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Russian Colonization: The Implications of Mercantile Colonial Practices in the North Pacific

ABSTRACT

The maritime fur trade propelled Russian expansion into the North Pacific in the 18th and 19th centuries. The mercantile legacy of Russian colonization is evident in the rapid founding of settlements across an immense region, the corporate hierarchy of the colonial administration, and the policies and practices for the treatment of indigenous peoples. Russian fur merchants transported to North America colonial practices that originated in Siberia. In contrast to American and British merchants on the Northwest Coast who relied on commodity exchange with autonomous native hunters for furs, Russians forced native hunters to work directly for their companies, initially by military force and the taking of hostages to insure tribute payments and later by mandatory conscription. While relatively few Europeans immigrated to Russian America, colonial administrators relocated scores of native and "mixed blood" workers to new colonies. What emerged was a different twist to the colonial encounters that unfolded among indigenous populations and "colonists." Rather than confronting successive waves of European immigrants, local peoples interacted primarily with other natives from homelands dispersed across the North Pacific. Historical archaeology has much to contribute to understanding the long-term impacts of "native-to-native" interactions in pluralistic colonial communities.

Introduction

Russian exploration and settlement in the North Pacific was driven primarily by the commercial incentives of the maritime fur trade, specifically the intensive harvesting of sea otters and, to a lesser extent, fur seals. A network of Russian colonies extended eastward from Siberia, including outposts on Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands, into what would become known as "Russian America," a vast region extending across the Aleutian, Kodiak, and Pribilof archipelagos, southern Alaska, northern California, and even Hawaii (Figure 1). While the Tsarist government

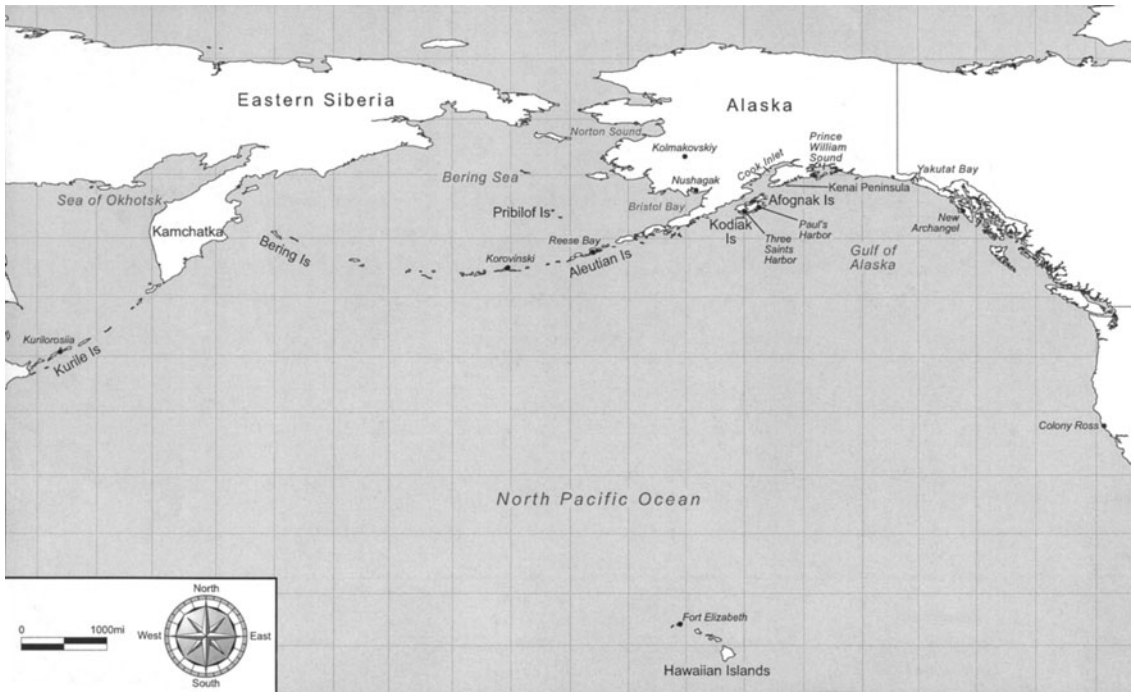

FIGURE 1. Eastern Siberia and Russian America, showing selected place names and archaeological sites. (Map by Lisa Holm.)

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was concerned with the North Pacific for geopolitical reasons and the Russian Orthodox Church founded missions among native populations, Russian presence in North America focused on the exploitation of commercially viable resources. The mercantile roots of Russian colonization had long-term implications for how the colonies were administered, who controlled access to economic resources, how the colonial hierarchy was organized, and ultimately how native peoples were treated.

In presenting a brief overview on Russian colonization in North America, the early history of Russian movement into the North Pacific and the formation of the Russian-American Company are outlined. Three salient characteristics of the Russian colonial program are discussed: its extensive scale, its administration by a corporate hierarchy, and its reliance on native hunters in order to compete in the maritime fur trade. The resettlement of scores of native and "mixed blood" workers into Russian colonies had significant consequences for the composition of multiethnic communities and the kinds of colonial encounters that took place with indigenous communities. The study of these "native-to-native" encounters in Russian settlements is crucial for understanding how social processes unfolded in these pluralistic colonial contexts and how native identities were both transformed and perpetuated in the North Pacific.

