

The Frigate Askold and the Opening of the Russian Foreign Settlement at Nagasaki

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The Russian steam frigate Askold appeared in Nagasaki Harbor in July 1858, transporting Vice Admiral Efvim Putiatin from China for the purpose of concluding a new commercial treaty with Japan. It was by no means, however, the first Russian attempt to establish relations in that port. A survey of these earlier Russian adventures at Nagasaki will provide a background for the visit of the Askold

The first Russian naval expedition and diplomatic mission to Nagasaki was in 1804. In October of that year, the Russian sailing frigate Nadyezhda commanded by Capt. I. F. Kruzenshtern, one of the most capable and revered officers in the Russian navy, came to Nagasaki during its voyage around the world one of the first two Russian ships to circumnavigate the globe in the hope of opening the harbor to Russian ships and trade.

Although aware of the strict Japanese attitude toward foreigners at this time, the Russians expected better treatment for themselves.

“The precautionary measures that Japanese take toward foreigners are rather well-known [and] insulting. We could not hope to be received more favorably than other nations, but considering that we [brought] with us an emissary from the monarch of a powerful, neighboring state...with all assurances of friendly intentions, [we thought] that they might make an exception in our case and allow us more freedom, which would make our long stay in Nagasaki pleasant and useful.”

But Nagasaki authorities did not trust the Russians. They confiscated all gunpowder and rifles and refused to allow the crew even to come ashore to rest. In fairness, one must add that the Nadyezhda was eventually permitted to anchor in the inner harbor for repairs, and all necessary supplies and materials were provided. Only after weeks of insistent requests did the Japanese authorities finally provide the Russians a place on shore. The head of the diplomatic mission, N.P. Rezanov, being ill, was allowed to live in a small house on shore that was fenced off on all sides and guarded at all times. He was thus kept a virtual prisoner while he waited for months for an answer from Edo to his proposals. Finally, an emissary from Edo arrived and flatly rejected all the proposals for trade and even refused to accept a letter and presents from Tsar Alexander I. Rezanov was given documents that forbade Russian ships to ever again come to Japan. The Russians were ordered to load their ship and prepare to leave Nagasaki as soon as possible. The Russian sailors were so eager by this time to leave that they worked sixteen hours a day to ready their ship for departure. Kruzenshtern feared that some “unpleasant obstacle” might prolong their “cruel captivity” but the Nadyezhda sailed out of Nagasaki harbor on schedule in April 1805.

Rezanov regarded his treatment at the hands of the Japanese as personally demeaning and the refusal to accept the Tsar’s letter as an insult to his country and its sovereign. Desiring to teach the Japanese government a lesson, he later incited two young Russian naval officers to lead raiding parties on Japanese settlements on Sakhalin and in the Kuril islands. This in turn led to the capture of Captain Golovnin and several other Russians on Kunashiri Island in 1811. Although they were eventually released in 1813, and the whole affair settled peaceably, it left a residue of mutual mistrust and suspicion. Against this background a new and large-scale expedition arrived in Nagasaki some

forty years later.

Five weeks after Commodore Perry's determined probe into Edo Bay and landing at Kurihama on August 22, 1853, four Russian warships anchored in the middle roadstead of Nagasaki Harbor. This Russian naval expedition, led by Putiatin, again aimed to open Japanese ports to Russian ships. Nagasaki still had a reputation for hostile reception of foreign ships, other than Dutch or Chinese. For this reason, the Russian ships entered the harbor in battle formation, and with a feeling of dread as to the nature of their reception. Putiatin's secretary, the famous nineteenth century Russian writer Ivan Goncharov, probably spoke for many Russians when he wrote about his own feelings as the frigate *Pallada* entered the harbor:

"We were entering with a somewhat compressed heart, at least I was, with the feeling with which one enters a prison, even though the prison is planted with trees."

But not all his compatriots shared his feelings. Voin Andreevich Rimsky-Korsakov, the commander of the steam schooner *Vostok* wrote in a letter to his parents and younger brother, Nika, at home in Russia, in a different vein from Goncharov.

"Our patriotic feelings were aroused, and I am sure all, as I was, were suffused with a pleasant awareness of the dignity of the Russian flag, under whose protection four ships had fearlessly appeared to open an empire of thirty million souls."

Subsequently, all the Russians seemed to agree that their reception by the Japanese was better than they had expected, and much different from the reception given to Rezanov. In this respect Goncharov wrote, "the Japanese are not at all what they were 40 years ago." Nevertheless, he also thought that the Japanese were still not capable of normal, civilized discourse with the Europeans due to their highly-developed system of mutual espionage and their habitual mendacity. During their entire four-month stay in Nagasaki spread over three separate visits, the Russians only had contact with Japanese interpreters and other Japanese officials; they were not allowed to meet with ordinary Japanese. Nor were they allowed to meet with the Dutch freely. Japanese guard boats surrounded the Russian ships to prevent any other Japanese boats from approaching them and also to cut off communication between the Russian ships. Putiatin, however, would not tolerate such restrictions and ordered his officers to lower Russian boats and break the rings of guard boats surrounding them and tow them away. The Japanese eventually withdrew their guard boats and allowed the Russian boats to ride around freely in the outer harbor.

Putiatin, Capt. Konstantin Posyet, second in command of the diplomatic mission and a Dutch interpreter, Goncharov, Capt. Unkovsky, commander of the *Pallada*, Rimsky-Korsakov and other officers, as well as the marching band and some selected sailors, were permitted to go ashore to meet with the governor and later with the emissaries sent from Edo. But the Russians were never allowed to mingle with the common people or to go ashore without official supervision.

