

The Smithsonian's Tartarian Secret

Exploring an Unexpected Connection



JORDAN NUTTALL

MAY 23, 2026

I have spent the entirety of the day in the garden, dear reader, basking in the rare and bountiful grace of the afternoon sun.

There is a *primal*, grounding truth in the warmth of the light upon one's skin, a subtle, universal embrace felt by all who roam this Earth, regardless of the era they call their own.

It occurred to me, in the stillness of the day, that I had never turned my attention toward the *Smithsonian* archives.

Given the depth of revelation we have unearthed in other, older repositories, the realisation struck me with the force of an imperative.

My research today was, for the most part, a test of **patience**.

Despite the persistent, documented accounts within 19th-century newspapers detailing the discovery of monolithic skeletal remains and the subsequent, direct involvement of the Smithsonian in their disappearance, the institution's official registers are conspicuously barren.

Not a single reference to these giants remains on the record.

My inquiries into magic and witchcraft, the very subjects that have occupied our recent, rigorous study, yielded similarly quiet results.

The system, it seems, remains adept at guarding its own silences.

Yet, one final thread remained to be pulled:

Tartary

And there, emerging from the digital ether, was an anomaly that is as provocative as it is unexplained.

It is a singular, jarring reference, existing in a context that defies the expected administrative classification.

We shall examine this fragment together, curious mind, to see what it contributes to the unfolding mystery of Tartaria, that vast, architectural, and historical tapestry we have been meticulously unravelling these past few months.

Accession 05-206 



Finding Aids to Official Records of the
Smithsonian Institution Archives

Accession 05-206

Smithsonian Associates

Audiotapes, 2004

Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution
Archives, Washington, D.C.
Contact us at osiaref@si.edu.

Creator: Smithsonian Associates

Title: Audiotapes

Dates: 2004

Quantity: 4 cu. ft. (4 record storage

	boxes)
Collection:	Accession 05-206
Language of Materials:	English
Summary:	This accession consists of master cassette audiotapes of educational programs and meetings presented by the various program offices within the Smithsonian Associates.

Descriptive Entry

This accession consists of master cassette audiotapes of educational programs and meetings presented by the various program offices within the Smithsonian Associates.

Correale Museum of Sorrento,
04/28/2004

East to Tartary, 04/24/2004 (4 tapes)

Garden, 04/30/2004 (4 tapes)

Exquisite Piracy, 04/30/2004

Folder 5

Box 2 of 4

The file we are looking at, dear reader, **Accession 05-206**, is a collection of master cassette tapes from 2004.

These are not secret, deep-state intelligence dossiers; they are something perhaps more telling.

They are recordings of educational programs and meetings hosted by the *Smithsonian Associates*, the institution's sprawling, **non-federally funded** arm responsible for public lectures, study tours, and the dissemination of *official* knowledge.

When you see ***East to Tartary*** listed there, alongside titles like *Garden* and *Exquisite Piracy*, you aren't looking at a historical document from the 1800s.

You are looking at a snapshot of a lecture given in the very recent past, 2004, within the polished, controlled environment of the Smithsonian.

The weight of this shouldn't be underestimated simply because it is recent.

It reveals that as late as 2004, the concept of *Tartary* was still being packaged, presented, and potentially contained within the Smithsonian's own lecture circuit.

It confirms that the subject wasn't entirely erased from their institutional consciousness; it was curated.

What is most provocative is the company *East to Tartary* keeps.

These tapes appear to be a batch of recordings, the raw material of an educational series.

To find *Tartary* sitting quietly in a folder alongside other, seemingly unrelated topics suggests it was treated as just another academic niche, a subject to be lectured upon, defined, and then filed away in a record storage box.

It highlights a critical question:

If they were speaking about *East to Tartary* in 2004, what exactly were they saying?

Were they reinforcing the conventional, academic borders of history, or were they grappling with the same anomalies that we are currently unearthing?

This isn't just an archive entry; it is a signal that the narrative was being actively maintained in our own lifetime, right under the umbrella of one of the world's most powerful keepers of history.

It proves that the *mystery* of Tartaria isn't just buried in the 19th century, it is something that institutions have had to consciously address, manage, and categorise well into the 21st.