Maritime Fur Trade

Peter the Great initiated the early exploration of the cold and mysterious waters of the North Pacific by drafting orders for the first official reconnaissance east of Siberia shortly before his death. In 1728, Vitus Bering, a Dane serving in the Imperial Russian Navy, directed the small coastal ship, *St. Gabriel*, on its voyage of discovery to determine whether Siberia was connected to the American coastline (north of the Kamchatka coast) and to report on any signs of European settlements (Fisher 1990:17–19; Smith 2000:9). While the first voyage failed to "discover" America, it led to another, more elaborate program of exploration known as the Second Kamchatka Expedition. The celebrated Pacific crossing of Vitus Bering and Alexeii Chirikov in 1741–1742, on board the *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* not only made landfalls along the northern and southern ends of the Alaskan panhandle but also stops at Shumagin Islands and several of the Aleutian Islands (Fisher 1990:25–28). Bering and his crew also wintered on what would be known as Bering Island, where many of the men, including the captain, died from scurvy.

The Bering and Chirikov voyage of 1741–1742 brought back to Russia eyewitness accounts of rich waters and verdant lands teaming with fur-bearing mammals—stories that were backed up with the procurement of 900 pelts of sea otter, fur seal, and blue Arctic fox during the winter encampment on Bering Island (Fisher 1990:28). The resulting "fur rush" to the North Pacific was precipitated by Russian traders who knew that Chinese merchants would pay very dearly for sea otter pelts. The dense, luxuriant fur served as a distinctive trim for the clothes of the Manchu upper class and produced exceptionally soft, warm, and attractive robes for any Asian or European elite experiencing a cold winter. Sea otter, the royal fur of the Middle Kingdom in China, opened the door to the hugely profitable but closely guarded traffic of Asian goods (Gibson 1987:34–35). The Tsarist government initiated treaties with the Chinese to grant Russian commercial houses the privilege of trading their pelts at Kiakhta (or Kyakhta) on the Russian-Mongolian border south of Lake Baikal and Tsurukhaitui (Gibson 1992a:12–18). Here pelts were exchanged for tea, spices, silk, nankeen, porcelain, sugar candy, and other goods that were then readied for export to European and American consumers (Tikhmenev 1978:162). In addition to the lucrative sea otter trade, there was also a strong market in Europe and Asia for fur seal pelts (Fedorova 1973:188).

Beginning in 1743, a plethora of Russian fur companies competed with one another in the extensive exploitation of fur-bearing mammals from North Pacific waters. Financed by Russian investors and merchants, these companies typically existed for only a single voyage, with the sea otter and fur seal catch being divided by shares among the financiers, captain, crew, and Russian fur trade workers or *promyshlenniks* (Fisher 1990:28–30). During the first 12 years (1743–1755), about 22 companies harvested sea mammals off the coast of Kamchatka to the Near Aleutian Islands (Fedorova 1973:104–105). As sea otter populations near the Siberian coast were exterminated, fur traders were forced to

voyage ever farther eastward. Between 1756 to 1780, 48 fur hunting expeditions took place along the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island, and the Alaskan Peninsula and contacts were made with local Unangan (Aleut) and Alutiiq-speaking peoples (Fedorova 1973:105).

By 1780, many of the smaller companies had become obsolete as the fur trade voyages became more capital intensive, involving bigger ships, more extensive provisions, larger crews, and bases for wintering workers. Among the earliest Russian settlements in Alaskan waters were Illiuliuk and Eguchshak, established on Unalaska Island in 1772–1775 (Senkevitch 1987:149–153). But it was not until two of the most successful merchants, Grigorii Shelikhov and Ivan Golikov, merged their holdings that formal plans could be implemented for establishing permanent, self-sustaining settlements in Russian America (Fedorova 1973:15, 106; Fisher 1990:30). Beginning with the founding of Three Saints Harbor on Kodiak Island in 1784, these settlements served as bases on Pacific islands and the Alaskan coastline for harvesting fur pelts. The consolidation of fur trade companies continued with the creation of the Russian-American Company in 1799. In granting the company its first charter, Tsar Paul I conferred upon this commercial venture an exclusive Russian monopoly over the exploitation of resources in North America, as well as the rights to be the sole Russian agency for founding and administrating colonies in the Americas.

The Russian-American Company

Russian colonization in the Americas was directed and administered by the Russian-American Company from 1799 to 1867, at which time Alaska was purchased by the United States. The company was modeled after other commercial monopolies of the day (e.g., Hudson's Bay Company, East India Company), as it was run as a quasi-private mercantile corporation financed primarily by private capital from stockholders. However, the company was closely monitored by the Tsar and various departments of the Russian Imperial government, and the Tsar's family owned stock in the fur trade conglomerate (Fedorova 1973:130–134; Gibson 1976:10; Tikhmenev 1978:56).