Toward the end of their first visit in November the Russians were finally offered the same place that Rezanov had used (Umegasaki), but they rejected it as unsuitable. When they returned to Nagasaki in early January 1854, they were offered the buildings and grounds of a Buddhist temple called Goshinji on the Inasa side of the bay as a resting place for the crews. A few Russian officers went to inspect it, flanked by Japanese guard boats and surrounded by guards on shore after landing. They judged the site suitable, but the Japanese did not immediately make it available. When offi-

cial permission to use Goshinji finally came, Putiatin refused to accept the demeaning conditions attached to it. “And that is what the Japanese wanted,” grumbled Goncharov; “they must avoid giving foreigners any reason for going ashore....[They] hoped to either escape the necessity for it or postpone it as long as possible.” Inasa, therefore, did not become a resting place for the Russian sailors at that time and the question of unrestricted access to the shore remained a major point of contention until the Russians’ departure early in February. Although relations between the Russian officers and Japanese officials were generally friendly and cordial, the regulations that prevented the Russians from going ashore freely were viewed as evidence of Japanese unfriendliness and distrust.

The Russians visited Nagasaki again briefly in April 1854, but they did not use Goshinji as a resting place and had no opportunity to meet or mingle with ordinary Japanese. Even though the first treaty with the United States had been signed on March 31, it had as yet no effect on the official Japanese policy of restrictions toward foreigners in Nagasaki.

In December of that same year, Putiatin, Posyet and some 500 other Russian officers and sailors, who had returned to Japan on the frigate *Diana* to continue negotiations toward the first Russo-Japanese treaty, were in Shimoda when an earthquake and tidal wave caused great destruction and loss of life. The *Diana* was also badly damaged, but the Japanese helped the Russians come safely ashore. Afterwards, despite their own desperate situation, the Japanese provided the Russians with food, clothing and shelter which enabled them to survive on shore in winter. They also helped them build a small yacht, which later carried Putiatin and forty other Russians safely back to the Russian far east. The remaining Russians had to arrange their own transportation by hiring foreign ships that came to Shimoda. The last group of Russians from the unfortunate frigate *Diana* left Japan in July 1855. It was the first time that the entire crew of a Russian warship or such a large group of Europeans had been allowed to live on Japanese soil, even if only out of necessity. The fact that several hundred Russians had lived in Japan for several months, and had worked together with the Japanese for a common purpose was remarkable evidence of changing times in Japan.

The Arrival of the Askold in Nagasaki

Putiatin arrived in Nagasaki aboard the *Askold* in mid-July 1858 to try to forge a more favorable commercial treaty along the lines of the one achieved earlier by the Americans. The previous year Putiatin had briefly come to Nagasaki to negotiate a commercial treaty along the lines of the Dutch model, but by 1858 the center stage of activity had shifted eastward from Nagasaki. Sensing this, Putiatin remained in Nagasaki only three days, then hurried on to Shimoda and later Kanagawa. With the cooperation of the city authorities in Nagasaki, Putiatin left twenty-five ill sailors behind at Goshinji Temple, supervised by a lone Russian officer and cared for by Pompe van Meerdervoort, the Dutch physician on Deshima.

Preliminary talks were held for two weeks at Kanagawa with Japanese officials on board the frigate. After this, Putiatin and his retinue traveled to Edo to continue the negotiations. Meanwhile, the men who remained on the *Askold* were only allowed to go ashore in Yokohama, at that time still only a “swamp” but not without its share of natural beauty. The sailors soon grew bored, however, walking up and down in the same place and turned to riding around the bay in their boats for recreation.

Having successfully negotiated and signed a treaty, Putiatin returned to Kanagawa on August 20. After a few days, he left for Shanghai on board the *Askold*. When the *Askold* had nearly reached its

destination, it was met by a ferocious typhoon that blew it a considerable distance back out to sea, causing extensive damage. This storm also greatly affected the health of the crew, most of whom were suffering from illnesses such as swamp fever, scurvy and dysentery. Putiatin had already departed for Russia on board a mail steamer, leaving Capt. Unkovsky to deal with the critical situation of his ship and its crew. Considering the high cost of such repairs in Shanghai and the unhealthy climate there in October, Unkovsky decided to return to Nagasaki. He may also have desired to test the treaty of 1855 by which the Japanese were obligated to provide assistance to Russian ships in distress. As the recently signed commercial treaty was not scheduled to go into effect until July 1859, Unkovsky could not count on its more favorable provisions to be implemented.

Unkovsky had no doubt heard of the kindness and generosity that the Japanese authorities had shown toward the Russian officers and sailors on the ill-fated frigate *Diana* in 1854 and 1855. Now, in September 1858, their situation was almost as critical: a badly damaged ship in need of repair, with half of its crew seriously ill. Again, it was as if the Russians were almost throwing themselves on the mercy of the Japanese and hoping that they would respond mercifully to their plight.

After the *Askold* left Shanghai, it ran into more bad weather and had to anchor for three weeks near Raffles Island, where emergency repairs were conducted. The persistent dampness and an epidemic of malignant malaria further threatened the fragile health of the crew. During the rough ten-day voyage to Nagasaki several sailors died. When the *Askold* finally reached port late in October, Nagasaki appeared to the Russians as a promised land after all the hardships that they had endured. The excellent weather and splendid view as they approached the harbor revived the sagging spirits of the crew, healthy and ill alike. Although it was not the first time to see it, "it was no less impressive, and maybe even more so. Elevated spirits spread throughout the crew and foretold success and speed in the work ahead of us."

