

Voice-over:

Along the Arctic Polar Circle, the reindeer herders, the Nenets rule as lords... Yet since as early as the Middle-Ages, the huge riches of these vast, particularly inhospitable spaces have been the subject of much coveting. In the 17th century, the tsars set out to conquer them, starting a colonization war that lasted for over than a century.

TITLE (7'): THE WARRI OF KINGS OF SIBERIA

Voice-over:

At the heart of western Siberia, along the banks of the Nadym River, the ruins of a mysterious fort were recently uncovered. According to the ethnologist Vadim Grisenko, the discovery opens a new chapter in the history of Russian colonization of Siberia. For the Nenet Iznovitch, it's a journey to the heart of the legends still being told by his people.

Voice-over:

Oleg Kardash has been in charge of the excavation for 10 years..

Voice-over:

Nadym is on the Arctic Polar Circle. At this latitude, the earth freezes so deeply that digging is only possible during the few summer weeks when the ground thaws.

Kardash: We started digging here 13 years ago. Over the course of 13 years, we've removed about a meter and a half of the geological layer. Our dig has produced about 15,000 objects and 150,000 bones. But our search is very slow because each summer only about 50cm of earth thaws.

Voice-over:

The first digs at Fort Nadym were fruitful. But time is a limited resource for the archaeologists. In the spring, the site is overrun by the river, which carries away dozens of square meters of earth.

Kardash: This site is still unique for the number of objects from it that are contemporary to Russia's colonization of the Great North. During the search, we found no remains that would be consistent with Russian villages in Siberia... No Christian icons. But surprisingly, taken as a whole, the objects here are not characteristic of an indigenous site either – there are a surprising number of imported objects. This leads me to conjecture that it was the center of a major political and military power with control over a large territory.

Voice-over: Oleg Kardash is facing an enigma:

Who were the inhabitants of Fort Nadym? They weren't Russian, but could they have

been the nomads who lived in the region?

Voice-over:

At the mouth of the Ob River, Nadym would have held a strategic importance at the time. The river was an entry point to western Siberia's virgin territories and a trade route and path for Russian colonization.

Voice-over:

For the old Nenets, Inzovitch, the Nadym bears a worrying past.

Inzovitch: It's better not to sleep here, because this is where my ancestors lived. I still want to live, and they would quickly carry you to the other world.

Voice-over:

In the 16th century, Russia's territories were set in the East by the natural border of the Ural Mountains.

Only a few adventurers dared to go beyond this frontier.

Yermak, a bandit banished by Tsar, was one of them. In 1581 he crosses the Urals at the head of a small army.

Renowned for his courage and leadership, he wins several battles against the Tatars, an invading people from Eastern Europe and Asia.

His taking of Sibiri, opening the door to Siberia, was immortalized by the painter Vasily Surikov.

Voice-over:

Yermak brought considerable war spoils back to Moscow: the furs of 2,400 sables, of 2,000 beavers and of 800 extremely rare black foxes.

Immediately foreseeing the riches that he could draw from the region, the Tsar Ivan the Terrible relieved Yermak and launched the conquest of Siberia...

Robert Delort: It is hard to imagine now the value that fur had at the time. Some called it soft gold, and black gold wasn't petrol but rather the sable's black fur.

This fur was used as a currency, especially in economies that weren't strongly monetized, such as Russia's, where the skin of squirrels counted as money – Pielk – or the skin of martens - Kun.

The fur hunters, the trappers were travelling east. They found there the sables that had disappeared on the west coast.

Voice-over:

At the time, Western Europe was avid for furs from the New World, today's Canada.

Robert Delort: The Canadian trappers would go hunting for fur, usually beaver, that would then be taken to Montreal and from there to the west: Paris or London.

Voice-over:

"Sumptuary" laws would reserve certain types of furs for the highest ranks of European aristocracy. Only princes or kings could wear the rarest furs. This prince's

robe is made from several varieties – the of sable, the lining of stoat, the collar of squirrel.