Some scholars stress that the Russian-American Company served as a "de facto agency of the Imperial Russian government" in North America (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:li). Nonetheless, the company was a mercantile venture that had to answer to stockholders and produce dividends. Profits had to be generated in order to operate its fur trade enterprise, and it appears that the Tsarist government subsidized very little of the commercial activities of the company. Following the Bering expeditions, the Russian government did send naval ships to the North Pacific to explore and map the region, to make scientific observations, as well as to raise the imperial flag. Catherine II dispatched voyages in 1768–1769 (Krenitsyn-Levashov voyage) and 1785–1792 (the renowned Billings-Sarychev expedition). In 1803 the government initiated the first of 40 round-the-world voyages from Kronstadt, its navy base on the Baltic (Wheeler 1987:49–50; Fisher 1990:30–31; Smith 2000). In their circumnavigation, Russian naval vessels probed much of the North Pacific, visited Russian-American Company settlements, explored uncharted coastlines, and kept a watchful eye on foreign intruders. However, the Russian-American Company had to pay high prices for any freight transported to its colonies, and it reimbursed the government for most of the salaries of military personnel stationed in Russian America (Fedorova 1973:157–158; Gibson 1976:87).

The commercial underpinnings of the company become clear when one considers three salient characteristics of the Russian colonial program: its extensive scale, its corporate hierarchy, and its treatment of native workers.

Extensive Scale

Compared to the French, British, and Spanish colonial programs in the Americas, the Russians are often portrayed as a rather marginal colonial enterprise. The former superintendent of the Sitka National Historical Park estimates that up to 90% of United States citizens are unaware of Russian colonial efforts in North America (Suazo et al. 1990:454; see also Smith and Barnett 1990: 9). While working at the Fort Ross State Historic Park in northern California, it was noted that most Californians are pretty well versed about nearby Franciscan missions, Spanish *presidios*, and Mexican *ranchos*, but they know very little about Russia's settlements outside Alaska,

even those in their own backyard. It is apropos that the organizers of a recent museum exhibition and publication on Russian colonization entitled their project "Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier" (Smith and Barnett 1990).

The relative obscurity of the Russian enterprise makes little sense when one considers that the commercial empire of the Russian-American Company spanned the entire North Pacific (Figure 1). More than 60 Russian settlements were founded in a vast region from the Kurile Islands, the Aleutian and Kodiak archipelagos, coastal and interior Alaska, as well as northern California and Hawaii (Fedorova 1973:272; Mills 2002). While geopolitical aspirations of the Russian Imperial government most certainly played a role in this expansionary colonial program, it was the profit-making motive of commercial enterprise that drove it. The overhunting of sea otter and fur seal populations continually forced the Russians to search for untapped marine habitats where fur-bearing sea mammals could still be harvested. Company administrators also advocated the exploration of new regions that might contain commercially viable resources, such as minerals, timber, fish, and terrestrial fur mammals.

The Russian-American Company's expansion into southeastern Alaska and northern California in the early 1800s followed the overexploitation of sea otters in the Aleutian and Kodiak archipelagos, the Alaskan Peninsula, and Prince William Sound and the need to build new posts where sea mammal hunting could still be undertaken. When Colony Ross was founded in northern California in 1812, it not only served as a base for hunting sea otters but also as a settlement where agricultural and mercantile production could take place (Farris 1989; Lightfoot et al. 1991). The aborted attempt to establish Fort Elisabeth and two smaller forts on Kaua'i Island, Hawaii, in 1816–1817 was entwined with both geopolitical aspirations and commercial incentives (Pierce 1965; Mills 2002). The company recognized Hawaii's potential for producing sandalwood, sugarcane, and food crops as well as serving as a convenient mid-Pacific stop between Kamchatka and Russian American colonies (Barratt 1990). After about 1818, when yields of sea otter and fur seal decreased markedly along coastal Alaska and northern California due to overharvesting, the managers of the Russian-American Company turned their attention to the northern latitudes, "into the heart of Alaska" (Fedorova 1973:107). Small trade outposts, *redoubts*, were established at the mouths and along the interior drainages of the Copper, Nushagak, Kuskokwim, and Kvikhpak (Yukon) rivers as well as on Bristol Bay and Norton Sound. These served as trading posts for procuring beaver, river otters, fox, marten, bear, lynx, and walrus tusks as well as bases to explore the interior for minerals and other resources (VanStone 1972; Oswalt 1980; Arndt 1990; Dumond and VanStone 1995).

Archaeological research provides an excellent window for viewing the extensive scale and diversity of Russian America. Outside of a few vodka-drinking circles, it is a little-known fact that archaeological studies of Russian settlements and associated native villages span the entire North Pacific and that a sizeable corpus of information exists for undertaking comparative work on the Russian colonial program through time and space. Archaeological investigations along the northern Pacific Rim include the Kurile Islands, with emphasis on the Kurilorossiia outpost on Urup Island (Shubin 1990, 1994); Atka Island, where field work focused on Korovinski, an important company base in the central Aleutian Islands (Veltre 1979, 2001); Reese Bay, Unalaska Island (Veltre and McCartney 2001a); Kodiak Island, including Three Saints Harbor (Clark 1985; Crowell 1997a), St. Paul's Harbor (the first administrative center of the company in Russian America) (Dilliplane 1990a:138–139; Smith and Peterson 1990) and Nunakakhnak village (Knecht and Jordan 1985); Afognak Island (Woodhouse-Beyer 2001); and the Sitka region, location of St. Archangel Michael (Old Sitka) and New Archangel (the second administrative center) (Blee 1985, 1990; Dilliplane 1990b; Suazo et al. 1990; Petruzelli and Hanson 1998; Thompson 1999; Grover 2000). In addition, a comprehensive archaeological investigation of Russian-period settlements on the Pribilof Islands (focusing on St. Paul Island) was initiated in 2000 by Douglas Veltre and Allen McCartney (2000, 2001b).

