

FIELDWORK ON THE COMMANDER ISLANDS ALEUTS

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ABSTRACT

The group of Aleuts living on the Commander Islands has long attracted the interests of linguists, anthropologists, and ethnographers. The first party of Aleuts was taken from the Aleutian to the Commander Islands in 1825, and the last was delivered in 1872. The Aleuts lived in two separate groups on the Commanders, one on Bering Island and the other on Copper (Mednyi) Island. The Aleut settlement of Preobrazhenskii, on Copper Island, was in existence from the beginning of the 1860s. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) began to gather individual objects and collections relating to the Aleuts of the Commander Islands that were brought in by participants of various naval, zoological, botanical, geological, and other expeditions. Until the end of the 1920s, no ethnographical studies of the Commander Island Aleuts had been undertaken. Employees of the MAE made a significant contribution to the study of the inhabitants of the Commander Islands.

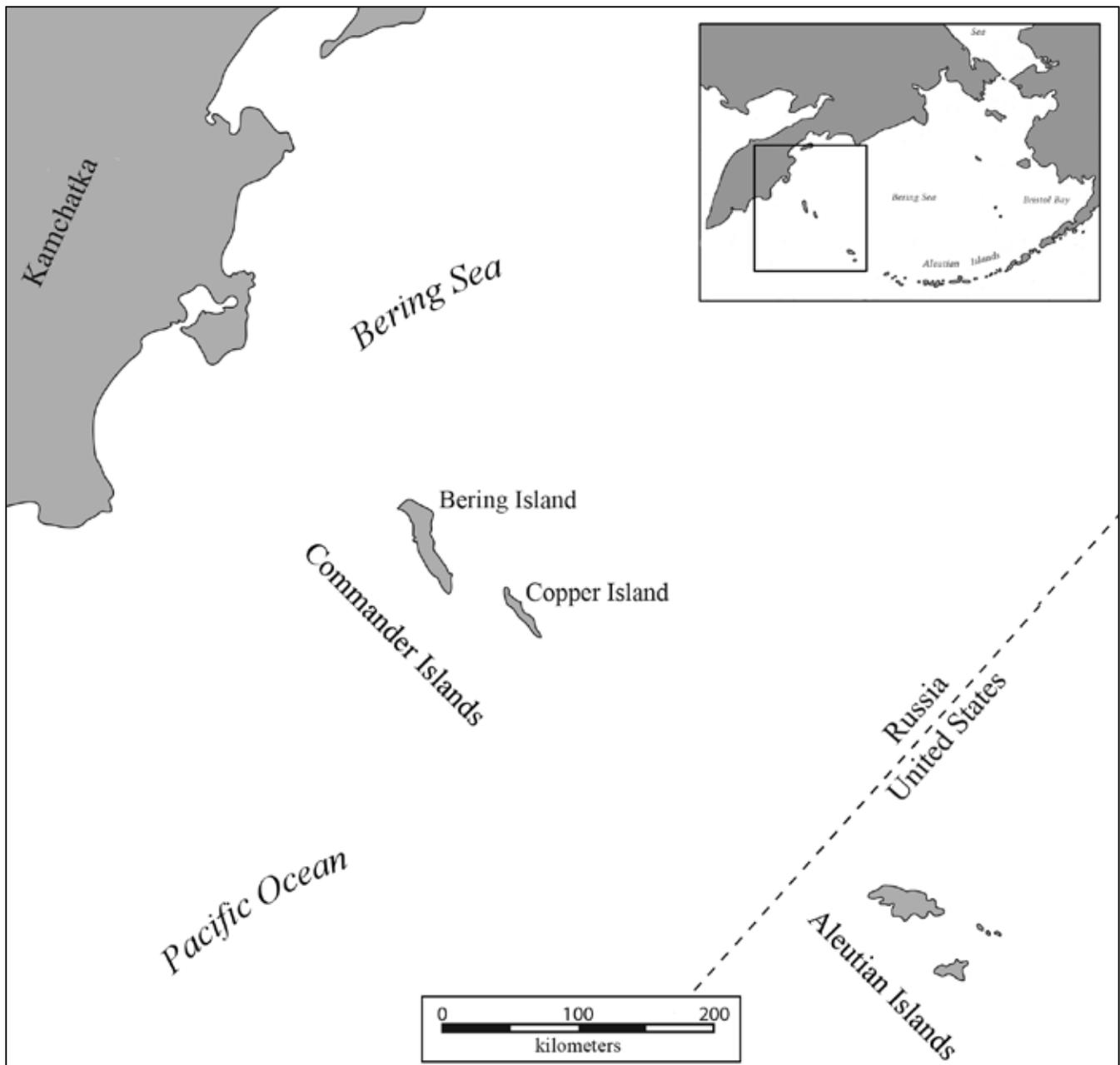
This article is dedicated both to the results of the scientific studies done among the Commander Island Aleuts as well as to the history of the MAE's collections on these "small people" of Siberia. Special attention is paid to the materials of the museum's employees and explorers, whose documents are now located in the MAE's archives (AMAE): S. Pandre, V. P. Khabarov, and E. P. Orlova. The article also mentions projects for the study of the Commander Island Aleuts that were never completed.

