

AHSGR BOOK CLUB

The Story of Johann

The Boy Who Longed to Come to America

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Spring Comes to Kratzke

Spring had come at last and villagers are preparing farms and fields. The area was traditionally known for its wheat and barley. Kratzke also had a mill for oil, presumably sunflower. In addition, villagers grew gardens and kept livestock. Johann and the teenage boys were in charge of taking care of the horses, oxen, and camels.



Somewhere On the Volga
Aleksandrovich Leonov, 1998



Camels in Astrakhan Oblast

Everywhere Johann looked he saw happy people plowing with yokes of oxen, camels, and frisky horse teams. They were turning the fresh, black loam to sun and sky, harrowing, sowing, the seed flowing in a golden arc from knowing, agile hands...His father spoke with reverence, "He who has not walked barefoot in new-turned soil knows not what healing the earth can bring."

p 15, 16

Adventures with Tatars



Kazan Tatars of the Volga c. 1925

While Johann was taking care of the village's horses grazing on the steppe, he heard noises and hid. It turned out that they were Tatars. Johann thought they would steal the horses.

The author called them *Tartar Raiders*, but they are actually *Tatars*, a people indigenous to Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Prior to the defeat of the khans (12th century), they were one large group, but over time, they separated into 4 groups. The Tatars who have lived in the Volga area are called Kazan Tatars. They are Sunni Muslim.

Johann and Alek Search for Kurgans

[Johann and Alek] entered a place of cages and hollow cliffs. Pressing on to a high ridge they came upon a view that took their breath away. Dotting the landscape were numerous mounds. There, looming against the swirling clouds stood a huge, half-broken rock formation that from the back, resembled a bear standing upright but leaning badly. They saw that the figure...was a woman...that [looked] toward the rising sun.

p 52, 53

Iryna/Adobe Stock



Polovets Stone Statues in Luhansk prior to 2022.

Wikimedia Commons



The type of Kurgan found in the Volga Region are Sarmatian Kurgans that date back as far as 2400 BC to 400 AD.

WordPress



Example of Sarmatian armor.

Kurgans are still being found and excavated. Many are in Siberia and the contents have been well-preserved in the permafrost.