A significant program of survey and excavation has focused on interior Alaskan trade posts (e.g., Nushagak [Aleksandrovskiy Redoubt], Kolmakovskiy Redoubt) and nearby native villages (e.g., Paugvik, Akulivikchuk, Tikchik, and Crow Village) along the Copper, Nushagak,

Kuskokwim, and Naknek rivers (VanStone 1955, 1968, 1970a, b, 1972; Oswalt and VanStone 1967; Oswalt 1980; Dumond 1981; Dumond and VanStone 1995). Considerable archaeological research has also been undertaken at Colony Ross in northern California, including studies of the Ross settlement, adjacent residential neighborhoods of the multiethnic workers, nearby native communities, the Ross cemetery, outlying ranches, and the Russian hunting camp or *artel* on the Farallon Islands (Treganza 1954; Riddell 1955; Farris 1989, 1990, 1993, 1997; Lightfoot et al. 1991, 1997; Goldstein 1992, 1995; Osborn 1992, 1997; Wake 1995, 1997a, b; Parkman 1996/1997; Allan 1997, 2001; Ballard 1997; Martinez 1997, 1998; Selverston 1999; Parrish et al. 2000). Finally, recent survey and excavation work has been directed at the study of Fort Elisabeth on Kaua'i Island, Hawaii (Mills 1997, 2002).

Corporate Hierarchy

A rather unique characteristic of Russian colonization was the administration of the far-flung colonies by a corporate hierarchy. The Russian-American Company was directed by a four-member board of directors, elected by the stockholders who worked out of the main administration offices in St. Petersburg, Russia. The directors were responsible for maintaining capital assets, for increasing profit margins, and for developing economic strategies for fur hunting and world trade (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:xxxvii). The directors reported directly to the Tsar and various governmental department heads on critical issues concerning the company and Russian American colonies. The company's operations in Russian America were directed by the chief manager (or chief administrator) who served in the capacity of governor for the Russian American colonies. His duties involved managing the different administrative *counters* or districts, enforcing Russian laws, negotiating with foreign traders, entertaining important visitors, and hiring much of the workforce (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989: xxxviii–xl). The chief manager reported directly to the board of directors, and he was headquartered in the commercial and administrative capital of Russian America, which moved from St. Paul's Harbor, Kodiak Island, to New Archangel in Sitka, Alaska, in 1804. The first chief manager was Aleksandr Baranov, a pragmatic and seasoned merchant with many years of service in commercial initiatives in Siberia and the North Pacific. However, after Baranov's retirement in 1818, government officials and military officers became more influential in the administration of the company, and future chief managers were selected from among senior Russian Imperial Navy officers.

The corporate hierarchy below the chief manager included the individual managers of the Russian colonies. The immense colonial territory was divided into seven separate counters, which included (1) Kurile (Kurile Islands), (2) Atkhinsk (the Western Aleutian, Near, and Komandorskie islands), (3) Unalaska (the eastern Aleutian and Pribilof islands), (4) Kodiak (Kodiak archipelago and Alaskan Peninsula), (5) Sitka (Northwest Pacific Coast), (6) Mikhailovsk Redoubt (Norton Sound area), and (7) Ross (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:xl). The chief manager appointed a manager for each of the seven counters, as well as other key personnel who reported directly to his office in New Archangel.

As Glenn Farris (1997:190) notes, administrative centers for the counters such as the Ross settlement and other sizeable Russian settlements retained the character of company towns. They consisted of the residences of the elite managers and other staff members, Russian Orthodox churches and chapels, as well as impressive buildings that served as company stores and storage space for pelts. Nearby were industrial sectors where assorted equipment and trade goods were manufactured and repaired. Here were found forges, metal shops, carpenter shops, cooperages, and even shipyards (in a few colonies). Outside the administrative and mercantile centers or cores were the residences of the pluralistic workforce that typically was located in outlying neighborhoods or villages.

Historical archaeology has contributed much to understanding of the spatial structure of these colonial communities. Some studies have focused on the industrial/mercantile spaces, including the brick kilns on Kodiak Island and Sitka Island (Dilliplane 1990a, b), the shipyard and ancillary shops that comprised the industrial sector at Colony Ross (Allan 2001), and the black smithy and forges associated with the Kurilorossiia settlement on Urup Island (Shubin 1990: 433). Recent excavations (1995, 1997, 1998) at Castle Hill in Sitka unearthed the foundations of

at least four structures, a metal workers' smithy (kiln), a profusion of copper slag and waste, iron bar stock, associated metal-working tools as well as textiles, ceramics, faunal remains, and other artifacts. While the archaeological materials are still being analyzed, this project promises many new insights on the industrial sector of New Archangel and the daily lifeways of Russian, Creole, and native workers in Russian America (see Petruzelli and Hanson 1998; Thompson 1999; Grover 2000). These archaeological investigations stress how craftspeople in Russian colonies came up with innovative solutions to technological problems on the distant frontier. For example, James Allan describes the resourceful solution for constructing a steaming oven for shaping wood in the construction of ships at Colony Ross (Allan 2001).