Yet when the *Askold* finally limped into Nagasaki, it was uncertain how the local authorities would greet its arrival and to what extent they would cooperate with the urgent needs for repair to the ship and restoration of health to its crew. Much to the Russians' relief, the Nagasaki authorities demonstrated a great desire to help the Russians from the very beginning. Unkovsky was able to meet the Nagasaki governor without delay and ask him for his assistance and cooperation. The latter immediately appointed a senior official to take care of all the Russians' urgent needs. In the words of Lt. Litke, one of the serving officers on the *Askold*, "from that day on...there was no delay in anything, except for the inherent Japanese slowness in whatever they do."

This slowness was something the Russians had experienced before. However, their critical situation now demanded quick action. Remembering his experience as commander of the frigate *Pallada* five years before, Unkovsky took the situation into his own hands and chose Goshinji Temple on the Inasa side of the bay as the Russians' residence in Nagasaki, paying a generous rent for it. Two weeks later, after the frigate had been disarmed and unloaded and all had been made ready at the temple and barracks built nearby for the sailors, the entire crew of some 400 Russian officers and sailors moved into their new lodgings. In the meantime, the most seriously ill sailors had again been entrusted to the care of Dr. Pompe and housed in a different temple, presumably on the Nagasaki side of the bay, and "situated on a hillside, far from the noise of the city and its foul odors,...above the morning mists, [and] arranged as an amphitheater, facing south towards the healing rays of the sun...." These conditions enabled even those sailors with only the slightest chance of recovery to regain their health rapidly. "After a month and a half all the formerly ill had fully recovered and

even the memory of the epidemic had disappeared.”

This claim that all the ill sailors recovered in October is contradicted by an article written twenty-eight years later, which asserts that two of them “quickly died” despite Dr. Pompe’s care, as well as by the irrefutable evidence of the gravestones still existing today. (See Chart 1) Indeed, the frigate was en route to or moored off Kanagawa. They were the first Russians to be buried on the grounds of the Dutch and Chinese cemeteries behind Goshinji, which had existed there for more than two hundred years. The presence of six more gravestones in late October and November make it almost certain that at least three sailors died in Nagasaki in October. With the addition of three more gravestones in December (January), and one more the following May (June), at least sixteen Askolders died, possibly more, during their ship’s one year stay in and around Japan, turning “the Dutch cemetery into a purely Russian one.”

Many of the Russian sailors survived, however, thanks to their warm reception in Nagasaki and the balmy autumn climate and lived to witness the dawn of a new era of informal, friendly relations between Russians and Japanese in Nagasaki. For those of them, like Unkovsky himself, who had experienced the uncooperativeness and delaying tactics of the Nagasaki governor only a few years before, the change in behavior toward them, and the opportunity to meet and mingle with ordinary Japanese people, must have presented a striking contrast. This change soon became evident in the warm relations that developed between the men of the Askold and the Japanese in Inasa and Nagasaki.

The Russians rapidly settled into their new quarters in Inasa and transformed Goshinji into a sort of “Russian village” complete with a cattle enclosure, Russian Orthodox chapel, two howitzers and a longboat gun from the Askold the weapons being placed at the entrance to Unkovsky’s quarters and on the large square on the temple grounds. At the entrance gate at the top of some stone steps an armed guard stood beneath a tall pole proudly flying the Russian flag. The landing of guns on Japanese soil was something that Putiatin would not have dreamed of doing only five years before and revealed the great difference in Japanese attitudes to the Russians since the days of Rezanov and Goncharov.

“The cannon and rifles and guns which we brought ashore without of course any hostile intent gave a more military appearance and independent position to our small colony in the eyes of both the Japanese and the other foreigners. The cannon were the first to be brought ashore by foreigners without the least protest on the part of the city officials and without their even being notified.”

The Japanese also did not object when the Russians fired the longboat gun every day at noon and sunset. Although Japanese law still prohibited the slaughter of cattle, the Russians were permitted to purchase cattle and let them graze and fatten on the temple grounds, provided that they would do the butchering themselves. From this time on, the Dutch on Deshima were also regularly provided with beef by the Japanese. In short, Japanese officials did not attempt to prohibit the Russians from setting things up as suited their needs. In Litke’s words, “all the temple grounds became a Russian settlement, following Russian customs and governed by Russian laws.”

It was to such a foreign colony that the two Nagasaki governors and their senior officials, in response to a Russian invitation, came to a European style banquet and party three weeks after the Askold’s arrival. It was the first time that Japanese governors had ever attended a banquet given by foreigners

on Japanese soil. The governors had at first been reluctant to accept the Russians' invitation, as it was without precedent, but eventually agreed to attend, along with the Dutch. Judging by Litke's description, they were probably glad they had done so:

"Two Japanese governors and twenty senior officials of the city [Nagasaki] dined in European style at the Russian captain's quarters. When a toast was given to the health of the Russian and Japanese emperors, salutes were fired from the howitzers... the dinner lasted a long time. The guests were merry and left late in the evening, having forgotten, at least outwardly, their old habits and customs. Rockets and bengal lights illuminated their path to the very pier."

Litke noted that other foreign ships – British, American, French – had begun gathering in Nagasaki harbor in October. He felt that the Askolders were establishing a precedent for other foreigners to demand a similar freedom of action and thus were helping to open Nagasaki before the commercial treaties of 1858 had actually gone into effect.