Tunnug, the Scythian Kurgan in Tuva, in Southern Siberia

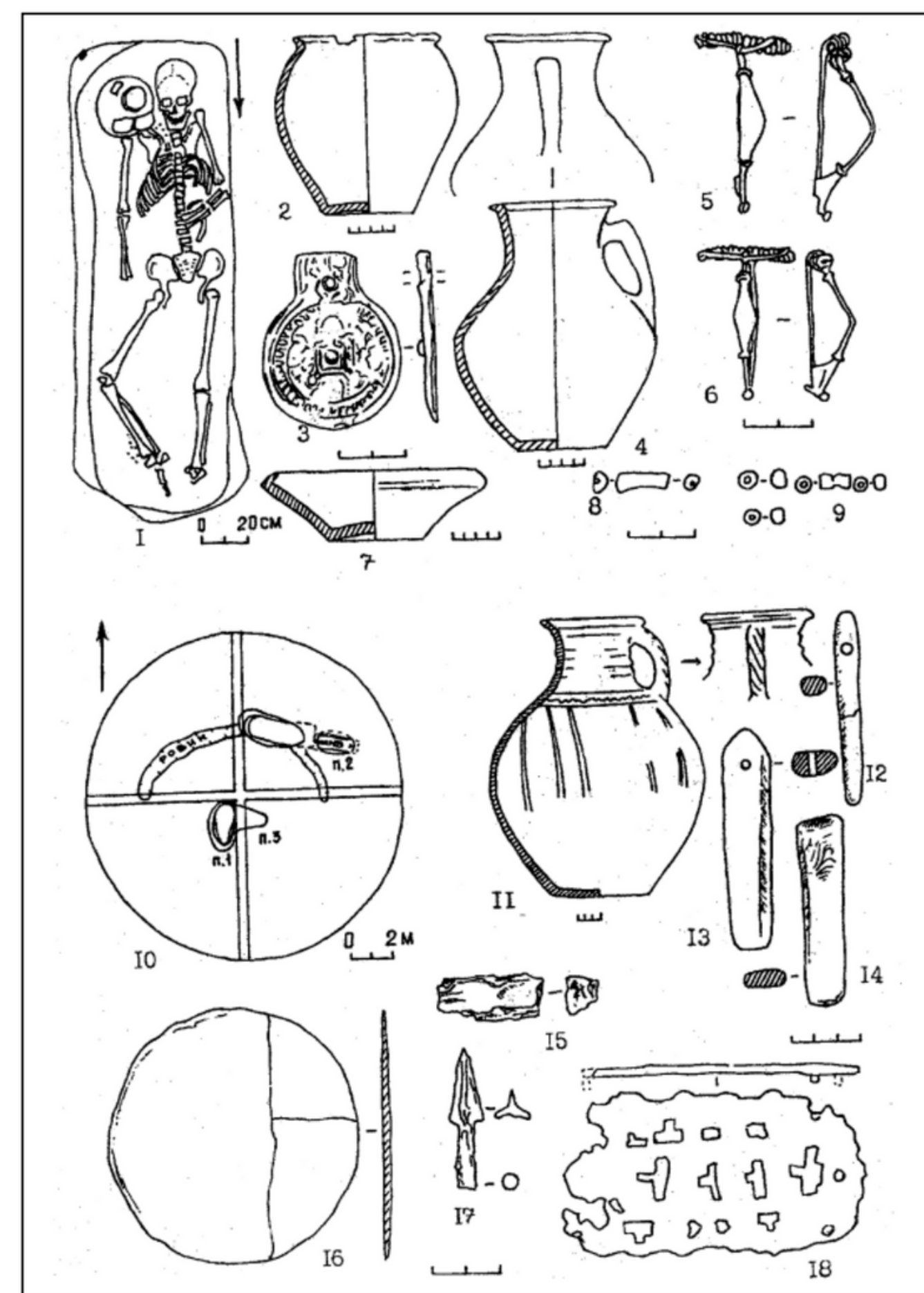


Figure 2. Figures 1-9 - Contents of Late Sarmanian (150-400 AD) Burial 1, Kurgan 1: 1- Burial 1, female, age 18-20; 2- gray clay vessel; 3- bronze mirror; 4- gray clay pitcher found covered by bowl (no. 7); 5-6- Late Sarmanian bronze fibulae; 7- gray clay bowl found inverted covering vessel (no. 4); 8- coralline bead; 9- dark gray, red, and white beads (24 found); 10- plan of Kurgan 2 containing 3 burials; figures 11-18- artifacts from burial 2, kurgan 2; 11-gray clay pitcher; 12- dark gray whetstone; 13- gray-brown whetstone, polished surface, sharp bevel on one side; 14- light brown whetstone; 15- lithic fragment (argillite?), unworked; 16- bronze disk mirror found with fragments of a cover or case; 17- bushed iron arrowheads; 18- Early Sarmanian iron girdle clasp.



Johannes Busick on right

War Looms with Japan

(about 1903)

The village would soon be drained of its strong young men, another breach of the promise of freedom from military duty given by Empress Catherine. p 68

War with Japan? Revolt in Greater Russia! Mothers everywhere were concerned about their sons being taken. Don Cossack military troops passed by the village...followed by a long line of carts loaded with baggage and chests. [They were] riding toward the village to take away the young recruits. p 67-68



Cossack Soldier

Johann's friend Heinrich was taken away even though he was just 16.

During this time, many Germans from Russia started emigrating.

Johann's friend Yakor will be leaving for America soon.

*You can read Alexander Dupper's story about Philipp Frick from Huck in the Winter 1982 *Journal*. He served in the Tsar's Navy as a stoker.

Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War was a military conflict fought between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan from 1904 to 1905.

Wikipedia



Czar Nicholas wanted to acquire a warm-water port in the Pacific Ocean for purposes of trade and for the navy because Vladivostok closed down during the winter due to weather. Russia leased Port Arthur in Manchuria (controlled by Japan at that time) but wanted it for the Empire. If Japan lost it, they would also lose control of Korea.



Battle of Port Arthur
February 8-9, 1904

Much of the fighting took place in what is now northeastern China. The brutal conflict in the western Pacific, which was resolved with the Treaty of Portsmouth, changed the balance of power in Asia and helped to set the stage for WWI, the Russian Revolution, and ultimately, WWII.

Library of Congress

Trip to Kamyshin to Grind Wheat

...the countryside grew hilly, dark bluffs and dense forests appeared...and the blue gleam of the Volga came into view. It was so huge that it seemed to blend with the far horizon. And, there was the town of Kamyshin in the distance.