Other archaeological projects have examined the spatial organization of colonial communities where the ethnically heterogeneous workforce of Russians, Creoles, and native laborers resided. The corporate ethos of the company was evident in the colonial hierarchy that defined the status, work, pay, and residential arrangement of all its employees. While several factors were employed in defining an employee's position in the company (e.g., level of education, job skills, and overall motivation), ethnicity was the primary variable employed for defining three major "estates" or classes: (1) Russians, (2) Creoles, (3) Indigenous Peoples (Wrangell 1969: 210–211; Fedorova 1975:11–15; Khlebnikov 1990:188–194).

Russian workers were divided into three groups (Fedorova 1975:15). At the apex of the hierarchy were the "honorable ones" who served as company administrators and military officers. "Semi-honorable ones" (men of lower rank) comprised the next step as clerks, soldiers, navigators, and laborers. The third group, "colonial citizens," was made up of Russian laborers who remained in Russian America after they retired from service in the company. Creoles, the offspring produced from Russian men and native women, were classified as a separate estate. They were typically not accepted by either the Russian or Native-American communities (Fedorova 1975: 13–14). Some Creole men were educated at the expense of the Russian-American Company, and they often served in important positions as officers on company ships and as middle-level managers, clerks, and skilled craftsmen (Black 1990; Spencer Pritchard 1991:43).

Archaeological research on the lifeways and daily practices of the Russian and Creole estates focuses on the investigation of the managers' houses and honorable and semi-honorable residential zones in company towns. Aron Crowell's investigation of Shelikhov's Log House at Three Saints Harbor provides insights on the material trappings and foodways of elite Russians in this early trade outpost founded on Kodiak Island in 1784 (Crowell 1997a:108–127, 1997b). He also excavated a *promyshlennik* barracks or *barabara*, where Russian workers probably lived, which consisted of a three-roomed semisubterranean dwelling built of driftwood poles and probably thatched with grass. The integration of European material culture with native architectural features and artifacts indicates the workers adopted many indigenous practices and/or that local native peoples, most likely Qikertarmiut women, worked in or occupied the barrack structure (Crowell 1997a: 127–152). Valery Shubin's excavations at Kurilorossiia in the Kurile Islands unearthed the well-preserved remains of a tripartite log structure (with a house-foreroom-storage room floor plan), probably postdating 1827. Shubin notes that this type of architectural structure was commonly built in contemporaneous Russian Siberian villages (Shubin 1990:431–432). Detailed observations have also been made of the architectural structures associated with the managers' houses, fur warehouse, and palisade walls associated with the elite stockade compound at the Ross settlement, built between 1812 and 1841 (Treganza 1954; Farris 1989, 1990).

Other work has focused on the elite architecture of New Archangel, where archaeologists and other specialists have been involved in the restoration of the Bishop's House (built 1841–1843) and testing archaeological deposits (ca. 1860) associated with the Russian hospital (Blee 1985, 1990; Suazo et al. 1990). Veltre provides information on the spatial layout of the Russian administrative center of Korovinski on Atka Island (ca. 1820s and later), including sod-walled enclosures, the area of the church and Russian Orthodox cemetery, garden plots, and boat slips (Veltre 1979, 2001). Wendell Oswalt details the spatial arrangement, architectural foundations, and associated artifacts of the interior Alaskan redoubt of Kolmakovskiy on the

Kuskokwim River, including various buildings constructed between 1841 and 1866: the blockhouse, store, Creole barracks, priest's house, and prayer house as well as the "Eskimo barracks" and *kashim* (native men's house) (Oswalt 1980). Peter Mills describes recent mapping and excavations of the impressive star-shaped fort at Fort Elisabeth, Hawaii, built out of basalt stones with the help of Kaumuali'i, a high-ranking Hawaiian chief in 1816–1817. This settlement differs in layout, building material, and organization from anything found in the rest of Russian America (Mills 2002).

Russian Treatment of Native Peoples

A third characteristic of the Russian colonial program is the company's treatment of the third estate or indigenous peoples. The explicit commercial agenda of Russian colonization permeated the policies and practices of its colonists and very much structured their encounters with local populations. However, colonial interactions with native peoples were not always tied to mercantile pursuits. Similar to other colonial programs in the Americas, missionaries worked with native peoples in Russian America. The Russian-American Company was required to support the missionary efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church (Osborn 1997:5–6). But it is important to note that the company's commercial policies often clashed with the objectives of the priests, especially during the early years of the fur trade (Kan 1988:507; Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:xli–xlii; Gibson 1992b:20). In reality, there were very few Russian Orthodox priests in Russian America until the middle of the 19th century (Rathburn 1981:12). For example, in 1816 there was only a single priest serving the entire Russian American territory, and by 1825 the number had only increased to five (Gibson 1992b:20). Some Russian colonies never had a permanent priest assigned to them. Until 1840, the intensity of missionary activities among native peoples and the establishment of schools varied greatly across Russian America. Some Unangan, Alutiiq, and Tlingit peoples received considerable attention from missionaries, while others were largely ignored (Rathburn 1981:13–15; Kan 1988:506–509; Veltre 1990:180–182; Black 2001). The Russian Orthodox Church expanded its missionary enterprise greatly in 1840 when the energetic Ivan Veniaminov was appointed to the rank of Bishop of Alaska, and the number of clergy, missions, and native schools increased significantly across Russian America (Kan 1988; Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:xlii).