The first collections concerning the Commander Island Aleuts began arriving in the museum at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1890, Alexander Alexandrovich Bunge (1851–1930) explored the Arctic and contributed a model of a two-hatched baidarka (no. 2867–37). From 1887 to 1880, as part of the crew of the clipper *Razboinik*, Bunge explored the North Pacific Ocean and visited the Commander Islands.

Another original collection (MAE 1998) is that contributed by the Tsesarevich Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov (1868–1918). The tsesarevich gave the collection to the museum in 1891, after he had undertaken a voyage to the Far East. It was expected that Nikolai would pay a visit to the Commander Islands during his trip. Though this never took place, the collection that the Aleuts had prepared for the tsesarevich was subsequently

sent to him as a gift. In 1896 it ended up in the MAE. Before that, from 1892 to 1893, the collection was in an exhibition of gifts presented to Nikolai Alexandrovich during his tour of the Far East. In that exhibition's catalog, the following Aleut objects are mentioned:

- 647. A baidar with eleven passengers [no. 313-47—S. K.]
- 648. Two single-hatched baidarkas
- 649. A baidarka with two passengers
- 650. A three-hatched baidarka
- 651. Skis and a stick
- 652. Examples of many kinds of hunting implements to hunt foxes, such as savage northern peoples have used from time immemorial
- 658. A Native dugout
- 659. A net for catching birds
- 660. War arrow



The Commander Islands. Map by Dale Slaughter.

- 663. Bag
- 664. Dance costume (from earlier times)
- 665. A parka made from birds
- 666. Native clothing and mittens
- 668. Aleut dance hat

At the time of the collection's formation, in 1890, the Commander Island Aleuts were heavily influenced by both Russian and American culture (in 1871 the island had been rented to an American trading company for twenty years). However, the Aleuts had maintained the ability to manufacture many objects of traditional culture, to which

the present collection attests. Altogether there are twenty-four entries in the collection, representing several dozen objects. There are models of baidarkas with figurines of hunters—one-hatched (no. 313-48/1-2), two-hatched (no. 313-49), and three-hatched (no. 313-50). There is also a model baidar—a large open boat with eleven hunter figurines (nos. 313-347). Also included are boats used to hunt whales and to transport women and children.

The original exhibition included a model of an Aleut underground hut, which shows traces of Russian influences. The traditional Aleut entrance hole in the roof

is replaced by a door through the side (no. 313-58). European influences can be seen in the construction of traps for catching foxes (nos. 313-52, -55, -56, -57) and in the children's clothing, which although made from animal intestines, does not resemble a *kamleika*, but rather a shirt with pants, boots, and gloves (nos. 313-66a, b, c, d). Siberian influence is easily seen in the skis and poles (nos. 313-51a, b, c).

Several objects relate to the production of traditional Aleut culture: a wicker basket (no. 313-53), a mesh for catching birds (no. 313-59), a harpoon for killing marine animals (no. 313-60), a model throwing board (no. 313-61), a net for catching birds (no. 313-62), a leather purse (no. 313-63), a parka made of bird skin (no. 313-64), two men's dance headdresses (nos. 313-68, -70), and a woman's cape-shawl (no. 313-69).