In such a way, the arrival of the frigate in Nagasaki... caused a sudden turnabout in relations between Japanese and foreigners existing up to that time. The Japanese had to become close to us out of necessity, giving us some freedom and privileges and agreeing to our demands even though they contradicted their previous way of acting and their view of civilized nations. Giving in to us, they had to make the same concessions to all other foreigners. Our course of action not only saved us from difficulty, it also brought general benefit. It paved the way for all foreigners who arrived and settled in Nagasaki afterwards.

Although this may seem like patriotic exaggeration on his part, Litke's views of the Askolders' leading role in this respect are largely corroborated by Pompe, who also stresses the strong, decisive actions of Unkovsky, but also the uncooperativeness of the Japanese. Recalling the Askold's arrival, he writes:

"The ship was 'in distress', so Oumkovsky [sic] did not ask for anything more than was his legal right. However, the Japanese would rather have seen him leave for Shanghai where it would be much easier to carry out the repairs, ...but the prices they demand are very high... ten times [actually six times] the price to be paid in Nagasaki. This was exactly the reason Japan had been chosen, and possibly also as an experiment, to see how those Japanese would react. After having given the authorities ample time to find [suitable] accommodations – a search which remained unsuccessful – the Russian commander himself found a temple in the village of Inassa [sic] situated on the bay across from Nagasaki, close to the [Dutch] steam factory and close to his ship – in short, a very suitable place. He requisitioned it at a very generous rent. First the Japanese tried to find excuses, but they soon came to the conclusion that the Russian colonel [sic] could not be trifled with, so they put the temple at his disposal."

As for the problem of obtaining food, specifically beef, and timber to repair the frigate, Unkovsky's determined actions in the face of Japanese equivocation settled the matter favorably for the Russians. It was Pompe himself who had helped create the need of beef for the Russians.

"I had prescribed for the entire crew soup made of beef stock, vegetables, onions, etc.

because all of them suffered from one degree or another of scurvy. Wholesome food was then urgently needed; there had to be fresh beef for the patients, but the government did not designate cattle to be slaughtered.”

After waiting a few days, and being told that there were no cows to be slaughtered, Unkovsky sent out a party to search for some and, paying the price that was asked, “filled the Russian cowhouse with good healthy animals.” The problem of obtaining suitable timber was settled in a similar way when the Japanese saw that the Russians knew very well where to cut it down, if need be. If one accepts the accuracy of Pompe’s account in the above respects, it becomes clear that the “cooperation” promised by the Japanese governor at the first meeting meant in reality a formal denial of the Russians’ requests followed by an informal, passive acquiescence to them.

Once the Russians had settled into their “colony” at Goshinji and regained their health and strength, they could devote themselves to the daunting task of repairing their ship. In the beginning this work was hampered by a shortage of available hands and slow delivery of materials by the Japanese. Repair work began in earnest on November 9, some three weeks after the frigate’s arrival. Litke divided this work into three separate categories: carpentry work done mostly on the ship, mast work in the small admiralty on shore, and sloop work near the temple. The Russians had no need of carpenters, as there were at least sixty men from seaports who had those skills in some measure, and they set to work with great energy. The Russians still faced difficulties that must have seemed unsurmountable to many of the Japanese and other foreigners living in Nagasaki, yet in the end they were able to overcome all of them by dint of hard work and resourcefulness. The Russians also learned from visiting the other foreign ships.

Another and more fundamental obstacle in the beginning was the lack of a common language between Russians and Japanese. Gone were the days, still remembered by many, when communication passed almost exclusively through official channels by laborious translation via Dutch. Now ordinary Russians and ordinary Japanese mingled freely, and the need for direct communication between them arose. In this environment Russians and Japanese quickly picked up enough of each other’s language to begin to communicate with each other. Litke related how in the beginning there were many instances of misunderstanding which gave rise to unpleasantness and quarrels between them, but fewer and fewer as their knowledge of each other’s language deepened. In his view, it was the Japanese who proved to be the better language learners. The Russians tried hard to satisfy the Japanese desire to learn their language. While some Japanese studied Dutch and English by order of the government, many young Japanese from families of merchants and local officials came voluntarily to take Russian lessons; those Russian officers who could be spared from repair duties sometimes spent entire mornings teaching them. Among these Japanese students of Russian was the sixteen year-old son of the Inasa village headman, Shiga Urataro. By the end of the Askold’s stay in Inasa, he had become fluent enough in Russian to serve as official interpreter for the first Russian consulate in Hakodate.

The presence of more than four hundred Russian officers and sailors from the Askold living on shore also proved to be a catalyst to the growth and development of the Inasa side of Nagasaki Harbor. The arrival of two more Russian ships – the clippers Dzhigit and Strelok – in late December 1858, with several hundred more Russians, all with needs and desires to be satisfied and money to spend doing so, undoubtedly further accelerated this development. Litke described this process in detail:

“When we moved ashore, there was only a tiny little village near our temple. Soon there began to appear sheds set up by Japanese merchants coming from the city [Nagasaki] to sell different goods and foods. Some of them set up stalls and prepared meals of cooked fish, chicken, eggs, and the indispensable sake (Japanese vodka) for our sailors returning home in the evening from work. The sheds gradually became houses, so quickly built in Japan, and so within a period of eight months the moribund little village grew into a large thriving town.

However, it seems that it was not only enterprising merchants who catered to the Russians’ need for food and refreshment, but ordinary residents of Inasa as well.

