

COMMENTARY

PROBLEMS IN PROTOHISTORIC ETHNOGENESIS IN THE NAKNEK DRAINAGE: AN UPDATE.

Roger K. Harritt, Environment and National Research Institute, University of Alaska Anchorage, 707 A St., Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Kerry Feldman's (2001) analysis of the bases for the King Salmon Traditional Council's application for tribal status is an important contribution to the anthropology of the northern Alaska Peninsula. It follows on the heels of several decades of focused research in this area by a number of researchers. Don Dumond is preeminent among the group. The comments presented here reflect my interest in late prehistoric ethnogenesis in the Naknek region and the relations between the human inhabitants of this period with those of surrounding environs.

Feldman's article illuminates the sociopolitical relations of the upper Naknek drainage people with those of adjacent areas, and it describes some of the characteristics of what is the recent end of a late prehistoric continuum of such relationships, that existed as early as AD 1500-1600. The study demonstrates the importance of combining different types of information from archaeology, sociocultural anthropology and archival records into a coherent evaluation of an issue now made prominent by the Traditional Council's claim. As a minor quibble, it is noted that Feldman's citations do not list important work on community histories in the area by Morris (1995), an effort that deserves mention in a study of this type.

The strengths of Feldman's analysis includes documentation of a traditional Yupik name for New Savonoski — '*Ulutluq*' or '*Ulutelleq*' — that he infers (pages 106-107) could be a part of the cultural baggage carried by refugees from Old Savonoski fleeing the 1912 eruption of Mt. Katmai (Novarupta) and who established New Savonoski. The location of the '*Ikak*' settlement along with one of the alternative names for Old Savonoski — Ukak — evokes speculation that some derivation of '*Ukakamiut*' also deserves some consideration as a possible name for the people of the upper drainage, based on patterns of Eskimo designations for groups, as many are derived from place names, and upon the identification of *Ukak* as one of the alternative names for Old Savonoski

(cf. Harritt 1997:Tab. 1). This possibility should be addressed in some future investigation. Such inquiries would do well to also expend efforts on determining whether group self designations can be established for other settlement locations in the drainage dating to the Bluffs phase and contact period, such as those located on Grosvenor Lake and the Grosvenor River (Harritt 1997:Tab. 3, Fig. 4). These suggestions are meant to encourage further investigation with an eye toward increasing the precision of distinguishing between groups in the region, thereby increasing the precision of our perceptions of them.

Feldman (pages 108-110) also presents examples of inter-group marriages and familial ties to the villages of the area include detailed accounts of marriages between former residents of Old Savonoski and Kodiak Island, one between residents of Old Savonoski and Ugashik, and a marriage between a residents of Old Savonoski and an immigrant *Alurmiut* (pages 108-110). This important information reflects a pattern in which marriages could occur between Old Savonoski residents and residents of territories as far away as Kodiak Island and the Kiatagmiut territory to the north and west. Also demonstrated is a mechanism in which marriages could occur between protagonists, in this case *Ullutellegmiut* and *Aglurmiut*, under circumstances where such relations would be mutually beneficial. The mechanisms and conditions in which systematic marriage exchanges between territories occurred that was initially suggested by Dumond (1994:110) is therefore demonstrated by specific cases. Marriages of persons from different territories relate directly to the existence of a definable late prehistoric-contact period society in the upper Naknek drainage (Harritt 1997, 2000). Examples of intersocietal unions have been documented in other Eskimo areas of Alaska and marriages between the upper drainage group and those of adjacent territories including Kodiak Island would be expected.

However, the nature of the interactions between the 'Alutiiq' of Kodiak Island and groups inhabiting areas of the Alaska Peninsula west of the Aleutian Range in other areas of social intercourse and matters related to day-to-day living have not yet been made clear. Such matters are important in establishing the ethnic integrity of the Old Savonoski group in the same way as the argument Feldman has made for the distinctiveness of that group from the *Aglurmiut*. The integrity of the inhabitants of Old Savonoski as a segment of a local, self-sustaining, operational ethnic unit – as a society – is necessarily part and parcel to the argument for tribal status for the King Salmon group. Otherwise, a claim to the King Salmon locality could also reasonably be made by the collective Alutiiq tribe, or Nation, whether their traditional homes were in the upper Naknek drainage, or on Kodiak Island, on the basis of a perception that King Salmon is simply traditional *Alutiiq* territory. In this respect the case of the King Salmon group is strengthened by demonstrating that specific families are associated with specific territories and locations.