p 86



Wikimedia Commons

The Volga Boatmen by Ilya Repin, c. 1871



Wikimedia Commons

Kamyshin, early 1900s



TravelAllRussia.com

Volga River

Going to Saratov

Wikipedia



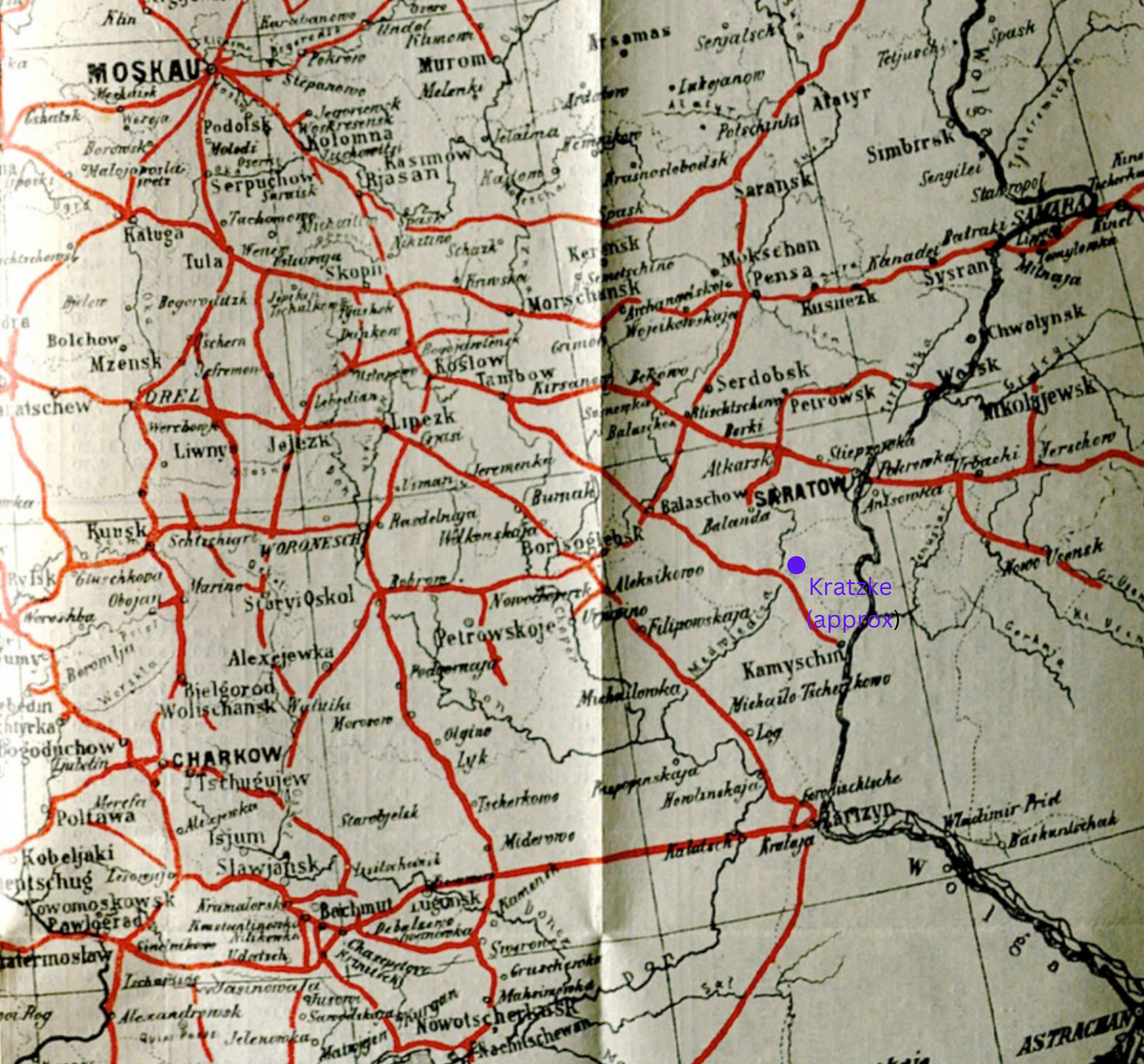
Saratov, 1916

To get to Saratov, Johann and his father traveled near the “friendly German villages of Messer, Dönhof, Beideck, and Schilling. In Saratov, they bought fabric for Katya’s dress and veil, coal oil, matches, sugar, writing paper, and ink. On the way home, they stayed the night in Beideck in Richard Schneider’s blacksmith shop. On the way home, they were attacked by wolves and they had to sacrifice one of their horses.

Wikipedia



Steppe Wolf



1909 Russian Railroad Map

Johann's Dream Comes True

“Ach, ihr Kinder. Ihr liebe,
liebe Kinder. Sei Gott
befoln.”

Johann's mother to Johann, p 161

Father did the usual thing.
He asked for a moment of
silence to ask God's blessing.

p 161

Neighbors sang farewell song as the
wagon left the village:

*Jetzt ist die Zeit und Stunde da
Dass wir Ziehn nach Amerika.*

The time and hour is now at hand
We're moving to a foreign land
Where souls by thousands prosper well.
Dauntless, with tears, we say farewell.

p 162

The trip and the permission to go to
America [was] the greatest gift of love
his Father could give him.

p 163

Even though I am meant to go,
I will never forget the place of
my birth.

p 163

Kratzke
Saratov?
Moscow
Libau
Hamburg
Rotterdam
Portsmouth
Ellis Island



Mela packed a lot of history, culture, and folklore into *The Story of Johann*.