Robert Delort: *It is hard to imagine now how valuable a sable's skin was at the end of the Middle-Ages and the start of the modern era. The skin of a sable, which weighs on average 60 grams, was worth 60 grams of gold for the kings wardrobe. And as a robe for a king or a lord might be made of 120 or 150 sable skins, you see that the robe was worth 4 or 5 kilos of gold.*

Voice-over:

Teeming with the most beautiful and precious of furs, the Tsar could expect to draw a substantial revenue from the Siberian expanses. But his covetousness quickly met with the resistance of certain indigenous populations, especially the forefathers of today's Nenets: the Samoyeds.

Voice-over:

Soldiers, hunters, and all sorts of adventurers... the Tsar's representatives set off to occupy the great North's virgin territories. They set up would forts called "ostrogs" – fortified sites that would play a key role in the colonization.

Voice-over:

Behind high walls, these strongholds held a few houses and warehouses. These little Russian villages placed under the protection of a church would administer districts, making it possible to control Siberia's immensity.

Voice-over:

Each Ostrog is governed by a Voivoide, upheld by a few soldiers and the kernel of an administration.

Their mission was to take a census of the indigenous population and, more importantly, to claim a tax in furs called the "Yassak".

Voice-over:

The authority's representatives, the voivods regularly sent letters to Moscow providing accounts of the situation at the farthest reaches of the claimed territories.

Kardash entrusted Eugene Verchinine to research these letters, which are still preserved in Moscow.

Verchinine: *We are in the Russian historical archives. There are over 10,000 documents in the Siberia department. The treasures held in these pages are still little known to specialists. They retrace the history of Russia's colonization of Siberia and their contact with the indigenous peoples.*

Voice-over:

The account of governor Teriaev's expedition to reach the **Mangazié** ostrog illustrates the dangers that the Russians exposed themselves to while isolated in the immense wilderness.

Verchinine: *“In July of 1643, two kotchs loaded with wheat and merchandise were sent to Tobolsk for Mangazeïa.”*

A kotch is a 17th century single-mast Russian ship designed for sailing on rivers and in the polar seas. It was aboard such ships that the Russians explored Siberia and set off on perilous expeditions.

“Terrible winds blew over the waters for two days and two nights. And on the third day... both the governor’s kotch and the one carrying merchandises were shattered and left them stranded”.

They stayed there for eight weeks.

And that’s when the Samoyeds encircled them and decided to attack.

At the end of this battle, they left, dragging sleds towards Mangazeïa, with the Samoyeds still shadowing them...

Then the winter arrived.

Every day the Samoyeds would raid them, launching an assault and making off with goods.

It took them eight weeks to travel from the Black Mountains to the mouth of the Taz,

And that’s when the Samoyeds decided to seize the eight sleds carrying their supplies.”

Voice-over:

In the wake of this final attack, the Samoyeds left behind 70 shipwrecked people, with no food, and facing a certain death.

When the soldiers from Mangazié Ostrog finally found them, only 20 were still alive.

The account ends with these words

“The soldiers found the governor Teriaev, his wife and their people. They had had to eat corpses... Then, one and a half day’s walk from the Magazeia ostrog, the governor also died, as did his two daughters and nephew...”

Voice-over:

Might there be a link between the Samoyeds described in this account as responsible for the attack and the village of Nadym? The age of the objects found on the dig matches the date of the archives.

But the site’s unique arrangement is radically different from what archaeologist’s know of Samoyed inhabitations – a nomadic people that live under tents.

An examination of the site’s architecture reveals that Nadym Garadoc bears every resemblance to a fortress.

The inhabitations are covered under a thick layer of earth, which of course protects them from the cold, but also conceals from eventual enemies. Within, two of the dwellings are more spacious and clearly belonged to the clan leaders. Among the

objects found there are many weapons, spread in different, proving that the Samoyeds who lived in Nadym were warriors.

Kardash: There are no other sites with as many swords: several dozen of them, more than 50 knives. These weapons bear witness to the aggressive nature of Nadym Garadok's inhabitants.

Let's suppose that Nadym Garadok's inhabitants, or at least part of them, served a military purpose. What was the aim? Were they fighting against Russian colonization? ~~What was its purpose?~~

Voice-over: Given these weapons, it seems very likely that Nadym's inhabitants took part in the raids mentioned in the Voivods' reports. But there remain questions about their motives.

An ethnologist of arctic populations has investigated the impact of Russian colonization upon the Samoyed way of life.