From Tartary to the Emergence

8. JAPAN AND ITS REGION

As the 'Far East' emerged – like a photograph in developing fluid, taking on clear outlines and colours – so it displaced other older European regional concepts, most notably the idea of 'Tartary'. In seventeenth-, eighteenth- and even early nineteenth-century English-language writings, as we have seen, Tartary was a vast realm that extended from the Caspian Sea to the frontiers of Japan itself. For example, eighteenth-century Scottish writer Thomas Salmon's fascinating and encyclopedic *Modern History, or the Present State of All Nations* (1739) – written at a time when the very notion of 'modern history' was assuming its 'modern' form²¹ – concludes its section on the 'Present State of Japan' with a discussion of 'the Land of Jesso, Said to be a Tributary to Japan, and of the Various Opinions Concerning its Joining to America'. This notes of Jesso (Ezo, present-day Hokkaido and the northern islands beyond): 'whether it doth not join to the north part of Japan, which is but little known to the Japanese themselves, is not yet determined ... Neither does it as yet clearly appear, whether this land of Jesso is a part of Tartary, or whether by an arm of the sea divided from it'.²²

Salmon, of course, only had access to a potpourri of second-hand knowledge about Japan and the surrounding countries (which contains surprisingly accurate details on some issues, side by side with fascinating confusions and misapprehensions on others²³). But the difference between his work and those of early twentieth-century writers on the Far East is not just a gap in access to accurate information, nor is the difference between Tartary and the Far East simply a matter of the redrawing of geographical boundaries between regions. There is also (I think) an important qualitative difference between these two regional concepts. Tartary was not a realm occupied by nation-states; indeed, the 'nations' of Thomas Salmon's modern history are not necessarily *nation-states* at all. Rather, they are a miscellany of 'peoples' who are variously described as tribes, kingdoms, principalities, etc.

21 Reinhard Koselleck notes that 'modern' or '*neue Zeit*' shifts during the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from being a purely chronological marker of recent times to having a particular content associated (as it is in the writings of Salmon) with the Western voyages of exploration, the spread of the printed word and the new intellectual currents of the Reformation. See Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 224–36.

22 Thomas Salmon, *Modern History; or, The Present State of All Nations*, vol. 1 (Dublin: George Grierson, 1727), p. 65.

23 On the practice of *seppuku* in Japan, for example, 'when a great man makes an entertainment, 'tis usual at the end of the feast to call his servants together, 'tis said, and demand which of them will kill themselves before the guests; and that thereupon they contend who shall first rip up their bowels'. Salmon, *Modern History*, p. 57.

ON THE FRONTIERS OF HISTORY

Tartary, in other words, was a fluid world where a whole range of societies – which might or might not have identifiable political structures – intermingled, exchanged goods and ideas, did battle and migrated across the face of the land. This of course reflects the fact that in the eighteenth century the authority of centralised states such as China, Korea, Japan and Russia only extended across limited parts of the area we call 'East Asia'. Between were wide realms occupied by very small kingdoms (such as the Ryukyu Kingdom) or by non-state societies such as those of the Ainu, Nivkh, Uilta, Nanai and other indigenous groups of the north-eastern parts of the Asian continent.

By the time we come to early twentieth-century writings on 'the New Far East', though, these regions had almost entirely been incorporated into states, and the Far East was therefore envisaged as a space entirely occupied by state-controlled territories, even if some of these were colonised states and others are colonising states. The bounds of Tartary could only be described by reference to physical features – mountains, rivers and seas – and its peoples were described largely through ethnographic accounts of their customs. The twentieth-century Far East, on the other hand (as in Krausse's work), was defined by a catalogue of clearly bounded states, and the narratives that described the Far East were overwhelmingly state-centred narratives. Importantly, this state-centred vision of the region then came to be projected backward onto history: the history of the Far East became the history of its major states, and many of the peoples of Tartary and beyond lost their place in history except to the extent that they impinged (because of wars, invasions, etc.) on the historical narratives of those states.

While states provided the spatial architecture for the early twentieth-century 'Far East', its temporal architecture was provided by narratives of progress. Of course, ideas of civilisation, barbarism and progress were present to some extent in pre-nineteenth-century works like Salmon's *Modern History*, but they played a different and more limited role. In this eighteenth-century 'modern history', true civilisation is the prerogative of Protestant Western Europe, while, at the other end of the scale, some extremely unfamiliar social forms are identified as survivals from the archaic past. When he deals with nations outside Europe, however, Salmon is much more likely to judge them in ethical or aesthetic terms than to rank them in terms of progress.

