own efforts opened an institution in St Petersburg, which already existed in all main cities of Europe' and 'which was hitherto lacking in the local capital'.[65] By that time, he had managed to convince at least one important official – the chief of St Petersburg's police, Fedor Trepov. In 1866, Trepov supported the Gebhardts' petition for credit by writing a letter to St Petersburg's mayor, Nikolai Pogrebov. As Trepov put it, the Gebhardts needed funding because they wanted to bring the garden 'to the degree of development and perfection which would meet the significance of a first-class capital city (*pervoklassnoi stolitsy*)'.[66]

[60]Quoted from N. Rothfels, 'Zoos, the academy, and captivity', *PMLA*, 124 (2009), 482.

[61]See the recollections of Egyptian students of their visit to the Parisian zoo in the late 1820s in R. 'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)* (London, 2011), 260–1. In October 1857, the daily *Severnaia Pchela* informed its readers that the zoological garden was one of the places visited in London by an embassy from Siam: *Severnaia Pchela*, 31 Oct. 1857, 1151.

[62]'Zoologicheskii muzei v Kembridzhe', *SPV*, 17 Apr. 1868, 1–2.

[63]RGIA, f. 218, op. 4, no. 2675, 8–9.

[64]Ibid., 14–15 (French original), 16–17 (Russian translation).

[65]RGIA, f. 1287, op. 29, no. 1733, 49–52.

[66]TsGA SPb, f. 787, op. 1, no. 151, 19.

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It is no wonder that almost immediately after its establishment, descriptions of the zoo became a *sine qua non* part of guidebooks to St Petersburg, which recommended it to visitors as one of the city's major sights on a par with its libraries, museums and permanent exhibitions.[67] Once established, the city authorities could use the zoo to impress both its own subjects and foreign visitors to the city. For instance, in 1883 the zoo was visited by Muhammad Rahim, khan of the recently conquered Khiva, who was so dazzled by the 'hitherto unseen animals' – particularly, a hippopotamus and a sea lion – that he returned to the zoo on the next day.[68] The zoo became a public space which highlighted St Petersburg's similarity to other 'first-class capitals' and projected its image as a world city. Accordingly, in 1897 the city rented it in order to host the members of the delegation of the French President Felix Faure and hundreds of German sailors who arrived in St Petersburg during the visit of Emperor Wilhelm II later that year.[69]

Conclusion

One of the major contemporary historians of nineteenth-century zoos, Nigel Rothfels, wrote that 'there is more going on at the zoo than many commentators would have us believe; and sometimes, I think, there is a great deal less'.[70] An archival-based history of origins of a zoo in St Petersburg illustrates both parts of this statement. On the one hand, the unpublished sources present it as a family venture by local entrepreneurs who regarded the zoo as one of their numerous commercial undertakings. Unlike zoos in London, Paris, Tokyo or Moscow, the zoo in the capital of the Romanov empire was a private institution. The project was supported by the municipal authorities but the imperial officials, including the emperor himself, remained indifferent to it. The founders of the zoo did not visibly promote knowledge of the Romanov empire via their animals nor did they outwardly disseminate any ideological messages among their visitors. Instead, the Gebhardts' zoo, like many other similar social places, was created for mercantile reasons and was intended to bring fortune to its owners by amusing and entertaining visitors. During the first years of its existence, this zoological garden was definitely not a locus of the Romanov empire, and it was not an imperial institution in the manner that scholars have interpreted other zoos of that time.

On the other hand, the archival documents show how the initiators of the first permanent public zoo in St Petersburg tried to convince the authorities that the city needed the garden to enhance its fame and bring it up to the same level as other major European and world cities. This argument was later repeated by one of the high-ranking officials, and was also well understood by the local press: cities of the Romanov empire belonged to the wider globalizing world of the nineteenth century.

[67]See, for instance, a Russian-language guidebook: A. Cherviakov, *Putevoditel' po S. Peterburgu* (St Petersburg, 1865), 296; a German-language one: H. Hafferberg, *St. Petersburg in seiner Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Ein Handbuch für Reisende und Einheimische* (St Petersburg, 1866), 177, 192. Both books agreed that even though the zoo did not yet possess many animals, it had promised to become an important local place of entertainment.

[68]'Vnutrennie izvestiia: Peterburg', *Khar'kovskie vedomosti*, 10 Jun. 1883, 2.

[69]'K priezdu Feliksa Fora', *Iuzhnyi Krai*, 25 Jul. 1897, 2; 'Prebyvanie imperatora germanskogo v Rossii', *Iuzhnyi Krai*, 1 Aug. 1897, 2.

[70]Rothfels, 'Zoos, the academy, and captivity', 482.

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In this global context, as Willibald Steinmetz put it, 'whether for individuals, nations or other collective entities, the mode of competitive and temporalized better/worse comparisons became a dominant figure of thought'.[71] While the 'cultural and moral prestige of a nation, made visible and audible at world exhibitions or international expert congresses, became another asset in the (perceived) struggle of nations for supremacy', zoos were one of 'the relevant benchmarks' for a country or a city to be considered 'civilized'.[72] By putting captured animals from around the globe on display, the zoological garden in St Petersburg became one of the important social spaces and points of reference of the Romanov empire's capital, which could bring fame and fortune to the zoo's owners and the city in which it was located.

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[71]W. Steinmetz, 'Above/below, better/worse or simply different? Metamorphoses of social comparison, 1600–1900', in W. Steinmetz (ed.), *The Force of Comparison: A New Perspective on Modern European History and the Contemporary World* (New York, 2019), 100.

[72]W. Steinmetz, 'Introduction: concepts and practices of comparison in modern history', in Steinmetz (ed.), *The Force of Comparison*, 15.

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