***Andrei Golovniev:** The Nenets, called Samoyeds in the Middle-Ages, were a hunting community that lived mainly on hunting wild reindeer and sea mammals, as well as fishing. Generally speaking, it was a people who ruled over the Tundra's great expanses.*

Voice-over: Reindeer were the key to power in the Tundra. Thanks to their herds, the Samoyeds could travel over thousands of kilometers.

Still today reindeer determine the lifestyle of the nomads. They have inherited from the Samoyeds the art of raising and taking care of them, an art that made their ancestors the lords of the Tundra.

***Andrei Golovniev:** The reindeer is at once a travel companion, a means of transport, a source of nourishment, and the family mascot. They are friends to man, they live in symbiosis with him, to such an extent that in the shamanic legends, reindeers understand man and act on his behalf. To a certain extent, it is considered man's double; man dresses in its skin. They smell the same.*

Is the reindeer a member of human society, or is the man part of the herd? In reality, it's hard to separate the two.

In the Nenet pantheon, reindeers are of divine nature. The gods travel on their backs, all the heros ride them.

Nenets feed on their raw meat, its burning blood. They believe that he who does not drink the reindeer's fresh blood cannot survive in the Tundra (because of scurvy or other illnesses). And the Nenets esteem that this food pleases the gods, and when they make an offering to the gods, it is always accompanied by the meat and burning blood.

Voice-over: The reindeer breeders' oral tradition still preserves the memory of their Samoyed ancestors. It paints them as a petulant people.

Andrei Golovniev: *Based on their folklore, they were quite belligerent. Many of the legends, especially the ancient one, known as the “sudbots”, tell of battles between tribe ...*

A new era began for the Tundra’s belligerent nomads when the Russians arrived. They’d been the ruling masters, who were now forced to pay the “yassak” – the tax paid in furs, which didn’t suit them at all.

And they reacted as nomads would: they increased the size of their herds so as to move further into the distant Tundras, becoming true shepherds, owners of many livestock. It was thus an economic transformation brought on by the warrior’s political concerns.

They refused to embrace Christianity and finally withheld from adopting Russian laws in order to preserve their own.

And they formed this very mobile, dynamic community, which spoke one and the same language, and they started calling themselves the “neney nenets” -- the “real men”.

Voice-over: It is very valuable to be able to complete the archaeological finds with the legends that the Nenets still share amongst themselves. The ethnologist Vadim Grisenko is visiting the elder of the Niadongui clan with a piece of wood that bears mysterious notches...

Grisenko: *Khabytcha, on one bank of the Nadym, archaeologists found the remains of a fortified village where there was this object, which looks like a stick; but upon closer examination, we found notches on both sides. So we have to wonder, what is it?*

Khabytcha: *You found something of great historical value – a great treasure. There are notches on it. When a tribesman takes as wife a young girl from another tribe... It’s marked here who will give how much and to whom, and on this side here, who will give for the girl and how much.*

Before the Soviet regime, this staff made it possible to decide not only marriages, but also issues of war and peace. In other words, this staff was very important to our tribe.

There is a very ancient legend... One day the forest Samoyeds asked a girl to marry a Tundra Samoyed.

The Tundra Samoyeds refused...

And thus began the hostilities between the two peoples.

But since there were few forest Samoyeds, those from the Tundra massacred them...

The survivors begged them, saying: "Leave us our lives, and we will give you one of our sisters to marry one of yours."

After that, they went to the banks of the Yaroudei River. They found a large larch. Made gashes on both sides of it and swore to never again quarrel and that there would now be an eternal peace between them.

Having made peace, the Tundra Samoyeds gave one of their sisters in marriage to the forest Samoyeds, sealing their reconciliation.

There was never a war between them again...

Voice-over:

This legend remains the only account of an important alliance. It probably describes the birth of the "Great Karatche".

The Great Karatche was the most powerful alliance between Samoyed tribes in history. It became synonymous of a nightmare for the Russians.

Voice-over:

The historian Virchinine has found a complaint from merchants to the Tsar dated January 20th 1637, in which the "Great Karatche" is mentioned for the first time.