The twentieth-century narratives of the New Far East, on the other hand, focused on the struggle of nation-states to obtain temporal, as well as spatial, superiority over others by becoming if possible larger and stronger, but above all more *advanced*. The rank ordering of nations on the ladder of progress, and the task of explaining their position on the ladder, had become the core task of Far Eastern history, and this was of course reflected not only in studies of the region as a whole, but also in the first major European and American scholarly histories of Japan.

This thread, once pulled, unravels far more than a simple oversight, dear reader.

Following that Smithsonian reference from the digital index to its academic source, I found a study titled:

JAPAN AND ITS REGION: FROM TARTARY TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW AREA STUDIES

The author, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, lays it out with jarring clarity:

Tartary was not a ghost; it was a *fluid world*

It was a vast, interconnected realm of diverse peoples and kingdoms that operated entirely outside the rigid lines we are told defined the past.

The passage confirms that while *Tartary* was the standard term used in 17th and 18th-century English writings, the narrative had to shift as colonial powers moved to construct the ***Far East***.

This wasn't an accident of language; it was a deliberate, documented strategy.

The 20th-century obsession with the *nation-state* demanded a new, **artificial history**.

To force the world into a tidy collection of competing states, the old, fluid reality of Tartary had to be dismantled.

As nations began defining themselves by their position on a *ladder of progress*, the history of Tartary, which refused to climb that ladder or fit into that hierarchy, was discarded.

It became *lost* to history specifically because it stood as a contradiction to the map modern institutions needed us to believe in.

This simple breadcrumb, found in the archives of the same institution that keeps our other questions silent, leads to a much larger truth.

Tartary was not a myth that faded into the ether; it was a reality systematically scrubbed from the record, replaced by the antiseptic, state-centric borders we mistake for the only version of the world that ever existed.

We are not looking at a history that slipped through the cracks; we are looking at one that was intentionally archived into oblivion.

[Subscribe](#)

And so, dear reader, what started out as a fruitless endeavour, blossomed into a vibrant flower of history, and we shall now reflect upon its petals.

We began this journey by staring into the cold, curated silence of an institution that has long held the keys to our collective memory, only to

find the halls barred and the records scrubbed.

It is a peculiar kind of heartbreak to realise that those we trust to shepherd our past are the very architects of its disappearance.

Yet, in that stillness, in the act of simply refusing to look away, we found that the cracks in their fortress are wider than they ever dared to admit.

This search demanded more than just data; it required a quiet, unwavering patience.

It asked us to sit with the absence, to let the silence of the archives become a mirror that reflected the true, jagged shape of what was missing.

We learned that Tartaria was never truly lost; it was just hidden behind a veil of terminology, buried beneath the weight of maps that were drawn with the intent to divide, to categorise, and ultimately, to erase.

To hold the name *Tartary* in one's mind is to feel the phantom limb of an older, grander world, a world of fluid borders, of a connectivity that modern history cannot account for, and therefore, must destroy.

It is a thrilling, **heavy realisation**.

We are not just uncovering historical footnotes; we are witnessing the autopsy of a reality that was deemed too vast, too independent, and too untamable for the small, boxed-in existence we are prescribed today.

This has been a testament to the power of the seeker.

By pulling a single, overlooked thread from an archive of dust-laden tapes, we have unspooled a narrative that spans centuries, a revelation

that our modern "reality" is but a thin, synthetic veneer laid over a much deeper, more ancient, and infinitely more mysterious foundation.

Let this be our **anchor**.

The silence of the institution is not a sign of nothingness; it is a sign of a great, guarded secret.

We have moved beyond the sterile, state-sanctioned versions of how the world came to be, and we are now standing on the threshold of a history that breathes again.

Carry this weight with you, curious mind.

The garden may be quiet, but the earth beneath it remembers everything, and we are finally learning how to listen.

This search is, and always will be, a pursuit driven by the internal necessity to understand.

It is a compulsion that resides in the marrow, a refusal to accept the inherited map when the terrain beneath our feet tells a different, deeper story.

Your curiosity is the most valuable currency in this exchange, and it is the fuel that allows us to look where others have been instructed to look away.

I ask for nothing, as the work is its own reward, and the path remains open regardless of contribution.

However, should you feel moved to support this endeavour, please know that every resource provided goes directly toward the procurement of rare literature and the continued access to archives.

The search continues, with or without aid, because the truth of our history is not a commodity, it is a reclamation.

Thank you for your presence, and your own unwavering desire to see clearly, *dear reader*.

[BUY ME COFFEE !\[\]\(70d2c6078ab65d8fee937ad46006682c_img.jpg\)](#)

[Comment](#)

[Share](#)
