Russian Colonialism In The North and Tropical Pacific: An Introduction

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Introduction

I am delighted to introduce this volume of the *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* that examines Russian colonialism and encounters with diverse indigenous peoples in the north Pacific in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The purpose of the volume is to present for the first time a synthesis of recent archaeological investigations conducted at a variety of Russian colonial outposts, work areas, and associated ethnic neighborhoods by U.C. Berkeley graduate and undergraduate students in the 1990s. The majority of the papers are based on research undertaken for doctoral dissertations (James Allan, Aron Crowell, Antoinette Martinez, Peter Mills, Thomas Wake) and a senior honors thesis (Hannah Ballard). With the inclusion of the paper by Oleg Bychkov, a perspicuous Russian collaborator of many of the contributors, the volume provides insights on Russian expansion and mercantile colonialism across the entire north Pacific by presenting seven case studies from Siberia, Alaska, California and Hawaii. The volume concludes with a thoughtful discussion of Russia's colonial legacy in North America by Glenn Farris, a scholar of the Russian-American Company and its California possessions who has worked closely with U.C. Berkeley students and faculty for almost ten years. He is uniquely qualified to place the case studies of Russian colonialism in proper historical perspective given his first-hand experience in the archaeological investigations of Native American, Russian, Spanish, Mexican and Euro-American communities in California.

I begin my introduction by situating the seven case studies within the broader historical context of Russian colonial activities along the north Pacific Rim. I then stress the importance of considering Russian colonial practices and Native encounters in current research on culture contact. Most anthropological and archaeological studies of early colonialism in North America focus almost exclusively on Spanish, British, French, and Euro-American settlements, while the Russians and their encounters with complex maritime hunter-fisher-gatherer societies and highly stratified agricultural peoples are largely ignored. The papers in this volume demonstrate the tremendous potential for undertaking holistic, historical anthropological studies of the diverse peoples of Russian-America. I conclude by identifying three major themes addressed in the volume that have significance for contemporary research on culture contact and colonialism. The themes include: 1) the Russian World System in the Pacific, 2) the spatial structure of multi-ethnic colonies, and 3) cultural persistence and change in pluralistic communities.

Historical Context

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Russian entrepreneurs established a chain of trade and hunting outposts throughout an immense territory stretching across eastern Asia (Siberia, Kamchatka, the Kurile Islands), the principal archipelagos of the Bering Sea (Komandorski,

Near, Aleutian, Kodiak, Pribilof), mainland Alaska, northern California and Hawaii. While the early years witnessed a multitude of small, private companies competing with one another for salable resources, by 1799 these entrepreneurial enterprises had been consolidated into a single commercial monopoly -- the Russian-American Company (RAC) -- that represented Russian interests in the north Pacific. The primary goal of this quasi-private commercial giant was to make a profit for its shareholders, including the Czar and the Imperial family, by participating in the lucrative fur trade (see Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1989; Tikhmenev 1978).

The north Pacific fur trade involved the hunting of fur-bearing marine mammals, especially sea otters and fur seals, whose pelts fetched a high price in Asian, American and European markets. During the early 1800s, the RAC was involved in the widescale exploitation of sea mammal pelts, the trapping of selected terrestrial mammals for their furs, and the trade of sandalwood and timber. The Company recruited a multi-ethnic labor force from Europe, eastern Asia, the north Pacific and western North America to work in its far-flung network of settlements (*slobodas*) and small hunting camps or work stations (artels). The majority of these laborers were Creoles (mixed Russian/Native ancestry) or Native peoples from Siberia, the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island, Southeast Alaska, California and Hawaii. In later years, as sea otters became scarce and fur prices fluctuated downward, the RAC became involved in other commercial activities, including whaling, mining and fishing, until its Alaskan colonies were sold to the United States in 1867.