This list demonstrates that at the end of the nineteenth century the Aleuts had still maintained the material basis of their traditional culture. I. E. Veniaminov wrote about Aleut clothing:

The principal and essential clothing of an Aleut is the parka—a kind of long shirt that falls below the knees, with a standing collar and narrow sleeves. Parkas are now made from bird skins, above all puffins (sea parrots) or tufted puffins, and sometimes from *aras*; if these are unavailable, the parkas are made from seal skins. . . .

Parkas are irreplaceable for the Aleuts in this climate. While traveling, parkas serve as bedding and clothing, and it may be said, their house. With it Aleuts fear neither wind nor frost (Veniaminov 1840:v. II, 212).

Veniaminov also gives evidence concerning the ceremonial headwear of the type represented in nos. 313-68 and -70.

In earlier times a round hat was still used, made from seal skins, embroidered with reindeer fur, with a long braid of straps in the back, and with an embroidered tongue forward. These hats were only used for dances; today no one has any like them (Veniaminov 1840:v. II, 219).

This last quotation relates to the description of Aleut culture on Unalaska Island in the 1830s; however, on the Commander Islands ceremonial headgear was retained until the end of the nineteenth century.

G. A. Sarychev mentioned the use of the cape-shawl like object no. 313-69 in his description of Aleut dances on the Andreanof Islands, which he witnessed in 1790:

When the Aleutians began to sing, the dancer took in each hand a bladder, which he held so they would hang down to his elbows, and then began to dance, nodding and tossing his head to the sound of the drum; after which, throwing down the bladders, he took up the skin, and swung it aloft several times, as if to exhibit it to the company. He then threw the bladders down, and seizing an inflated seal skin, danced with it as before, holding its extremities in his hands; and finally, taking a stick, imitated the action of rowing a baidar (Sarychev 1952:202; translation modified from Sarychev 1806).

Models of two mats, counters, and throwing knuckle bones constitute parts of a traditional Aleut game (nos. 313-67a, b, c, d) that was played by four participants, two against two. The game was played on two marked-off squares, through which were drawn several lines. The players were supposed to throw the small knuckle bones into this space. Sometimes small mats with lines drawn on them were used. The competitors tried to knock the others' knuckles from the lines, replacing them with their own pieces. The pair who managed to place more knuckle bones on the lines were declared the winners. For their victory they received several small bone sticks or beads. Once one of the pairs had won three times the game was over.

In 1906, the Imperial Academy of Sciences received from the Geological Museum a bola that the Commander Islands Aleuts used for hunting birds. It had been given to the Geological Museum by zoologist Otto Alfred Fedorovich Gerz (1852–1905), who at the end of the nineteenth century had undertaken zoological explorations in the Commander Islands. In 1912 a model of a Commander Island baidarka (no. 1975) was received from the Kamchatka Medical Inspector Alexander Yulianovich Levitskii (born 1863).

In 1910, during a trip to the Amur, L. Ya. Shternberg visited the N. I. Grodekov Khabarovsk Local History Museum and established a professional association with the museum director, V. K. Arsenev. Over the course of many years the MAE received a valuable collection of Siberian ethnography from Khabarovsk. In 1915 the museum's curator, M. Venediktov, sent the MAE three model baidarkas from the Commander Islands (no. 2442). In 1927 the museum received two Commander Island Aleut *kamleikas* from O. D. Nilova, objects which had belonged to Admiral K. D. Nilov at the end of the twentieth century (no. 3483).

In addition to its collection of objects, the MAE has a small illustrated collection consisting of twelve group

photos of Aleuts from the village of Preobrazhenskoe, on Copper Island (no. 4566). These photographs were taken at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. In several photographs the Aleuts are shown wearing caps with the inscription “Copper Island” along the band. Before the Revolution, all Aleuts who reached twenty years old were enlisted into protecting fur-seal colonies. They wore a naval uniform consisting of pants, jacket, and a cap bearing the inscription “Copper Island” or “Bering Island.”