The Russian-American Company, especially for the years prior to 1840, paid mostly lip service to saving native souls. Its primary interest in local natives was their exploitation as cheap laborers. The company depended on Creole and native peoples as the economic lifeblood of its colonies. There were two primary reasons for this.

First, the company experienced difficulties recruiting ethnic Russians to populate its colonies. Company recruiters were said to be among the loneliest people in all of Russia. Few ethnic Russians signed up to work in Russian America, no doubt put off by the harsh and often dangerous conditions in the colonies, the mediocre pay, and the isolated nature of the frontier. As was true for other European colonies in the Americas, Russian-American Company settlements were isolated from Mother Russia by tremendous distances and treacherous waters.

The Russians enticed to work for the company were primarily single men or married men who left their families at home (Fedorova 1975:11). Svetlana Fedorova (1973:150–151) estimates that from the period 1799 to 1867, there were only between 225 and 823 Russians (a mean of about 550) in all of Russian America. Thus, unlike some other European colonial programs, Russian colonization did not involve the massive emigration of European families to American soil (Farris 1997:188, 191). Rather, those Europeans who populated Russian settlements were primarily company employees who typically did not put down roots for long (Fedorova 1973:154). The company tended to rotate employees from one colony to another across the North Pacific, depending upon ever changing managerial and labor demands in the different counters. More importantly, unless they were in debt to the company, the *promyshlenniks* and managers typically left Russian America at the end of their five- to seven-year contracts. Thus, a constant turnover took place in the European labor force in Russian colonies (Gibson 1976:48–50, 108).

The second reason the Russian managers depended on non-Europeans as their primary workforce was the particular mode of mer-

cantile practices the company employed in the North Pacific. Most fur trade companies were dependent on native producers to provide them with pelts. British and American merchants, who competed with the Russians for furs in the North Pacific, instituted what is known as the "commodity peonage" system. Using their ships as floating emporiums, the merchants enticed native hunters to exchange their furs for manufactured goods, such as cloth, metal hatchets, glass beads, blankets, and knives. Russian merchants employed a different method for extracting furs from native peoples. Based on their experiences in the earlier Siberian fur trade, the Russians brought to North America the practice of subjugating native peoples and forcing them to pay a tax or tribute (*iasak*) in furs (see discussions of the North Pacific fur trade in Wolf 1982: 182–194; Gibson 1988; Crowell 1997a:7, 10–16, 233, 1997b:14–15, 2002).

The early exploitation of sea otters on the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island involved using military force against native communities and taking women and children hostages to insure that local native leaders paid their *iasak* (Veltre 1979:64–67; Crowell 1997a:11–16, 40–53; Crowell and Lührmann 2001). Catherine II banned this form of tribute taking in 1788, but it was replaced by the mandatory conscription of native peoples to hunt for Russian companies. When the Russian-American Company was granted its imperial monopoly in 1799, it continued the practice of drafting men between the ages of 18 and 50 from the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island for three years of service (Fedorova 1975:16). Native hunters conscripted by the Russians were among the most sophisticated and effective sea otter hunters in the world. Trained from childhood to become skilled hunters, they employed lightweight *baidarkas* (skin kayaks) to pursue sea otters in kelp beds and along shallow, rocky intertidal waters. Using lethal barbed-bone projectile points attached to darts, which were fired with great accuracy from bows or throwing sticks, thousands of sea otters and other commercially valued sea mammals were systematically harvested in coastal Pacific waters (Ogden 1941:11–14).

The mandatory service of Native-Alaskan hunters was critical to the success of the Russian-American Company. Russian merchants could not compete directly with American and British traders by exchanging manufactured goods for pelts harvested by independent native hunters. True, some goods were produced in the industrial sectors of company administrative centers. But most manufactured goods had to be imported into the colonies. It was actually cheaper and more efficient for the Russian-American Company to obtain merchandise from British and American merchants, the company's major competitors in the North Pacific fur trade (Gibson 1976: 83–87, 172–174). From the founding of the Russian-American Company until 1840, many of the manufactured goods imported into company settlements were acquired from American merchants. In the late 1830s an agreement was reached with the Hudson's Bay Company, which began to supply food and merchandise to the Russian colonies. Therefore, in undertaking archaeological work on company settlements, it can be rather perplexing to find little evidence of diagnostic Russian material culture per se (VanStone 1972:81; Farris 1989:492). One discovers that much of the assemblage of manufactured goods, such as glass and ceramic vessels, originated from the United States, Britain, or Asia. Nonetheless, archaeological research indicates the percentage of Russian imports did vary among the colonies. For example, recent work at Castle Hill in New Archangel discovered a relatively large quantity (10.7% of the ceramic assemblage) of Russian lead-glaze earthenware, which is fairly rare in excavations at other Russian settlements (Thompson 1999).

