

REVIEW

ANÓOSHI LINGÍT AANÍ KÁ: RUSSIANS IN TLINGIT AMERICA. THE BATTLES OF SITKA, 1802 AND 1804

Dauenhauer, Nora Marks, Richard Dauenhauer, and Lydia T. Black (Editors). 2008. Seattle and Juneau: University of Washington Press and Sealaska Heritage Institute. 491 pp with photographs, maps, figures, appendices, and index.

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This monumental study, which links wide-ranging ethnographic, historical, and aboriginal sources of knowledge about Russian-Tlingit interactions in the early contact period, is volume 4 in the Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature series. Some twenty years in the making, this volume represents a significant departure from the previous three, which focused on Tlingit oral traditions (vol. 1), ceremonial oratory (vol. 2), and biography (vol. 3). *Anóoshi Lingít Aaní Ká: Russians in Tlingit America* is a rigorous intercultural exploration of two critical episodes in Alaska's history: the Russian-Tlingit battles of 1802 and 1804 at Sitka, where Russia ultimately gained its strongest foothold in the New World. The book explores how complex events leading up to the battles unfolded, involving cross-cutting relationships among not only Russians and Sitka Tlingits, but also among other non-Native (e.g., American and English) traders and non-local Natives (e.g., Aleut and Chugach, and other Tlingit tribes). It also demonstrates that the outcomes of the battles were neither inevitable nor particularly decisive. Like Daniel K. Richter's perspective-shifting explorations of Indian-White relations in the East in *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*, *Anóoshi Lingít Aaní Ká* seeks to shift our grounding of history in the Pacific Northwest by elevating the status of Native oral traditions in understanding Alaska's colonial birth and its legacies. Similarly, the study leads the reader to imagine what possibilities might have played out had relations between the Russians and the Tlingits blossomed rather than soured in the early nineteenth century,

or if the powerful Tlingits had prevailed as decisively in the battle of 1804 as they did in 1802.

The editors employ a number of tools in executing this paradigm shift. The centerpiece of the volume consists of Tlingit oral narratives recorded in the twentieth century from elders born in the late nineteenth century, when the oral traditions of the battle were still very young. These include Alex Andrews' and Sally Hopkins' detailed bilingual texts (carefully transcribed and translated by the Dauenhauers), which are presented at the end of the volume but referenced throughout, as well as English narratives by Andrew P. Johnson and twentieth-century-born elders Mark Jacobs Jr. and Herb Hope. The latter are interspersed throughout the earlier sections alongside a wide-range of documents and articles produced by Russian, European, and American scholars or participants in Russian America. The sheer number of voices and range of sources creates some obvious challenges for narrative flow. The editors seek to overcome this in three ways. First, they offer a comprehensive introduction which lays out the development and aims of the project, encapsulates the overall story, and explains how the documents were chosen and organized in putting the history together. This can be read both as an overture and a synopsis. Second, they structure the sections chronologically with the following titles: I. The Prelude: First Encounters of Russians and Tlingits (eight documents); II. The First Battle Encounter: Prince William Sound, 1792 (two documents); III. The First

Settlement in Tlingit Territory: Yakutat, 1796 (one document); IV. The Russian Push into Southeast Alaska before 1799 (one document); V. The Founding of Old Sitka, 1799 (ten documents, including translations by Lydia Black of Russian-American Company manager Aleksandr Baranov's correspondence); VI. The Battle of 1802 at Old Sitka (eight documents); VII. Baranov Returns: The Battle of 1804 at Indian River (ten documents); VIII. And Life Goes On: 1805–1806, 1818 (five documents); and IX. Bilingual Texts (the two oral narratives by Andrews and Hopkins). Appendices include lists of casualties, biographies, personal and place names, a glossary, and other pertinent information. Third, most sections and documents have editors' introductions, which lay out further context for selection of the documents and how they fit within the broader narrative and historiography of the Sitka battles. This is critical because many of the documents contravene accepted tenets of the historical record, but must be read carefully to discover this.