Thus, until the 1920s, research on the Commander Island Aleuts was limited to the collection of several small ethnographic collections and short descriptions of the Aleuts in the travel journals of sailors, government officials, zoologists, botanists, and other researchers who visited the islands. The first to call for real scientific study of the Commander Island population was the American anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1843). Hrdlička was interested in the question of the peopling of America. He thought that in prehistoric times there were two routes by which humans reached America. One of them was located in the Bering Strait, and the other stretched from Kamchatka across the Commander and Aleutian Islands—at a time when they formed an isthmus connecting Asia and America. In order to prove his theory, Hrdlička needed to undertake archaeological and anthropological research in the Commanders.

The XXIII International Congress of Americanists took place New York City in September 1928. Professor W.G. Bogoras, a member of the MAE, took part in the congress. After the congress concluded, Bogoras participated in an international meeting for the study of Arctic peoples, a meeting also attended by K. Wissler from the American Museum of Natural History (New York), A. Hrdlička from the Smithsonian Institution, the Canadian ethnologist D. Jenness, E. Nordenskiöld from Sweden, and three Danes: W. Thalbitzer, K. Birket-Smith, and T. Matthiason. At the meeting the men agreed on the necessity of organizing ethnographic expeditions to unexplored parts of Siberia and that the American museums were prepared to finance such expeditions. W.G. Bogoras spoke out against an American expedition to study Siberian peoples. He claimed that Soviet scientists possessed the means to conduct their own expeditions. Subsequently, A. Hrdlička established professional correspondence with archaeologists and anthropologists from Moscow, Leningrad, and Irkutsk.

The first Aleut to receive higher education (partly in anthropology) was Valentin Polikarpovich Khabarov. At the end of 1925, the Northern Branch of the Workers’ (Preparatory) Faculty of Leningrad State University was founded. Twenty-four students enrolled, eighteen of whom were native Siberians, among them V.P. Khabarov. Both L.Ya. Shternberg and W.G. Bogoras taught in the Northern Branch. In 1927, the students of the Northern Branch were transferred to the Northern Faculty of the Leningrad Eastern Institute, and in 1925 the Institute for the Peoples of the North (IPN) was created on its basis. During the time of his study, Khabarov was one of the most active students. In March 1928, he took part in the work of the Fifth Plenum of the North at the All Union Central Executive Committee in Moscow. There he was chosen as a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Taiga and Tundra*. Bogoras became editor of the periodical, and his assistant, Ya.P. Koshkin, later became rector of the IPS. In 1931 the first fifteen students graduated from the IPS, among them Khabarov and his Khanty wife, Militsa Khabarova. In 1931, Khabarov published an article entitled “The Commander Islands” in the third issue of *Taiga and Tundra*, which also contained Militsa’s notes “A School on the Commander Islands” (Khabarova 1931).

V.P. Khabarov wrote:

Bering Island has only one inhabited place, the village Nikolskoe, with a population of 179 people. Copper Island also has only one inhabited place—the village Preobrazhenskoe, with a total population of 153 people. The Russian population (the financial administration) does not exceed 15 on both islands.

The human population on the Commander Islands is less than 350 people, if one counts the permanent as well as temporary residents—the financial administration. Until the end of the last century the population grew naturally, and the number of inhabitants reached 605 by 1910. Thereafter they began to die out.

The average lifespan, as a result of poor climatic and living conditions, is extremely low—22 years on both islands.

The peoples’ economy there is based on hunting marine mammals: sea otters, fur seals, and blue foxes. The peoples’ well-being depends on the harvest of these species. The fur trade declines from

year to year... Women do nothing except domestic labor, and the men work in the fur trade or defend the island's fur-resources for a salary, recently divided into three categories. Outside of the fur business, the population receives no income (Khabarov 1931:54–55).

Khabarov's information in this article comes from 1927, when he and his wife did summer internships on Bering Island.

At that same time, the doctor S. Pandre, from Khabarovsk, composed a report on Bering Island from 1930–1932 (Archive of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, f. 23, op. 1, no. 27, p. 15). This document contains no ethnographical observations but does depict the general socioeconomic and demographic situation of the Aleuts. According to the report, at the beginning of the 1930s the Aleuts experienced a deep demographic decline and practically died out.