The company classified native peoples into different colonial categories, which had significant implications for how they were treated, the kinds of jobs they performed, and how they were compensated. Sea mammal hunters from the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island were classified as "Islanders" (also referred to as "Settled Aliens" or "Dependents") along with native peoples from the Kurile Islands and the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska (Fedorova 1975:15–16; Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:xliii). In addition to commercial hunting, they also served the company as porters, fishermen, and skilled craftsmen. While they were obligated to work for the company, they were paid for their labors. The Islanders worked on commission (paid per sea otter pelt) or received daily or yearly salaries in scrip, a parchment token that could be exchanged for goods in company stores (Tikhmenev 1978:144).

Other natives employed by the company were defined as "Semi-Dependent" peoples (Fedorova 1975:17). At the Ross counter in northern California, the local Pomo- and Miwok-speaking communities fell into this category. Identified as "Indians," they were recruited to serve as general laborers and seasonal agricultural workers. They were paid through barter or in-kind for their services, usually receiving food, tobacco, beads, and clothing (Wrangell 1969:211; Khlebnikov 1990: 193–194).

In describing the colonial hierarchy and treatment of native workers, it is emphasized that the boundaries between the different colonial estates and native categories were not rigid or impermeable. In reality, the imposed colonial estates were composites of diverse groups of people who often hailed from different homelands, spoke diverse languages, and maintained distinctive ideologies and worldviews. Since these broad ethnic categories existed primarily in the minds of company managers, the cultural practices associated with each of the different estates in the colonial hierarchy were somewhat ambiguous. Latitude certainly existed for the creation of "invented traditions" in these colonial contexts (Upton 1996:5). In order to be recognized as a member of the Russian, Creole, Islander, or Indian categories, "it was imperative that you 'talk the talk' and 'walk the walk' in the eyes of the Ross managers" (Lightfoot et al. 1998:205).

Sannie Osborn (1997:172) makes this point in describing how native peoples could be reclassified as Creole, and Creole workers as Russian.

> In practice, not all persons designated as Creoles were of mixed ancestry. Some individuals of entirely native descent were designated as Creole because of their occupations or positions within the Company hierarchy. After 1821, Native Alaskans who became naturalized citizens by pledging allegiance to the tsar could be also considered Creoles (Oleksa 1990:185). And, others who were Creole by definition, were listed as Russian on the basis of the social position of their father (Black 1990: 152). Perhaps more importantly, being a Creole was "more a matter of the spirit, a state of mind, a question of self-identity" (Oleksa 1990:185).

Furthermore, it was very common for sexual unions to take place between men and women of different estates. The general policy of the upper administration of the Russian-American Company was to support interethnic unions between company employees and local native peoples so as to increase the population of Creole people who would eventually enter the service of the company (Fedorova 1973: 206–207, 1975:11–13). In some Russian counters, such as Colony Ross in California, the most common households containing two or more people were interethnic households of men and women from different ethnic estates (see the Kuskov [1820–1821] and Veniaminov [1836, 1838] censuses published in Istomin 1992; Osborn 1997). At Colony Ross "Indian" women were a significant component of the interethnic households involving Islander, Creole, and Russian men, although their participation in pluralistic residences decreased substantially by the 1830s. By this time an increasing number of the households were comprised of Creole and Native-Alaskan women.

Historical archaeology is examining the long-term impacts that Russian colonization had on local native peoples. There is a long tradition of undertaking holistic, diachronic studies of Pacific peoples caught within the Russian colonial world, with researchers employing multiple data sources drawn from archaeology, ethnography, native narratives, and historical texts to examine the dynamics of native cultures that transcend prehistory and history. Frederica De Laguna pioneered this approach in her 1949–1954 study of northern Tlingit peoples in Angoon and Yakutat Bay, southeastern Alaska. Her research team's collaborative work with local Tlingit communities generated "ancient" and recent histories of the regions as well as rich descriptions of Tlingit material culture derived from native informants, European sources, and archaeological findings (Laguna 1960; Laguna et al. 1964). Beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s, James VanStone, Wendell Oswalt, Don Dumond, and others maintained a focus on long-term native cultural dynamics by examining changes in subsistence, settlement patterns, house types, and artifacts in the late-prehistoric, Russian, and American periods, even though stratigraphic separation of the latter two proved difficult in some sites (Oswalt and VanStone 1967; VanStone 1968, 1970b; Oswalt 1980; Dumond and VanStone 1995). This tradition of emphasizing the *longue durée* in Russian America as well as working closely with local tribes and native organizations in community partnerships has continued with field

work on Atka Island (Veltre 1979); Unalaska Island (Veltre and McCartney 2001a); Pribilof Islands (Veltre and McCartney 2000, 2001b); Kodiak Island (Knecht and Jordan 1985; Crowell 1997a); Afognak Island (Woodhouse-Beyer 2001); the outer Kenai Peninsula (Crowell and Mann 1998); Kaua'i Island, Hawaii (Mills 2002); and Colony Ross, California (Lightfoot et al. 1991, 1998; Lightfoot 1995; Wake 1995, 1997a; Martinez 1997, 1998; Parrish et al. 2000).