Verchinine: "Oh Tsar and great prince of all Russia, your poor and humble servant and merchant, Michka Kondakov, pleads to you. Sire, I lay claim against the Karatche Samoyeds from the other side of the Urals. Last year, 1636, the governor of Mangazie sent my uncle Kirilov to Moscow, accompanied by guides on the winter path. And those guides had no choice but to cross through the territories of the Karatche Samoyed. And those Samoyeds, Sire, having learnt that my uncle was carrying 300 rubles, killed him instead of bringing him to Berezov.

And Sire, these same Samoyeds kill and rob from soldiers and trappers along these same paths.

Voice-over:

Upon discovering this letter, archaeologists were able to establish beyond a doubt the link between the Karatche Samoyeds and Nadym.

On the site are traces of the Samoyed warrior rituals.

Kardash: In 2005 while digging in the southern part of Nadym Garadok, we discovered a ritual ground that included the remains of a great fireplace where the ground was severely scorched ...

This proved that a fire burned there almost continually.

Around the fire, there were about thirty reindeer skulls, set in circles, bearing marks characteristic of sacrifices.

In Nenet legends, preparations for war are called "man-dalada", which means "meeting in a circle". We found there the traces of their ritual activities accomplished in a sort of circle. The Samoyed warriors probably met here before their military missions and then left on their war expeditions, setting off

from a well established place – the chief's home.

Verchinine: *The archival documents highlight a leading figure. An emblematic figure, the head of the Great Karatche union in the mid-17th century: Pos' Khouléïev.*

Voice-over:

Pos' Khouléïev was one of the Tundra's great princes, a chief known for his courage in battle and skill at hunting.

Kardash: *We know that the bow was a weapon used for hunting. But in the Middle Ages it was also used for war.*

The Nenet bow is distinguished by its great size and complex build, which allowed it to be deadly even from a great distance. It was a formidable weapon much used across northwestern Siberia. We found many fragments of bows.

Kardash: *Aside from the bows, we were impressed by how many knives we found. They are swords like this: they look quite small, because they weren't meant for cavalry but for hand to hand combat – that is to say, in direct contact with the enemy.*

There were also battle axes, different from a carpenter's, which has a straight blade.

There are many models of bows and swords, and several smaller wooden replicas, which show that as early as childhood the inhabitants of Nadym Garadok practiced with weapons.

There are many fragments of chainmail. In the middle ages, chainmail was worth a lot – a sort of armor that could only belong to a chief or his guard.

I like to think that Pos' Khouléïev, Nadym Garadok's chief, wore that chainmail.

Voice-over:

Pos' Khouléïev's name appears for the first time in the archives in 1642.

In the middle of the winter, Pos' Khouléïev attacked the Poustozersk Ostrog, located more than 1,000 kilometers from Nadym.

This is what the document tells us:

On February 20th, the Grand Karatche's Samoyeds arrived in front of the Poustoziersk ostrog; Pos' Khouléïev was with them, along with many others, more than 200 men.

And these Samoyeds ransacked the district's villages during four weeks, destroying the icons, desecrating our churches. They stripped and beat people; they tortured them and even killed some....

Under the guidance of strongmen like Pos' Khouléïev and his sons, the Great Karatché regularly ransacked the Russian outposts.

Voice-over:

There were increasing complaints from the governors to the Tsar, but the Karatche's

Samoyeds remained elusive in the Tundra. "As a consequence," they reported, "it's impossible to stop them, or to make them pay the tax..."

It became pressing for the Russians to subdue the rebel Samoyeds, as they had the other nomadic tribes. They counted on the familiar practice of taking hostages to guarantee payment of the tax.

Voice-over:

They were called the AMANAT. Chosen amongst the tribe's most important members, they were freed once the tax had been paid.

Verchinine : Instructions were given to Beriozovo's voivod to take hostages from among the Grand Karatche's followers. An endeavor upon which the archives heap praise:

"On February 8th of this year of 1652, Alexei Likhatchov and Berzov's soldiers returned from Obdorsk..."

And he brought with him four Samoyed hostages, amongst whom was the noble prince of the Grand Karatche's lands: Pos' Khouléïev."

And I told them to keep and to watch these Samoyed hostages with great care and attention, both by night and day, so that they may not escape or inflict any harm upon the soldiers or themselves.