Importantly, the editors are not hostile to the Russian sources, which would be a poor, if justifiable, antidote to the hostility and ignorance that many Western historians have shown for Tlingit historical sources. On the contrary, they skillfully embrace all the sources and use them to interrogate and enlighten each other in fruitful ways, such that Russian sources shed light on Tlingit history and Tlingit sources shed light on Russian history, including biases, omissions, and misperceptions. Many of the documents are translated here for the first time. Professor Black, who passed away only months before the book was completed, translates or re-translates much of the Russian material with help from Richard Dauenhauer, while Nora and Richard Dauenhauer transcribe and translate the Tlingit texts. The editors' careful attention to details, such as personal and place names, and to the divergence and convergence of points in the sources results in something more than a classical ethnohistory: *Anóoshi Lingít Aaní Ká* is a truly intercultural history. Just how productive this approach can be is richly evident in exploring the very origins of contact between Russians and Tlingits. Tlingits have oral traditions about encounters with the Russians dating back to Aleksei Chirikov's expedition with Bering in 1741. In his "Early Encounters between the Tlingit and the Russians," elder Mark Jacobs, Jr. reports on the Tlingit history that men presumably from Chirikov's vessel were sent to shore to acquire freshwater and decided, upon meeting a friendly Tlingit party, to desert the Russian

expedition. The Tlingits were said to have adopted the refugees and intermarried, the descendants ultimately settling in Klawock. According to Jacobs, the incident took place near Sitka on the outer coast of Kruzof Island. In a separate essay (p. 11-20), Allen Engstrom, using a variety of sources as well as his own ground-truthing expedition to verify, among other things, a petroglyph resembling a Russian sailing ship, makes a convincing case for Surge Bay on the outer coast of Yakobi Island, further to the north. Interestingly, the latter locale was suggested by a Hoonah Tlingit elder I spoke with in the early 1990s, who related a story very similar to Jacobs'. If true, this rewrites the genesis of contact between the Russians and the Tlingits, pushing it back a half century and placing it in a very different light.

Other revelations are more prosaic but no less useful in helping us understand the character of Tlingit-Russian relations. For example, few know that Baranov, along with being a capable administrator and hard-nosed negotiator (a Tlingit nickname for him I learned from Tlingit elder Herman Kitka Sr, was Loosh Téix', "No Heart"), wrote at least one song. The melody is lost but the sentimental lyrics are preserved, including: "Though nature here [Alaska] appears wild,/ and the people are of bloodthirsty habits,/ the important benefits/ needed by the Fatherland/make boredom and labor bearable" p. 132). Apparently one of the ways the rank and file promyshlenikii soothed their boredom was by harassing Tlingit women, a condemnable practice brought out in the Tlingit narratives as partial justification for the hostilities that developed between the two sides.

Another important revelation is that diplomacy and peacemaking are central to the story as much as the warring. Good diplomatic skills on the part of both the Russians and the Tlingit helped avoid conflicts at a number of turns. The peacemaking facet of Tlingit culture is often overlooked or deemphasized in Western accounts of their "savagery" and "bloodthirstiness," but the Russians experienced it firsthand within a year after the battle of 1804. Realizing that his operation was both dependant on the Tlingit for subsistence, labor, and trade and vulnerable to another attack (or blockade, as Herb Hope relates from his Kiks.ádi clan's history), Baranov made numerous overtures for peace, and eventually the Tlingits accepted. A formal "Deer Peace Ceremony" eventually was conducted, gifts exchanged, and, as Alex Andrews succinctly sums it up, "things were made good

with the Russians/ ... The Russians then became our relatives” (pp. 344–345).

As Andrews also makes clear, however, some matters were not completely resolved. The great Kiks.ádi warrior, Katlian’s (Kalyáan’s) Raven helmet and the gold peace hat given to the Tlingit by the Russians at the peace ceremony were alienated from the Tlingit and put into museums. Thus, the politics of peace did not end in 1805 but continued into the present era of repatriation and commemoration. By 2004, the two-hundredth anniversary of the battle of 1804, they yielded a second ceremony in which both hats, now repatriated to the Tlingit, were brought out to celebrate a more lasting and just peace. With these actions, and this book, it seems that the question “who owns history?” provocatively posed in the prelude to *Anóoshi Lingít Aani Ká* and wrestled with throughout this remarkable project, now has a more inclusive and balanced answer. As a consequence, this book will be an indispensable reference for any student seeking to understand this watershed period in Tlingit, American, and Russian history.