In tracing indigenous life ways from late prehistory to post-Russian times, the above studies are attempting to evaluate the degree to which native foodways, artifacts, architectural forms, sociopolitical relations, and ideological constructs underwent change or persistence and how native identities were constructed and transformed over time. One of the most significant characteristics of Russian colonialism stems from the fact that the Russian-American Company would deploy an international, multiethnic workforce to any of its coastal colonies. Here we get a different twist on the traditional perspective of European immigration to the Americas. Rather than Europeans carving out new lives in frontier settlements, the Russian colonial system involved the relocation of scores of native and Creole workers to distant settlements across the North Pacific. The "core" population of most of the coastal counters involved in the maritime fur trade were the indispensable Islander sea mammal hunters—primarily Unangan (or Aleut) people from the Aleutian Islands, Alutiiq people from Kodiak Island, as well as Chugach hunters from Prince William Sound. They were dispatched in large numbers throughout coastal Russian America, from the Kurile Islands to Sitka, and Hawaii to northern California. In most cases, the transplanted Islander and Creole workers were relocated to populated areas where they encountered local peoples, although they did colonize some uninhabited places, such as the Pribilof Islands (Veltre 1990:177).

The interior redoubts established along Alaskan rivers after 1818 were organized differently. They maintained small resident populations of native, Creole, and Russian traders who bartered with indigenous hunters for land mammal pelts of beaver, river otter, fox, and other species (Arndt 1990). Some interior hunting and trapping was done by groups of company hunters (Creoles and Islanders), especially after the outbreak of smallpox among local native populations (Oswalt 1980:79–84; Dumond and VanStone 1995:99). However, the majority of the terrestrial furs were obtained by trading tobacco, glass beads, textiles, copper, and iron utensils with local native populations (Dumond and VanStone 1995:7–8). Archaeological work at redoubts and nearby native villages indicates that the Russian traders were "not lavish" in their exchange of trade goods for furs (Oswalt 1980: 96–97; Dumond and VanStone 1995:99).

In examining colonial encounters with native peoples in Russian colonies, especially the coastal counters involved in the maritime fur trade, it is important to consider the implications of native-to-native interactions. Indigenous contacts with the colonists probably did not focus on the Russian managers or *promyshlenniks* per se who made up a small percentage of the overall workforce. The daily encounters and close bonds that transpired were primarily with Creole and Islander workers. The formation of many of the interethnic households, whether they were on the Kurile Islands or at Colony Ross, involved local native women and Creole or Islander men. This presents a very different kind of social arena for examining the complexities of colonial relationships than that envisioned for most other European colonies in the Americas.

A recurrent theme that is emerging from archaeological studies of Russian colonies is the evidence for the strong persistence of native cultural beliefs and practices, despite dramatic disruptions that unfolded over time. The history of Russian colonization is a legacy of significant impacts to local native populations, beginning with the brutal taking of hostages to ensure that fur tributes were paid in the North Pacific. After the Russian-American Company received its charter, successive onslaughts to the fabric of native culture continued. The Russians exposed native peoples to lethal epidemics, enforced excessive labor demands, implemented massive relocations of native villages in some counters, and took young men away from their communities to work in distant colonies. The Russian period also witnessed the creation of innovative marriage patterns and social networks as well as the introduction of new kinds of material culture, foodways, and cultural practices (Veltre 1990; Lightfoot and Martinez 1997; Crowell and Lührmann 2001).

Despite these enormous transformations, several studies highlight how people continually re-created strong native identities that involved the active selection of new cultural traits that were modified or molded to fit local cultural perceptions and practices. How much this cultural persistence is linked to the nature of native-to-native interactions in Russian colonies remains to be seen. However, it is interesting that this active construction of native identities appears to have taken place among native groups in coastal counters involved in the maritime fur trade as well as with indigenous communities associated with the redoubts along interior Alaskan drainages (Oswalt and VanStone 1967; VanStone 1968, 1970a, b, 1971; Oswalt 1980; Knecht and Jordan 1985; Lightfoot et al. 1997, 1998; Woodhouse-Beyer 2001; Mills 2002).

Conclusion

The investigation of Russian expansion into the Pacific Ocean presents an exceptional opportunity to examine the processes and implications of mercantile colonialism in North America. The salient characteristics of the Russian colonial program are its broad-scale spatial distribution across the North Pacific and its administration by a mercantile conglomerate. Russian colonies were essentially company towns that supported few Europeans but many Creoles and native workers. The study of Russian colonization provides the potential to examine the kinds of social dynamics that transpired when local indigenous populations were confronted with other native peoples and mixed bloods from across the North Pacific. The ramifications this had on the cultural practices, belief systems, and worldviews of indigenous communities are just now being investigated. Many questions remain to be answered. Did the Russian colonial system facilitate the spread of pan-Pacific native practices during the late-18th and 19th centuries? How did the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church impact native cultural practices, especially after 1840? How did native and colonist relationships differ in the coastal colonies and interior redoubts? And did native-to-native encounters in coastal Russian colonies produce a colonial legacy fundamentally different from that found in other European colonies in North America? Clearly, historical archaeology in the North Pacific has much to contribute in developing a broader understanding of European colonization in the Americas.

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