Agriculture

Day-to-day life

Family

History of the Volga Region

Holidays

Immigration details

Language/Dialect

Legends

Religious beliefs and observances

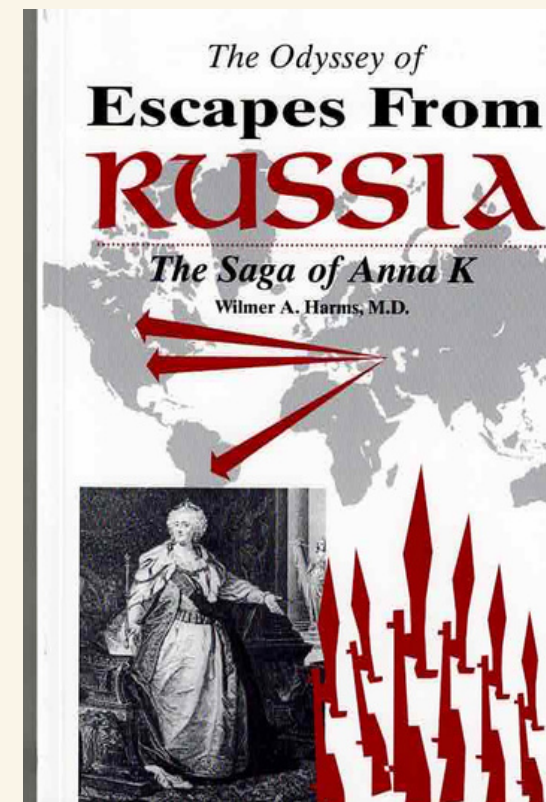
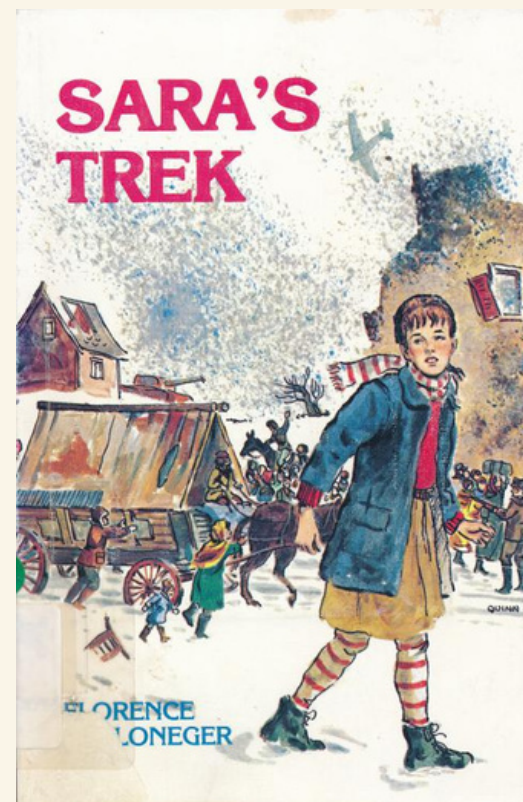
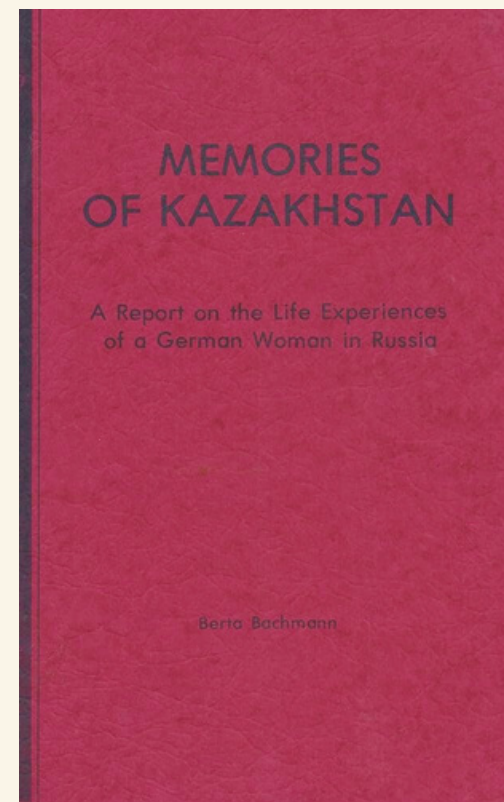
Wolves

What was your favorite to learn about?



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Join us in May for the next Book Club event.
More info will be coming out soon.



Which would you like to read?
Type your choice in the chat.