“One could often see in the evenings a sailor sitting on the doorstep of a Japanese house and holding in his rough arms a baby, while the mother prepared tea or some other drink for him.”

Unfortunately for the health of the Russians in Inasa, not all of their desires were satisfied without a price. Soon more than a quarter of the sailors who had survived the long voyages at sea fell victim to a new threat on shore: syphilis. Although this disease was treated satisfactorily with mercury, eradication was difficult because of the proximity of brothels and the abundance of alcohol.

Although the Russians followed their own customs and laws on the grounds of Goshinji, they were willing to adapt to Japanese customs outside their compound. Litke thought that the Russians showed more desire to follow Japanese customs than the Americans, British or French in Nagasaki, and the men of the Askold more self-discipline and restraint than the sailors and merchants from those other countries. He noted how badly behaved the others had been. American sailors from the steam warships Powhatan and Mississippi, who had moored in Nagasaki Harbor before the Askold’s arrival, “allowed themselves the most despicable disorderly behavior in the town,” wrecking houses and beating merchants. The English had shown not only “coarse and arrogant conduct” but also illegal activity, as in the case of a British ship that had tried to import opium into Nagasaki, even though it was forbidden by treaty to do so. A French merchant who had spirited his Japanese maid away to Shanghai put her in danger of capital punishment under Japanese law when he returned her of her own volition to Nagasaki. According to Litke, “only after insistent pleadings and persuasion, in which our captain took a large role, did she avoid the punishment prescribed by law” and instead was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

Litke stressed that the Russian officers and sailors from the Askold were not guilty of such transgressions. He noted with pride how well-behaved and disciplined the Russians crews were compared to those of America and Britain, although he also did admit that a few troublemakers were strictly punished for their bad behavior in the beginning. One might discount his views as the bias of a serving Russian officer, but there are both Dutch and English eyewitness accounts that substantially corroborate them. Pompe, as someone who was in constant contact with the Russian officers and sailors from the Askold, testifies:

“...there was at all times exemplary discipline among the Russian crew. I was able to witness this daily because, at the request of the Russian commander [Unkovksy], I took charge of the treatment of the patients there; the head physician was ill.”

An Englishman, Henry Arthur Tilley, who served as a language tutor on the Russian warship Rynda,

visited the Russian colony in June 1859 and left an eyewitness account of the Askolders' stay at Inasa and their relations with the Japanese residents there, compared to those of the English and Americans:

“They seemed to live, all of them, a very jolly life in this old temple. Plentifully supplied with all the necessities and luxuries of life from Shanghai, they had formed quite a little farm about them, and oxen sheep, and pigs were slaughtered much to the disgust, no doubt, of their shaven hosts. They had made themselves quite at home; many had formed liaisons with some pretty Japanese women, and had their own menage in town. Nearly all spoke Japanese sufficient to make themselves understood; a few had made such progress as to speak with facility, and even to write and read.

To this they were, in a measure, indebted for their popularity among the people, but especially because they were very observant of their [Japanese] customs and careful not to offend their little scruples. I saw one or two instances of men speaking the English language, entering the clean, mat-spread rooms of the Japanese, in their dirty boots, in spite of the protestations by words and signs, and the looks of despair of the owners. To shout at and abuse the people, tiresome and procrastinating though they may be, is ill calculated on the part of foreigners to gain their willing services; yet I witnessed many instances of such violations of civility during my stay in Nagasaki. I wish my countrymen and Americans would remember, that to treat the people of Japan, ...as they do a Hindoo servant or Chinese cooley, will be the very worst manner of having their wants or wishes attended to. On the other hand, kindness and attention not to violate their prejudices, and, if possible, to enter into their social life, will be the best method of having everything that may be required. This was the way in which the Russians, during their stay of nine months in Nagasaki, contrived to gain the affections, not only of the people, but of the higher authorities. Captain Unkovsky, and through him, his officers, had only to express a wish to have it satisfied, where it was possible; his name was known for miles around, and called aloud to us in the streets as we passed. The officers in their walks through the town, were surrounded by laughing children backed by a circle of pretty girls, with the men peering over their shoulders.”

Such a description might have to be viewed skeptically coming from a Russian writer, but coming from an Englishman, albeit in Russian employ, it certainly lends credibility to Litke's claims of being on intimate terms and enjoying the special confidence and esteem of the government officials, shopkeepers and other private citizens of Nagasaki.

“As their oldest acquaintances, who had settled on shore first and for a longer period and had come into closest contact with them, we enjoyed the complete confidence and respect of both private citizens and government officials in Nagasaki...this was shown by the good and polite reception accorded to us in whatever private home we happened to enter. In shops we could buy various better items more cheaply than other foreigners; several objects which the Japanese were not allowed to sell to foreigners they furtively brought to the temple at our request and we could thus obtain different items for our foreign friends who had tried in vain to buy them in stores. As regards officials, the preference which they gave us before all other foreigners in Nagasaki was obvious. In case of some difficulty with other foreigners, they usually came to us

for advice before reaching a decision. They would often satisfy demands which were contrary to their laws and customs merely to oblige us, and in general, showed respect and trust in all their actions [toward us].”