The papers in this volume exemplify the broad scope and complexity of Russian colonial practices in the north Pacific in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Bychov describes the development of the Tal'tsinsk glass factory in Siberia that provided Russian outposts in the north Pacific with glass artifacts beginning in 1784. Crowell examines the ruthless nature of the colonization of Kodiak Island, Alaska, and the subjugation of Qikertarmiut (Koniag) peoples commencing in 1784 when Grigorii Shelikhov first established the Three Saints Bay settlement. Allan, Ballard, Martinez, and Wake present different perspectives of the ethnic neighborhoods and commercial enterprises at Fort Ross in northern California, where the RAC founded and maintained the administrative center of its Russian-California colony from 1812 to 1841. Finally, Mills considers a brief Russian foray on Kaua`i Island, Hawaii, where in 1816 Georg Schäffer and a workforce of Aleutian and Qikertarmiut workers helped construct Fort Elisabeth, a monumental structure of rock and earth that was later modified and used by Hawaiian elites.

Culture Contact Studies

Current studies of culture contact have much to learn from Russia's colonial experiences and Native relations in the north Pacific. Briefly defined, culture contact studies are concerned with how indigenous peoples responded to European contact and colonialism, and how the outcomes of these encounters influenced cultural developments in postcolonial contexts. At the forefront of current social theory on culture change, these studies employ a holistic anthropological approach that integrates multiple lines of evidence from archaeology, ethnography, ethnohistory, linguistics and Native oral traditions.

Although much has been written about the history of the Russian-American Company and its activities in the north Pacific, this vast colonial operation has been largely ignored by historical anthropologists and archaeologists undertaking culture contact studies. In considering

recent studies of culture contact in North America, I am impressed with the diverse number of publications commemorating the Columbian Quincentennial that highlight Euro-American, Spanish, British, and French colonial practices and Native affiliations (e.g., Deagan 1995; Milanich and Milbrath 1989; Thomas 1989, 1990, 1991; Walthall and Emerson 1992; Wilson and Rogers 1993). However, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Farris 1989; Fitzhugh and Chaussonnet 1994; Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988), recent historical anthropological studies of the Russians and the people they encountered in the north Pacific are almost nonexistent.

The systematic investigation of Russian colonialism is very important because the processes that unfolded differed markedly, in so many ways, from other European colonizers in North America. In comparison to the Spanish, British, French, and Euro-Americans, the Russians implemented different policies and practices for establishing and supplying their settlements, for exploiting valued resources (such as sea mammal pelts), for recruiting a multi-ethnic work force, and for integrating Native peoples into colonial settlements. In examining these colonial initiatives and Native encounters, it is critical to undertake integrated studies of Russian colonies that consider available textual data, Native oral traditions, **and** archaeological remains since many of the day-to-day activities in these communities were only scantily reported or not recorded at all.

The papers in this volume exemplify how archaeology can provide critical insights on topics that received little attention in eyewitness accounts, such as ethnic neighborhoods, the layout of space, architectural plans, Native workers' lifeways, interethnic households, and even commercial activities, such as shipbuilding and glass manufacture. The papers also demonstrate the incredible potential for examining seminal themes in culture contact studies through detailed historical anthropological investigations of Russian-American colonies. The authors consider several themes: understanding the Russian World System in the Pacific; delineating the spatial structure of multi-ethnic colonies; and studying cultural persistence and change in pluralistic communities.

Russian World System in the Pacific

The Russians established their chain of colonies in the remote "periphery" of the north Pacific so as to exploit and transport furs and other raw materials to expanding markets located in Asia and the "core" industrial countries of Europe and eastern North America. From the outset, it must be recognized that the maintenance of this core/periphery relationship was never easy. The Russians were chronically overextended and understaffed in the Pacific, their industrial capacity at home was relatively marginal compared to other European nations, and their merchant fleet in the late 1700s and early 1800s was rather meager and poorly equipped. These constraints dictated many of the colonial policies and practices first initiated by early Russian entrepreneurs and later elaborated upon by the Russian-American Company in the Pacific.

Crowell discusses how the better supplied and equipped British and American fur companies and merchants employed a "commodity peonage" system built upon direct trade of European goods with Native peoples for valued resources (e.g., furs). The Russians could not compete head-to-head with the American and British traders, since Russian goods tended to be higher priced, they cost more to ship to the Pacific, and some were of lesser quality (see Gibson

1976). Consequently, the Russians implemented a "tributary" system in which Native peoples were initially subjugated and forced to pay "taxes" (*iasak*) in furs. As Crowell notes, when the *iasak* was abolished in 1788, mandatory labor requirements were imposed to insure a steady supply of cheap Native laborers in Russian colonies.