According to statistical information from the Commander Islands, the population of Bering and Copper Island in 1911 numbered 640.

On January 1, 1930, the population of the islands was determined to be 300 people, as soon after my arrival on the Commander Islands in April, 1930, I was presented with the question of explaining the reasons for the decline of the population by 50% in 20 years.

I undertook thorough investigations of the Aleuts' health on Bering Island. I only found the medics' notes on the reasons for mortality in 1925. From research on the Bering Island Aleuts it was clear that their principal malady was tuberculosis, principally in the lungs, which accounted for 25%....

What accounts for such a high rate of infection and death from tuberculosis? There are many factors: 1. living conditions, 2. every-day life, 3. alcoholism, 4. incest, 5. food, 6. climatic conditions.

I will sum up each of the factors listed.

Living conditions. From archival documents dating 1877–1899, and 1905–1906, in Doctor Malinovsky's report, it can be seen that "the huts were of the American sort, appropriate for a country where oranges grow." From the reports of representatives of *Dalryba* (Far Eastern Fish) on the Commander Islands it is clear that before Soviet organizations leased the islands, these houses belonged to the Aleuts, went entirely un-renovated, and every year became more dilapidated. Yes, and in the first years of the Soviet organizations *Dalgostorg*

(Far Eastern State Trading) and *Dalryba*, wooden building material was brought there only to serve the needs of the hunters and were not given to the Aleuts to fix their houses.

Therefore, in the course of several decades, the people have lived in damp, cold houses, and waste much of their energy on heating themselves....

Everyday life. Aleuts live happily in families, they treat their sick very tenderly, and they are afraid of leaving them by themselves. When conducting sanitary disposal it is necessary to move carefully around the sick person and others....

Alcoholism. In all the archives, in E. K. Suvorov's book, there is evidence of alcoholism among the Aleut. Of course, alcoholism has not ended even today. No educational work in the form of conversations about the evils of alcoholism, not even a demonstration of a well-made, popular film, has led to the desired result. Perhaps the production of moonshine has somewhat diminished, but alcoholism has been impossible to eradicate, and probably will be for several decades, despite such attempts at punishment such as forced labor, fines, and withholding of sugar rations for two months. It seems to me, that in the first month after the establishment of a People's Court, the Aleuts distilled and drank more frequently....

Incest. From the genealogies I have of the inhabitants of Bering Island it is clear that all are related to each other. If these people were healthy, then perhaps by the laws of genetics no degeneration would result from in-breeding. But, given their weak physical development, this incest from generation to generation is one of the reasons for Commander Island Aleuts dying out....

Food. One cannot say that on Bering Island, that food is bad, taking into account of course the local products: wild game, dried fish, salted fish, plus the rations distributed to the stations. From 1930 to 1931 there was not enough fat and vegetables had been absent for the last three years. In that year not even a single kilogram of potatoes was delivered. Only two kilograms of dried vegetables per family (15 grams per person) are distributed each year, and 30–31 grams to a half kilogram of onions. It is clear, of course, that the three year absence of vegetable rations has had a major impact on food supply....

Climatic conditions. As I said above when describing the working conditions of the fur hunters, the conditions are difficult. There is continuous dampness, strong winds, a small number of sunny

days on Bering Island, and almost no sunny days at all on Copper Island. . . . (AMAE n.d.: f. 23, op. 1, no. 27, l. 15).

As a result of the dedicated work of the physician S. Pandre and her successors, the Commander Island population stabilized in the 1930s and began to slowly recover.

Upon returning to Bering Island in 1931, V.P. Khabarov received administrative posts in the local government. His book *The Fur Seal Industry on the Commander Islands* appeared in 1941 (Khabarov 1941). Khabarov maintained official ties with his co-workers in the Siberian Department of the MAE. They convinced him to write articles about the Aleuts, probably for the collection *Peoples of Siberia*, which was readied for printing at the end of the 1930s. Khabarov contributed an essay entitled "Aleuts." Below are several quotations from the work, which relate to the description of Aleut culture on the Commander Islands (AMAE, f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106).

The inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands had numerous local names. . . . Atkhinitsy—Niggugim (presently Beringovtsy). . . .

On the other hand, Aleuts of the Attu Islands called themselves Unangan—that is, in the back of the Alaskan peninsula. It must be said, that the word Unangan should be understood in two ways and indivisibly. Better said, the first of these [probably the inhabitants of the Alaska peninsula—S.K.] (Attuans) called themselves Unangan for military success, in order to succeed in war. Later the Attuans themselves started to call themselves Unangan. Besides this, the word Unangan expresses the pride of the Aleuts tied to the aggression and fortune needed to attack the enemy suddenly. That is where the name Unangan (today Copper Islanders) comes from (AMAE n.d.: f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106, l. 1–2).

According to data from the Aleutian Executive Committee, on January 1, 1938, the number of Aleuts living in the USSR included 155 men and 148 women. . . . The Bering Islanders call their island Tanamash, which means "our land." They call Copper Island Ikun Tangakh, which means "sea rock." The Copper Islanders call Bering Island Ikun Tanak—visible land, and they call their island (Copper)—Tanamakh, which means "our land" (AMAE n.d.: f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106, l. 3).

The Commander Island Aleuts build their underground dwellings differently. The pit is no more than half a meter deep, the openings in the roof (*ulyugikh*) served

exclusively as a chimney. In order to enter and exit the dwelling a door (*kamegikh*) was made in the wall. Inside the walls were bunks for sleeping. A stone fireplace was located in the corner and outfitted so that one could cook bread in it. In the 1870s, these dwellings were replaced by planned houses built by the Hutchinson Co. Aleuts lived as separate families in these dwellings. They were heated by charcoal or hot water that was carried in. Their internal furnishings were benches, tables, shelves, etc., the same as in Russian houses in Kamchatka. Their utensils are all purchased. The national costume of the Commander Islands has been maintained only by the hunters: waterproof boots (*ulegikh*) and jackets. The rest have been replaced by imported European styles.

Marine animals, both hunted and fished, played a large role in the Aleut diet. The meat of marine animals, birds, and fish was boiled. Sometimes the meat was eaten raw, for example the liver and kidneys of seals and sea lions and several fish, including halibut, greenling, sculpins, the heads and gills of cod, and greenling liver. Coho salmon and sockeye and humpback salmon heads are also eaten raw. Octopus is boiled for food, but some of it is eaten raw. Besides this, Aleuts gathered sea urchin and other mollusks raw. The main food sources were fur seal meat, cod, pike-perch (*sudachok*), and sockeye salmon. Their meat was salted down in boxes for winter. Food from cod and from salmon is also dried (*iukola*) and packed into boxes or into sea-lion stomachs. Food from marine mammal meat (sea lions and seals) is packed raw into seal or fur-seal stomachs. Salted fur-seal flippers are only eaten raw with cod or salmon *iukola*.

Aleuts use a lot of tobacco. Both men and women smoke. The majority of men also prefer to chew tobacco, a habit adopted from the Americans. Previously American and Russian tobacco was used, but now Russian naval *makhorka* (low-quality tobacco) is smoked. Aleuts used to chew "Kentucky," "Cherkass," or "Manchurian" leafed tobacco, but now that they no longer have access to this, they chew *makhorka*. In order to prepare tobacco to be chewed it is moistened with water, sprinkled with a little salt, and then mixed with charcoal. The tobacco leaves are rolled into a pipe like stuffed cabbage and then put in a small box well made for that purpose, constructed either of wood or from a cow horn. This box is called a *tabakerka*. Snuff tobacco has disappeared (AMAE n.d.: f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106, l. 18–20).

Aleuts were animist-shamanists. According to their ideas, the whole world was populated with spirits. Several spirits had particular meaning in their religion: The spirits of people and of the animals they hunted—seal spirits and cod spirits, waterkeeper spirits, cliff spirits, and the spirits of things hostile to humans. Plots, drawings, and talismans were widespread. The shamans' functions were to intercede with the spirits to ensure success in hunting and in the struggle with spirits who had kidnapped a human soul, or with spirits possessing people...