In addition to Goshinji, the Russian officers made one of the local tea-houses their own and spent many pleasant hours there with the charming hostesses. Tilley was again an eyewitness of these activities:

“In one of those tea-houses of which the Russian officers of the squadron took almost exclusive possession, several mornings were passed in photographing Japanese of both sexes decked out in full costume, dancing and singing girls, with now and then some curious beauty from the neighborhood....[The] hilarity of the whole party was increased by the changing of costume. Moosoomes [girls] came out in uniform, with pantaloons and swords girded on; officers in Keremon and Obee [kimono and obi], their hair dressed out à la Japonaise with coloured crape, and flowers. Each played the part of his or her assumed character, the moosoomes strutting up and down, and the men prostrating themselves like the Japanese women, till the scene became so ridiculous that the most serious could not hold out. The people around roared with laughter; tears were running down the cheeks of a fat old bonze, as his ponderous sides shook, while two caustic-looking, two-sworded gentlemen, putting their noses in at the garden gate, shook their heads, and no doubt, vowed to themselves that the barbarians were spoiling the people.”

It is not known whether the two samurai in question made a complaint to the Nagasaki governor, or to Unkovsky himself, concerning the Russians’ corruptive influence on the people. As for the Russians, in case of any complaint against a Japanese, they generally took their case to the governor, and trusted him to deal with it. However in those rare cases where the offense was great, they felt compelled to take matters into their own hands. Then they could exhibit very high-handed and threatening behavior when Russian honor, or that of Europeans in general, was at stake. The following two incidents illustrate this point.

The first incident concerns insulting behavior on the part of officers under a Kyushu daimyo (feudal lord) toward a Russian ensign. Although Litke and Pompe describe what seems to be the same incident somewhat differently, they both agree on the swift action and firm and uncompromising stance taken by Unkovsky. It seems that the ensign in question had trespassed into the courtyard of the daimyo’s house, an action forbidden to foreigners by treaty, and been grabbed and pushed back beyond the gate by officials inside. Even though the Russian was in the wrong, not being aware of the prohibition against entering a daimyo’s house, such a rude ejection seemed insulting and intolerable to Unkovsky when it was reported to him. He felt that such action could not go unpunished, and quickly dispatched a Russian officer accompanied by the Japanese official and interpreter assigned to the Russian compound to demand that the offending officers appear before the Russian captain. A threat to level the house the next day with Russian cannon if they did not do so proved effective. The officials were disarmed and placed under guard at the Russian compound. The Nagasaki governor requested their release, but Unkovsky refused to release them until a representative of the daimyo came to apologize for their conduct and they were strictly punished in accordance with Japanese law. They were put in prison and were to be stripped of their rank and titles, but Unkovsky intervened and asked that their punishment be limited to one month

in prison.

The second incident did not directly concern the Russians, but they nevertheless became deeply involved in it. It seems that the secretary to the Dutch commissioner who had been angered by the “haughty and insolent words” of a Japanese official, slapped him in the face. This action by a Dutch official must have come as a very great shock to the Japanese officials, who had been accustomed for more than two hundred years to very compliant and deferential behavior from the Dutch on Deshima. Now it was the dawn of a new era in Nagasaki, when Russians would immediately punish any perceived insult or humiliation. The Japanese police gathered to decide how to deal with this insult to Japanese dignity and recalling the previous forceful action of Unkovsky, considered imprisoning the unfortunate and already apologetic Dutchman. Fortunately for him, the Japanese did not attempt to do that before consulting with the Russians. Unkovsky told them that such things were not done among European nations and that no one was imprisoned without his government first being informed, and that officials were in any case protected by diplomatic immunity, the violation of which would lead to the rupture of relations between the two nations. When reminded of his own arbitrary incarceration of the daimyo officials, Unkovsky had his answer already prepared: “when the shores of Nagasaki bay are studded with guns, and the Japanese have their own fleet ready to do battle with any fleet in the world, then let them act arbitrarily toward foreigners, without consideration of the laws and customs of civilised nations; but to act in such a way now would be careless on their part”.

Unkovsky further reminded the Japanese that Russia and Holland were allies, and that their sovereigns were related to each other, and so the Russians would feel duty-bound to take the side of the Dutch and demand satisfaction themselves, even to the extreme of resorting to force, if the Japanese dare to touch the hair of the Dutch secretary. Such an answer did not please the Japanese officials and they left dissatisfied, feeling that the Russian reply showed the insincerity of their professed friendship. Nevertheless, the Japanese did not attempt to imprison the secretary and let themselves be satisfied with an apology before the governor.

Litke attempts to justify the stern reply of Unkovsky by arguing that it was the lesser of two evils. Although it caused a worsening of their relations with the Japanese officials, and perhaps ordinary Japanese as well, it preserved the dignity and influence of all Europeans in Nagasaki. To have allowed a European to be imprisoned would have meant to permit the Japanese gradually to regard it as their right to subject all Europeans to their customs and laws. For “here there were neither Dutch, Russians, nor English; there were Europeans all united without exception for the attainment of a common goal.” In Litke’s view, this goal was first of all to attain and maintain the respect, if not the admiration, of the Japanese. If the Dutch secretary had been put in a Japanese jail, “we [Europeans] would have lost everything, and fallen from our high position, perhaps irrevocably, which we gained after so much effort, especially in Nagasaki.”

Litke also saw a good side in the reply of his captain for the Japanese. If the latter had tried to carry out their plan, there would have been “no end of unpleasantness” with the European powers and the Japanese government would have eventually had to give in to their superior strength and would have lost face in front of their people. According to Litke, the Japanese officials saw this “kindly side” of Unkovsky’s advice themselves and later came to thank him on behalf of the governor. Despite this reconciliation, the influence of foreigners in Nagasaki began to waver until an unusual occurrence “terrible in itself” destroyed all doubts and restored the trust of the officials and the

friendship of the people to the Russians in particular.