Bychkov and Allan describe some of the logistical problems of supplying distant colonies in the Pacific "periphery" with European ethnic foods (especially wheat, fruits, and vegetables) and imported goods. Bychkov outlines the development of the early glass industry in Russia, and then details the establishment of a glass factory in Siberia in 1784. The Tal'tsinka glass factory near Irkutsk produced colored beads and other glass products (window panes, bottles, lamps) specifically for shipment to Russian colonies in Siberia and the Pacific. Allan describes shipbuilding in Russian American. This enterprise developed in an attempt to bolster the merchant fleet by facilitating the flow of food and manufactured goods to the Pacific colonies and returning furs and other Pacific resources to markets in "core" areas. He presents a case study of the RAC's shipyard at Fort Ross that produced six vessels from 1816 to 1827.

Mills considers the interplay of the Russian World System at the local level, and emphasizes the importance of considering the complex linkages that existed between the RAC and the Native populations who were ultimately involved in the exploitation of Pacific resources. The Russians did not always dominate this relationship. Furthermore, it is clear that indigenous peoples had considerable influence in how the broader World System was integrated into the local setting. In his case study of Kaua`i Island, Mills shows that the local elites controlled and directed the acquisition of sandalwood and food, forcing the Russians to trade to them specific kinds of goods (ships, munitions) that enhanced their status and power in the competition for chiefly positions. In a similar vein, Ballard, Crowell, Martinez and Wake describe how Native Alaskan and Native Californian workers and their families both influenced and helped structure the economic, social, and political practices of Russian mercantile activities at Three Saints Bay and the Fort Ross Colony.

Spatial Structure of Multi-Ethnic Colonies

The Russians created pluralistic communities wherever they established colonies in the north Pacific. These communities housed the ethnically heterogenous workforce of European, Creole, and Native laborers in spatially demarcated landscapes where status and ethnicity were delineated and negotiated. Several papers in the volume address the spatial organization of Russian colonies using both archival documents and archaeological remains. Their findings indicate that the underlying hierarchy of status and social relations in Russian colonies were reproduced, to some degree, in these settlements.

At the top of this colonial hierarchy was a small elite class of Russian managers, clerks and military officers. Below them was a larger class of artisans, skilled laborers, and foremen drawn from lower-class Russian and Creole groups. At the bottom rung of the hierarchy was a still larger class of hunters, agricultural laborers and artisans comprised mostly of Native peoples. In the Fort Ross Colony, this latter class was further segregated into Native Alaskans ("Aleuts") and Native Californians ("Indians"), with the latter at the lowest end of the colonial pecking order as measured by their paltry pay and physical separation from the elite Russian quarters (see Lightfoot, Wake and Schiff 1991:221-22).

The spatial organization of the Three Saints Bay Colony on Kodiak Island is detailed by Crowell. The western end of the main settlement or *krepost* consisted of an elite Russian neighborhood comprised of the headquarters building, cabins, storehouses, a kitchen with a bread oven, gardens, a bathhouse, and a school. The eastern end of the *krepost* was inhabited by an ethnically mixed group of lower-class Russian employees, Native Aleutian workers, and probably some Qikertarmiut women. Most of the Qikertarmiut workforce were segregated into a third area, a nearby *artel* site north of the main settlement.

The papers by Allan, Ballard, Martinez and Wake consider the spatial structure of the ethnic neighborhoods and industrial areas in the Fort Ross Colony in California. The Russian officials resided in an impressive stockade complex that was the centerpiece of the colonial community. This complex consisted of the manager's house, a warehouse and Company store, chapel, kitchen and other living quarters. Directly west of the stockade complex was a "Russian" *sloboda* where the working-class Russian and Creole men and their families lived in planked houses with associated gardens. Adjacent to the north stockade wall was Metini, a residential area detailed in Ballard's paper where it appears planked houses and gardens were also constructed. Here Creole or Russian men apparently established interethnic residences with Native Californian women.

