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The Russian State Library (RSL), founded more than 150 years ago, is considered one of the world’s largest libraries: its collections contain over 47 million items, and its 36 halls receive over 800,000 visitors per year

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for Inquisitive People

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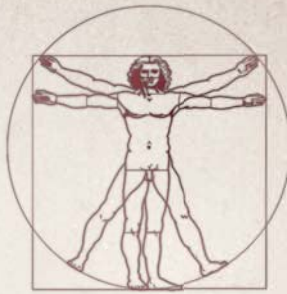
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*“The natural desire
of good men is knowledge”*

Leonardo da Vinci

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Founder and First
Editor-in-Chief
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of the journal
SCIENCE First Hand
Academician Nikolay
L. Dobretsov

Dear friends!

Today people keep talking about the Northern Sea Route, the shortest route between the European part of Russia and the Far East, or between Europe and Asia, passing through the seas of the Arctic Ocean. Ice is said to be the main obstacle to seafaring in these waters; it is only powerful icebreakers that can ensure year-round navigation along this main thoroughfare in the Russian Arctic.

Ice reconnaissance employs a wide variety of means, including helicopters, aircraft, and even drones. However, as early as 1919, German pilot Walther Bruns proposed the idea of using an airship for commercial flights from Europe to Japan and the United States across the Arctic, and hydrographer Ludwig Breitfuß supported this idea, proposing a route over Emperor Nicholas II Land (now the Severnaya Zemlya archipelago).

These ideas laid the cornerstone for establishing in 1924 the International Society for the Exploration of the Arctic Regions by Means of the Airship (Aeroarctic), which we wrote about previously. This time our readers have a chance to look at a unique document submitted to the Soviet government on behalf of Bruns and now stored in the archival collection of the Polar Commission at the St. Petersburg Branch of the RAS Archives. According to the author of this project, its implementation “should bring enormous progress to all branches of both special polar research and technical equipment in hard-to-reach polar regions since it will provide full capability to easily and quickly overcome huge, inaccessible areas; carry out all kinds of research; deliver, to any location, both people and cargo, such as radio and geophysical stations with full equipment and substantial life supplies; and, finally, rescue people and valuable cargo from wrecked ships.”

The Russian State Library is one of the world’s largest book repositories keeping tens of millions of printed and manuscript volumes. However, few people know that its collections also contain numerous books for younger readers, beginning with the first moralizing stories of the 19th century.

In the new issue of our magazine, we recall the exhibition “Books of the Old House: Childhood World in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” which displayed the best children’s editions featuring works by outstanding Russian and international illustrators, including books from former estates and personal libraries, even those possessed by the family of the last Russian Emperor, Nicholas II. The exhibition review offers an opportunity to understand how parents as well as children saw the world at the turn of the century.

As we know, by far not all periods of human history are documented – a major portion of it is “unwritten.” However, we can reconstruct events of the distant past using sciences such as anthropology, archaeology, etc. However, surprises often await researchers on this path.

Novosibirsk archaeologist Natalia Polosmak and her team had expected that a large burial mound they excavated in the Southern Altai Mountains near the Katanda Kurgan, the most enigmatic burial complex of the Pazyryk culture, would also be attributed to the Pazyryk people. Instead, the researchers discovered a burial site of the little-studied Afanasievo culture, more than 2000 years older. An unknown ritual was performed over a Caucasian man buried in the grave, leaving traces of red ochre on the skeleton and broken pottery... The Afanasievo culture is a crucial chapter in the ancient history of not only the Altai Mountains but the entire Central Asia. However, this chapter has yet been written only to a half.

*Editorial board and editorial office
of the journal SCIENCE First Hand*

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