Past midnight on March 8 the Russians were suddenly awakened by the frantic cries of the temple priest: "Fire! Fire!" But it was not the temple. Clambering out of bed the Russians saw the glow of a huge fire on Deshima, on the opposite side of the bay. The officers roused the men and grabbed anything that might be useful in putting out the fire buckets, mats, axes, and pumps. Then they rushed to their boats and rowed, the first ones arriving at the pier of the Dutch factory in half an hour. Litke recalled:

"The picture which we found was both terrible and amusing. Several houses had already burned down; the fire was spreading with great speed. The poor Dutchmen having no men or instruments to contain the fire had lost their heads and were merely running up and down. The Japanese, on the other hand, who had come running from the city, were afraid to get close. Their fire brigades in multi-colored costumes and with lanterns on long poles and huge boat-hooks stood lined up along the street, motionless, and only made noise and shouted."

In the disorder, Unkovsky took charge. The Russians rushed into the burning houses and began tossing out goods that could still be saved. As various belongings began to pile up outside, the Russians persuaded the amazed and still motionless Japanese to move the things to the shore of the bay. Meanwhile the Russians tried to wet down the house which had caught fire last but found their pumps inadequate to the task. At this point the Japanese firemen volunteered to send for larger and more powerful pumps. In the meantime the Russians managed to halt the further progress of the fire by completely leveling the house burning beside the still untouched buildings. While the Russians were thus risking their own lives to save the property of the Dutch and the Japanese, and to suppress the danger to the city of Nagasaki itself, and while the Japanese dutifully carried things ashore and even began to help the Russians in putting out the fire, some opportunistic Europeans tried to take advantage of the situation. Men in boats from the merchant ships moored in the harbor rowed up to Deshima and began helping themselves to the goods piled up there. As soon as the Russians heard about it, they rushed to the scene but found the laden boats already pushing off from shore. Heedless of the danger to themselves, the Russians dove into the water and, catching up to the boats, forced them to return the property, which, as Litke wrote, "had been plundered to our common shame by Europeans under the gaze of almost the entire population of Nagasaki." The Russians were thus responsible for saving the property of others twice.

Capt. van Kattendyke, residing on Deshima at the time, is silent regarding the heroism on the Russians' part but does acknowledge their bravery in helping to put out the fire. According to him, however, the Russians did not arrive until much later: "About 7 o'clock in the morning, about 300 Russians [led by] the courageous [Capt. Unkovsky] came hurriedly [to Deshima] and by knocking down one house were able to finally extinguish the fire." He also credits the Japanese efforts more than does Litke.

The Japanese did not hide their admiration and gratitude for the Russians' heroism.

"The gratitude of the Japanese was boundless. The city authorities recognized the importance of our energetic actions. They understood that without the Russians' determined efforts the fire might easily have spread to the city and not one house would have been left standing. The people were enraptured by the valor, resolution and rapid

actions of the Russians and amazed by their selfless daring-do. There soon appeared pictures depicting the fire on Dezhima, with enthusiastic descriptions, and songs were sung on every corner celebrating the Russians fighting against the fire and their victory over it.

In some songs, in the neighborhoods where we were better known, could be heard the names of Russians most instrumental in extinguishing the fire. On the street no one walked past us without a kind word and we were received in private homes with honor and joy.”

However, the Russians’ daring actions possibly evoked more than mere gratitude in the minds of the Japanese. Litke felt that it demonstrated to them the superiority of moral education. While they had ineffectually stood by while one house after another was consumed, threatening general destruction, the Russians had, moved by their “moral force” and “European pride,” saved the day. This recognition of moral superiority together with gratitude conclusively reconciled the Russians with the Japanese, and “the harmony and friendly relations remained unbroken until the departure of the frigate.”

The heroism shown by the Russians impressed the Japanese and elevated them above other foreigners. Although the Japanese did not generally differentiate much among Westerners, for the time being, the balance had swung in favor of the Russians. Litke claims that even other foreigners came to seek the Russians’ advice. Summarizing the Russians’ standing, he concludes:

“Without a doubt, all of the previously described circumstances contributed to the fact that the Russians in Nagasaki acquired such influence and enjoyed such honor and affection from the populace, but they never would have achieved that for us, had our own behavior not been consistent with the constant assurances of friendship and sympathy for the Japanese.”

He goes on to admit that perhaps not all of the many Japanese who had gathered to observe the Askolders’ initial landing had looked on with smiling faces.

“In the beginning the settling of 400 people on shore aroused fear and alarm, and they did not look on us kindly, and only shyly approached our lodgings, judging us by their previous experience with Americans who made an unpleasant impression on them before our arrival. But they soon saw in us people who wanted by all means to maintain good relations, not only not bringing them any ill, but bringing them good in some degree. Their fears and doubts gradually began to disappear and to turn into familiarity which in its turn soon changed into attachment and friendship.”

The degree of attachment and affection of the people of Nagasaki for the men of the Askold was clearly demonstrated at the time of the frigate’s departure, when there could be no more expectation of commercial advantages or other rewards. The overwhelming response of the common people, and the absence of their initial mistrust and suspicion convinced the Russians that the Japanese desire for friendship was genuine.