South of the Ross stockade was situated the Native Alaskan Neighborhood, the topic of Wake's article, where Aleutian, Qikertarmiut and Chugach men, women and families resided, along with mixed ethnic households composed of Native Alaskan men and Native Californian (Kashaya and South Pomo, Coast Miwok) women. East of the stockade and adjacent to the Fort Ross Cove was the industrial sector of the colony. Allan reports on an on-going investigation of the shipyard that probably once boasted slip and launching ways, as well as associated carpenter, cooper and blacksmith shops. In the northern hinterland was the Native Californian Neighborhood, comprised of a series of small villages or compounds where the Kashaya Pomo resided while working for the Russians, primarily as agricultural laborers. Martinez's article describes the intensive investigation of one of these Kashaya Pomo villages, known locally as Tomato Patch.

In Hawaii, the spatial organization of Fort Elisabeth on Kaua`i Island differs dramatically from both Three Saints Bay and Fort Ross. As Mills elaborates, it is an amalgamation of Hawaiian and European monumental architecture in which components of a traditional Hawaiian ceremonial *heiau* were incorporated into an early 19th century star-shaped fort of European design. The rubble-filled, double-stone facing walls of the fort, which contained adobe-plastered buildings and stone platforms, is unlike anything ever built by the RAC or the Hawaiians. The syncretism of architectural elements and internal layout suggests that the initial planning and building of this imposing structural complex involved equal participation by the RAC and Hawaiians. In contrast to other north Pacific colonies, there is little evidence for multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Russian and Native Alaskan workers in the immediate hinterland of the fort. Rather, the structure served as a cultural landmark, status symbol and ceremonial center for the Hawaiian chiefs who controlled Kaua'i long after the Russians were forced to leave the island.

Cultural Change and Persistence in Pluralistic Communities

The intersection of diverse cultures in Russian colonies produced a complex mosaic of both new innovations and continuities with the past in the material culture, daily lifeways and world views of Russians, Creoles, Native Alaskans, Native Californians and Hawaiians. The papers consider several different perspectives for understanding cultural persistence and change in the pluralistic colonial settings at Fort Elisabeth, Three Saints Bay and Fort Ross.

Mills's investigation of Fort Elisabeth is a case study of colonialism where the Russians did not have direct control over the indigenous population. The relatively equal partnership of Russians and Hawaiians in the construction of the fort on previously consecrated land probably involved careful mediation in the selection of the major cultural elements represented in the fort's design. Mills's investigation suggests that the Hawaiian chief, Kaumuali'i, had considerable latitude in choosing those architectural elements that would be both imposing to other Hawaiian elites and European traders, but harmonious in relation to his own cultural values.

The other papers are case studies of cultural continuity and change at the Three Saints Bay and Fort Ross colonies where the Russians clearly dominated the colonial setting. They attempted to maintain and reinforce a rigorous hierarchical structure through differential pay, the spatial segregation of ethnic groups, and unequal access to imported foods and manufactured goods. It is then not surprising that the Russian officials were among the most culturally conservative. As Crowell describes, the elite Russians in the Three Saints Bay *krepost* attempted to replicate the material culture of their homeland by constructing massive log buildings with imported furniture and high status artifacts.

In reality, the boundaries created in defining status, ethnicity and social relations in these colonies, especially among the working classes, were quite permeable. A significant observation in several papers is the evidence for bi-directional cultural change among the lower-class Russians and Native workers who labored, socialized, and even lived together.

As the archaeological investigations reported by Ballard, Martinez, and Wake detail, some Native peoples at Fort Ross consumed European foods (beef and mutton), used glass and ceramic sherds to produce indigenous artifact forms, and adopted some European tools (metal saws and knives) and ornaments (glass beads). The Russian *promyshlenniki* who worked closely with Native hunters adopted some elements of their clothing, foods, architecture and transportation (*baidarkas*). Crowell describes the excavation of the *promyshlennik barabara* at Three Saints Bay that incorporated hybrid architectural elements of an Aleutian longhouse and Russian innovations including a ground-level doorway, windows covered with glass or mica, and thatched roof. While some imported artifacts and metal artifacts, including gun parts, were recovered, other archaeological remains consisted of indigenous foods, ground slate knives and pottery.