And I gave the order that the necessities for their survival be given to them from your treasury, and that they be fed enough so that, by your Sire's grace, they suffer no lack.

Voice-over:

But taking the Samoyeds hostage did not have the desired effect. (And compromised the levee of taxes in all districts.)

To flee this practice of amanat, the Samoyeds fled far into the Tundra. So well that other ethnic groups who would get the furs from them to pay the taxes, were no longer supplied and found it impossible to pay their tribute of furs to the Russian treasury!

Voice-over:

Eugene Virchinine discovered a letter sent from the Samoyed's neighbors, the Ostiaks. They reveal themselves to be extremely concerned by the capture of Pos' Khouleïev and his men. This is what they write:

Verchinine:

And we, your humble servants, all the Ostiaks, noble subjects and common men, are lost.

Reader : because of these hostages, we have no hope. We, your humble servants, are not hunters, and we have no hunting grounds nearby, and without the Karatche Samoyeds we cannot pay our tribute, and we do not know where to find what we must deliver to you.

Voice-over:

From his cell, Pos' Khouléïev also sends a supplication to the Tsar. He promises submission in exchange for his liberation.

Pos' Khouléïev: "Dear clement Tsar and Grand Duke of all the Russias, Alexeï Mikhaïlovitch, take pity upon us, your humble servants. Order your governor to let us return to our tents, as we have always lived, to avoid great troubles on our grounds.

We, your humble servants, are a savage and nomadic people, and it is impossible for us to remain in one place. We are very afraid of remaining in prison. We promise to return every year to Obdorsk to deliver your tribute. Tsar, be clement and generous."

Verchinine: The archives don't say if Pos' Khouléïev's was considered. But no matter what, a few months later he was freed as many of his entourage took his place as hostages.

Voice-over:

The freeing of chief Pos' Khouléïev gives an idea of the importance of the Samoyed hunters to the Tsar's treasury.

Voice-over:

And yet the Samoyed chief's supremacy was menaced...

Having taken refuge under the Tsar's protection, some receive in exchange for the tax, the "yassak's gift": much desired Russian goods.

It is crucial for the Karatche leaders to underline to their men their status both as warriors and shamen.

Kardash: Among the many objects found in Nadym Garadox, I am most impressed by those for worship, amongst which stands out the shaman's staff. It is an extremely rare object. It is likely that Nadym Garadok was not just a warrior center, but also had a religious function, and that Nadym Garadok's chiefs were also shamen.

Another important proof of Nadym Garadok's religious role is the presence of plaques like this one. This plaque was part of the shaman's costume, and is modeled after the bird's wishbone. The shaman was associated with the eagle, able to fly into the sky.

Voice-over:

Grisenko collected a story from the old Nenet, which might confirm the mythical role that this region played for the ancient Nenets.

They travel up the Ob, to its mouth, Cape Hébidia-salé.

Voice-over:

Old Inzovitch shares the legend of this place.

Inzovitch: The hero Maréhy came from over there, the river Nadym... The devil was blocking the entrance to the Ob River... He decided to kill the devil with an arrow... he drew his bow... the arrow goes over the sacred cape and kills the devil, at the place called Tchiortovy Kolia – "the devil's stake".

Gritsenko: Why hasn't anyone ever lived here ?

Inzovitch: How can one live on holy ground?

Inzovitch: They're afraid. What's sacred is sacred.

Inzovitch: Who wants to die or to become crazy from fear?

Kardash: You mean that abnormal things happen in places like this?

Inzovitch: Things happen. That's why people are afraid to live here, they're afraid of becoming mad.

Kardash: It's surely not by chance that Nadym Garadok is only a few kilometers away. Like all holy places, it draws pilgrims. Its proximity to here proves Nadym Garadok's importance. It was a means to reach this sanctuary, one very important and loded with meaning for the local people.

Kardash: Oh! Vadim!

Gritsenko: Well, look at this!

Gritsenko: It has already started to decompose.

Inzovitch: It's a horn.

Gritsenko: It's a mammoth's tusk.

Kardash: Perhaps this is why this place was considered sacred, because there were the remains of mammoths here.

Inzovitch: Maybe... But nobody ever touches anything here. They're afraid to...

Voice-over:

In the course of their digs, the archaeologist made a macabre discovery.