“Several days before the crew boarded the frigate there began in the village a round of general invitations and leave-taking; the residents, men and women without distinction, embraced and kissed our sailors and cried. During the actual boarding, despite our

sailors being led in formation, they found a way of separating, and it took a lot of effort to search for them in houses where the Japanese literally hid them from the officers. At the same time the majority of the villagers accompanied the ranks of sailors to the very wharf, sobbing as they went. Meanwhile the officers were constantly visited by acquaintances from the city, officials and merchants, who expressed their sincerest regrets that the Russians were leaving, gave them parting gifts and begged them not to forget them. The city official in charge of the Russians' affairs...had been ill in bed for several weeks but had himself carried onto a boat in a sedan chair to bid us farewell. Finally, on the day of the frigate's departure, the entire roadstead was full of boats from early morning, while the residents of our village on three enormous boats moved around and around near the frigate, exchanging shouts with the sailors, and when the frigate began to move out of the harbor, shouted in one voice and in Russian: 'proshchaite, proshchaite (farewell, farewell)..., we won't see you again, don't forget us.' Our contractors, with whom we had been in daily contact, accompanied us on the frigate as far as the very outlet to the sea, and cried like little children."

This description may sound exaggerated, and even incredible, but there seems to be little doubt that the men of the Askold had won a special place in the hearts of Nagasaki residents. After such an emotional farewell Litke could not doubt in the sincerity of Japanese friendship. He felt that the long stay of the Askold in Nagasaki "brought useful results and laid a firm foundation for the influence that Russians must make use of in Japan." In order to maintain this influence he recommended that Russian warships frequent Nagasaki. He expected that Nagasaki would become the major international port for Japan because of its superb harbor, excellent climate and proximity to China. He also thought that relations with the residents of Nagasaki were the easiest of all the opened ports of Japan. Nagasaki would occupy a special place in his memory, and that of his shipmates.

"We preserved the deepest and most pleasant memories of our wintering there. They will never be erased from memory, and it is also certain that the Japanese will not soon forget us. The frigate Askold will yet live for a long time in the legends of the Japanese people and Russians visiting Nagasaki will, hearing tales of our life in Goshinji, recall with pleasure on what a high level of independence and esteem had then stood the Russians in Japan."

Although the forceful and resolute actions of the Russians were later condemned by some as arrogant, and without regard for right and wrong, Pompe was in complete disagreement. He felt that the Askolders "did not demand anything to which they did not have a full right...[and that] they refused to be intimidated and... did not accept refusal through insipid answers." He believed that "the envy of those who were less successful will fail to deny them the successful outcome of their efforts."

Rutherford Alcock, the British consul general who visited the Russian colony at Inasa in June 1859, concurred with Pompe's view of the Russian policy of strength combined with courtesy:

"They had been here some months, and this [Inasa] had evidently been made the rendezvous for a Commodore's squadron, consisting of the frigate and half a dozen corvettes and gunboats... I dare say, being here in force, the Russian had had it pretty

much his own way – and obtained what supplies he wanted – with fair words or the strong hand, as the case might require. But, under similar circumstances, the same thing would probably have been done by the senior officer of any other foreign squadron.”

The Askold departed Nagasaki on June 26, 1859, only a few days before that port was officially opened by treaty. Yet the Russians had already effectively opened it to their own ships, just as they had opened the hearts of the people of Nagasaki.

Unkovsky gave gifts of silver and gold in the name of his government to those Japanese officials who had been particularly helpful. He also assured them that his stay in Nagasaki would leave a favorable impression on both him and his government. In addition, “the Russians left many other souvenirs of their stay in Inasa, of which one would see remarkable evidence if one should observe the children at play in that village some years later.”

Conclusion

The more than eight-month stay of the Askold in Nagasaki from 1858 to 1859 marked the opening of the port to foreign habitation and commerce, even before the 1858 treaties officially went into effect. It also showed how the Russians at Inasa enjoyed a position above other Westerners in Nagasaki. Many Russians felt themselves closer to the Japanese and more in sympathy with them, as well as better able to adapt to Japanese ways than other Europeans. To some extent, this is borne out by the eyewitness accounts of British and Dutch observers in Nagasaki at that time. As Westerners who had been forced to live under Mongol domination for centuries, they had a long history of cultural interaction with Asians. As the old saying goes, “Scratch a Russian, find a Tartar.” In addition, the Russian officers and Japanese officials had a common disdain for merchants. The absence of any Russian merchants in Japan at that time gave the Japanese the impression, however false, that there was no merchant class in Russia and thus increased their respect for Russian people.

For the Russians, the long stay of the frigate Askold in Nagasaki not only saved the lives of about half the crew but also realized the desire of Putiatin for true friendship between Russians and Japanese. It was the beginning of unrestricted, independent and intimate relations with Japanese of all classes. Together with the briefer visits of other Russian ships, it established Nagasaki as a friendly port-of-call and winter anchorage for the ships and men of the Russian navy in Far Eastern waters – a situation that would endure until the Russo-Japanese War. It was the reason why, in 1905, more than 1,000 Russian prisoners-of-war were lodged in eighty different homes in Inasa and treated not as enemies, but as old friends. Governments may quarrel but people remain friends.

Strangely enough, the stay of the Askold does not appear in official chronologies of the city of Nagasaki or in chronologies of Russo-Japanese history. This does not mean, however, that it is unworthy of attention. The significance of the stay lies not in the history of official negotiations but in the less documented history of personal communication and cooperation among people from diverse cultures. Tilley observed that at the time Nagasaki had “the most foreign, mixed and changing population of the whole country.”ⁿ In that environment the men of the Askold found a safe haven in their hour of greatest need.

William McOmie. “The Frigate Askold and the Opening of the Russian Foreign Settlement at

Nagasaki.” *Crossroads: A Journal of Nagasaki History and Culture*, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 1–32.