Crowell suspects that the widespread use of Native foods, technology and architecture in Russian colonies is related, in part, to the impotence of the Russian World System. The high prices and/or paucity of imported goods in the Company stores kept their access limited primarily to the elite Russian class. The archaeological evidence from both Three Saints Bay and Fort Ross indicates that European goods and domesticated foods, while present, were not widely available to the working classes.

Ballard, Martinez and Wake consider how the active negotiation of ethnic identities and gender relations at Fort Ross influenced the deliberate implementation of some conservative cultural practices. Wake demonstrates that the Aleutian and Qikertarmiut workers residing in the Native Alaskan Neighborhood at Fort Ross maintained traditional dietary practices and a traditional worked bone technology used in the production of harpoons and fish hooks. These highly visible, daily activities broadcasted their ethnic affiliations and social relations to people both inside and outside the Native Alaskan community.

Ballard identifies culturally conservative practices in both diet and technology among Native Californian women who may have been cohabiting with Creole or Russian men at Metini. Likewise, Martinez's investigation of the Tomato Patch Village indicates that Native Californians residing in villages in the hinterland were maintaining traditional practices in their architecture, internal village layout, selection and preparation of foods, and manufacture and use of most artifacts.

Interestingly, taking Crowell's and Martinez's findings together, they show that the most culturally conservative people in the Russian colonies were those at the very top and the very bottom of the status hierarchy. The elite Russians had a vested interest in maintaining the ***status quo,*** while Native Californians who resided in the hinterland showed little interest in actively participating in the colonial hierarchy. As noted elsewhere (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995), *indigenous elites probably resisted the implementation of a new hierarchical system that* would have redefined their traditional positions of political status and ceremonial leadership they had enjoyed in the local community.

One of the most exciting avenues of on-going research is the investigation of change and persistence in interethnic households. Russian, Creole and Native men from distant homelands who worked for the RAC commonly entered into relationships with local Native women. These relationships provided many opportunities for both men and women to redefine their status positions and ethnic identities in relation to the colonial hierarchy. Crowell's findings at Three Saints Bay indicate that some of the Russian *promyshlenniki* may have intentionally downplayed their Russian identities in order to accommodate the Aleutian or Qikertarmiut women who lived with them. The construction of hybrid Aleutian/Russian longhouses, the consumption of Native foods, and the adoption of Native clothing would have distanced these men even further from the elite Russians and clearly broadcast strong ties to the Native Alaskan community.

The investigation of Fort Ross is providing many insights on Native Californian women who resided in interethnic households, and what happened to them once these relationships dissolved. The case studies of Wake and others (see Lightfoot, Schiff and Wake in press) present information on mixed ethnic residences comprised of Kashaya Pomo women and Qikertarmiut men in the Native Alaskan Neighborhood, while Ballard's research on Metini considers possible relationships between Native Californian women and Creole or Russian men. Martinez's investigation of the Tomato Patch village provides the opportunity to examine what happened to Native Californian women when they returned home after interethnic couples broke-up.

Martinez compares and contrasts the archaeological remains of households in the Native Alaskan Neighborhood, Metini and Tomato Patch in order to begin addressing the following questions. Did some of the women in inter-ethnic households implement strategies for

manipulating their ethnic identities and moving up in the colonial hierarchy? Did others continue to practice traditional conventions that continued their strong ties with the nearby Native Californian community? And did women from interethnic residences who returned home to outlying villages serve as cultural mediators in the broader colonial community at Fort Ross and as cultural innovators in the Native Californian community?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this volume of the *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* demonstrates the great potential for examining significant themes in contemporary culture contact research through the study of Russian colonialism and Native encounters in the north Pacific. The case studies in historical anthropology examine Russian colonial practices and Native relations in late 18th and early 19th century contexts in Siberia, Alaska, California and Hawaii. The papers consider the problems the Russians had in maintaining and supplying their World System in the Pacific; the spatial structure of pluralistic communities established in different colonial settings; and factors that influenced cultural continuities and transformations among the diverse populations of Russian colonies, including the negotiation and manipulation of status positions, ethnic identities, and gender relations. The volume represents a significant advance in understanding the nature of Russian colonialism and culture contact in the north Pacific.

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