Voice-over:

In house 8, the house of Nadym's chiefs, they found a room full of bones... most likely the remains of eight people that will reveal an unknown facet of the Grand Karatche's history.

Voice-over:

In all 14 skeletons were found spread around the site.

Laid out in disorder, they could only have been abandoned after their death.

Based on the body's positions, it is clear to the archaeologists that they hadn't been buried.

Voice-over:

Oleg Kardash entrusts these Nadym bones to a forensic scientist from

Yekaterinburg.

Professor Kossintsev shares the conclusions of osteological analysis.

***Kossintsev:** During the course of the dig in the city of Nadym, we found human remains. They belong to 14 people -- 3 adult women, 1 elder man, and also 3 adolescents and 6 children. We also found the remains of a fetus.*

***24:27** These people died in Nadym Garadok between 1729 and 1730.*

*Of course it is impossible now to establish their cause of death. **24:53:01***

Nonetheless, on the child's skull we remark the traces of a blow from either a sword or a heavy knife.

Part of the bone has come away here. The wound was inflicted shortly before its death since there is no trace of scarring.

Kardash:

The question of why these people died in Nadym Garadok remained an enigma for a long time. A murder... most of the dead were women and children, with only one adult man amongst them. The murder of women and children is a completely illogical act – at the time, they were considered to have real value as a bounty...

Voice-over:

The Niadonguis still pass down this troubling account of the clan's origins.

***Khabytcha:** They say that giants once lived on the lake's edges in zemlianki, "underwater houses ". There were seven families.*

Then one day men arrived, a hundred of them, wearing skis.

They circled the village.

It is said that they'd never seen such strong men and that this was why they had to die.

The battle was uneven and the giants were killed.

Only a limping giant was left. He took a bow and arrows, then from on top of a roof, shot down at the enemies. He killed them all!

As to the women, they locked themselves away in the houses with the children and died of hunger...

Just one child survived. He came out, put on skis, and went in search of a place where men lived.

He found the track of a sled, followed it, and soon saw a home.

He was barely living by this point.

He was greeted by the people.

And in the house was an old man with his wife and their daughter.

The old man killed a reindeer, gave the blood to the boy to drink, and he survived.

Then the old man said: "Since you have no one, stay with us, and you will marry our daughter."

The boy was named "Sèra" — he who survived hunger.

They lived a long life. The old man and his wife died, and the young raised their own reindeer.

And that is how the Neneb tribe of the Niadongui was born”.

Voice-over:

This Nenet legend from the Niadongui clan remains the only hypothetical account of the Nadym Garadok.

***Kardash:** Ten years after the discovery of human bones during the Nadym Garadok dig, we were able to find archival documents from the Arkhangelsk region, which allowed us to match the archaeological finds, the Niadonqui legend, and real historical events.*

The document says that during the winter of 1730-1731, Karatche Samoyeds once again attacked the Poustozersk district, hoping to loot the region. But the city of Poustozersk had prepared for the attack, which thus failed ...

***Kardash:** 56 Karatché Samoyedes were captured, including their chief Paloma Tibilim.*

They were interrogated and tortured and Chief Paloma Tibilim died under the knout.

What does this document tell us?

It confirms that Nadym Garadok found itself defenseless during the winter of 1730-1731. The Great Karatche's army was campaigning and only women and children would have stayed behind.

It was one of the Karatche's rare military defeats that would have cost their lives.

It would seem that Samoyeds who had joined the Russians of the Poustozersk district were sent on a punitive expedition to Nadym Garadok.

Voice-over:

In 1734, an explorer to the region noted in his travel log: We followed the mouth of the Ob and passed by Ndim Garadok. Looted, the fortress had been destroyed."

***Kardash:** We can thus understand why there were such bones there... Karatche's final inhabitants were caught off-guard and massacred. It is likely the death of the chief's family and the destruction of Nadym Garadok that marked the end of the Great Karatche.*

Voice-over:

Thereafter, ever more avid for furs, the Tsars would spread their empire across the entire Asian continent up to the north of the American continent...

The Samoyed's heroic resistance lasted only a century. But the Nenet's myths still carry the glorious shadow of this time when the reindeer hunters were the uncontested masters of the Tundra

THE END