In this regard anthropologist-proponents of the Alutiiqization of the inhabitants of the Bering Sea slope of the Peninsula in anthropological studies routinely point to broad correspondences in the material culture of Kodiak Island and the peninsula, and from there proceed to lump all together under the rubric of an 'Alutiiq' culture area (e.g., Clark 1984a:146-148; Steffian 2001:121-126). Presumably, if the suggested cohesiveness of Aluticism were in effect across the region in late precontact times, the connections involved more than an occasional marriage between *Ullutellegmiut* and a member of a similar type of Kodiak Island grouping, the *Qikexta ymiut* ('island people'; Clark 1984b:195), and more than simple trade relations. It is important to stress here that my reference is to terminology used by anthropologists, not to Native residents of the area who chose whatever designation they wish for themselves in modern times (cf. Leer 2001:31; Partnow 2001:68-69).

To this point, Dumond's (1994) assertions about connections between the Naknek drainage Bluffs phase and Kodiak Island Koniag cultures of 500-150 years ago have consisted of a suggestion of systematic marriage exchanges, inferences about declining use of pottery, an inference of shared symbolism and religion, and a general remark about sharing of material culture (Dumond 1994:110, 117; 2001:118). Steffian (2001:121-126) also suggests that trade provided much of the basis for relations between Kodiak residents and those of the Alaska mainland, however this interpretation reflects a geocentric perspective centered on Kodiak Island, rather than a

view from a pan-regional perspective that would give more equitable consideration to the residents of a given locality.

House form variations, another important element of the material culture of the region for this period, have been a topic of disagreements on distinctions between Kodiak Island houses and those of the upper and lower Naknek drainage (compare, Dumond 1994, 1998 and Harritt 1997). As Dumond (1998:71) rightly points out, virtually no houses have yet been excavated in the upper drainage for the period between the time the *Aglurmiut* arrived, around AD 1810, to the time the area was evacuated in AD 1912 due to the volcanic eruption. Presumably, the form of the upper drainage *Ikak* phase dwellings continued the pattern established during the Bluffs phase, but this suggestion requires testing through excavation of houses of this period in the upper drainage (loc cit). At this point in the debate I concur that the late pre-contact period, pre-*Aglurmiut* houses of Kodiak Island and the Naknek drainage possess similar elements in composition, including multiple rooms. Occasionally houses in the Naknek area also contain examples of the slab-lined hearths that appear to be common on Kodiak Island (Harritt 1988:Figs. 7 and 17; Dumond 1994, 1998). This concession does not, however, weaken my assertions concerning the existence of a Bluffs phase society, dating from ca. 500-90 years ago. I now believe, rather, that the characteristics and nature of the sociopolitical entity can be found more on the level of localized patterns and styles than in the qualitative attributes of the artifact assemblages. An avenue for addressing this problem is presented in the inaugural *AJA* issue, in an article by Steffian and Saltonstall (2001:1-27) in which labret forms and styles are used to investigate village affiliations and status on Kodiak Island. Presumably, their study could easily be expanded to include labrets from the Alaska Peninsula, with interesting results. The same type of fine-grained analysis should be applied to other artifact categories as well. Categories would include house design elements, to investigate the ethnic units that inhabited the Pacific Eskimo and Peninsula Eskimo areas, in order to define late prehistoric polities in the region or, at least, the cores of the interaction spheres (Steffian and Saltonstall 2001:4).

Alternatively, continuing the broad brush approach applied in early research efforts in the region, will perpetuate the perception that the late pre-contact inhabitants of the region were organized as concatenous social units that stretched across the Alaska Peninsula from Kodiak Island to the lower end of Naknek lake. But Feldman's analysis has demonstrated that the inhabitants

of a part of this region had a much more refined and specific group identity. And, given the modern import of this most recent investigation of Naknek region ethnogenesis, the ethnic identity of the members of a group such as the Katmai Descendants, is also of crucial importance in modern society. Their identity has been inherited from ancestors who resided in the Naknek Lake environs over the course of several centuries.

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