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Frost: the cold as a cultural challenge in Russia.

It always has been cold in Russia. The chronicles inform us of several occasions when the crops froze before harvest. In their diaries, peasant farmers bemoan the hardships of winter, its heavy yoke on village life. The cold brought hunger, disease, grief and suffering, and was a constant experience in Russia over the centuries.

Russia's association with extreme cold was and is unique. Montesquieu, in *Esprit de lois* (1748) was one of the first to point out the connection between climate, human nature, customs and even the constitutions of states. He termed Russia a cold country. He was optimistic that the Russian cold, to which he attributed the characteristics of resilience and courage, would lead Russia into prosperity and progress. Modern terms - such as "Thaw Period" and "Cold War" - are in a metonymic relationship with Russia and the Soviet Union. They have influenced our language and thinking in a rather ambivalent way. The discourses on Russian cold are fed by existential experiences. Russia is subject to extremes of weather courtesy of its geographical location; in the prevailing continental climate, the oceans have little moderating influence. During the summer months, Arctic atmospheric currents float towards Southern Russia, bringing snow even then.

Although cold and frost are central to Russian history, there are very few studies which have systematically investigated how people in Muscovite and Tsarist Russia, and in the Soviet Union coped with the hostile climatic conditions. My project is concerned with the subjective perceptions, social practices and discourses through which Russians from the early modern period through to the late Soviet Union reacted to the subzero temperatures and the harsh climate. Their adaptive measures, whether expressed or negotiated in political, social, aesthetic or economic terms, take center-stage and will be analyzed using methods taken from political history, the history of science, the sociology of risk and social history. A second step will analyze how individual and collective identity is constructed via communication about the cold, and how the extreme climate has characterized the perception of self and other, and the prevailing mentalities. This study's central focus on climate constitutes enrichment to the field of Russian environmental history, which hitherto has been concentrated on the geographic category of space and environmental damage.

In contrast to previous research on Russian and Soviet environmental history, this project will present a *longue durée* history. It will nevertheless investigate practices and interpretations relating to cold at all levels of society, including peasants and workers. Using case studies I will show how in Tsarist Russia and in the Soviet Union society and nature were connected.