The principal subjects of the Aleut's tales were the deeds of ancestors, stories about the travels and adventures of heroes, and visits from inhabitants of other places, such as giants (*agligikh*), dwarves (*chalkakakh*), and various animal spirits. The raven was the hero of many myths. Humorous stories about bad hunters occupied a large place in Aleut folklore. Aleuts had several forms of song: shamanistic, playful, epic, lyrical, and others. The influence of Christianity has left a mark on folklore. Together with various myths about the raven, *agligikh* and *chalkakakh*, the origin of hunted animals, and the adventures of heroes, there have appeared tales about the creation of the heavens (*agokekh*), the evil spirit (*inunannakh*), and his assistant (*chugugorokh*), etc.

Miniature figures, carved from wood, bones, and ivory, and painted (with blood and bile from animals and variously colored clays), form part of the Aleuts' visual arts. Tattooing and face painting are also practices. Dances (*kagaiugikh*) with painted masks showing heroes, animals (seals and codfish), and spirits had religious meaning" (AMAE n.d.: f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106, l. 23–25).

In the notes to his article, Khabarov reported that in 1930 he was in correspondence with Waldemar Jochelson, and that "Kugam Ikgana (Damned Old Woman) and Kagliagumuzakh (Raven-Little Raven) and others helped contribute materials on language, and currently preserve tales and legends in the Aleut language" (AMAE n.d.: f. K-V, op. 1, no. 106, l. 41). Today, the location of the folkloric texts written by Khabarov in 1939 is unknown (Sangi 1985:395). In 1939 an article about Khabarov and other graduates of the Leningrad Institute of the Peoples of the North, entitled "Lomonosovs of Our Day," was published in the journal *Pravda*.

In 1937 and 1938 Aleš Hrdlička twice visited the Commander Islands. In 1937 his stay only lasted two days

(Hrdlička 1945:277–287). Hrdlička managed to undertake real archaeological explorations in August 1938, when the student W. S. Laughlin traveled with his crew (Harper 2002:10). Hrdlička examined the coastal cliffs of Bering and Copper Islands and middens along the slopes of the hills and the stream banks, and made several test pits. The results of his research were negative—he uncovered no traces of prehistoric human presence in the Commander Islands (Hrdlička, 1945:381–397).

In the summer of 1939 Hrdlička once again came to the Soviet Union. In June he visited the MAE, bringing to the museum library several of his works and presenting an essay on anthropological research in the United States. Hrdlička and Maria Vasilevna Stepanova (1901–1946) of the museum's America department established a productive working relationship. Under Hrdlička's influence, Stepanova planned to take part in an expedition to the Commander Islands. At the MAE, Hrdlička took part in a special meeting with Soviet specialists in the archaeology and ethnography of Siberia and America. As one of its results, the leadership of the Academy of Sciences planned a conference for October 1942, dedicated to the 450th anniversary of the discovery of America. However, the Second World War (1941–1945) ruined these plans.

In the 1940s Stepanova worked on her dissertation, "Native Inhabitants of Russian America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." However, she died in December 1946 at the age of forty-five. In Stepanova's eulogy, E. E. Blomquist wrote,

Her PhD dissertation was already near completion before Maria Vasilevna had the opportunity to travel to the Commander Islands. She had already begun to prepare for an in-depth study of the Commander Island Aleuts, when her early death cut short her tireless work. A thoughtful, serious researcher has been taken from us, a person with great creative plans and possibilities. The beginnings of her work promised to uncover much in her little-known field, and would have enriched Soviet science with valuable research (Blomquist 1947:215).

As a result of her death, Stepanova and Hrdlička's plans to conduct additional research on the Commander Islands were never realized.

In 1949, Elizveta Porfirevna Orlova (1899–1976) became a nonstaff member of the MAE. From 1930 to 1935, she

worked in the Russian Far East, teaching literacy to the Native peoples of Siberia. In 1932, Orlova prepared a primer for the Aleut language which, however, was not published. Today, only one copy of this primer is kept in the Institute of the History of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) [verbal communication with E. V. Golovko].

In 1949, E. P. Orlova found permanent employment at the MAE. In May 1861, she moved to Novosibirsk and began working in the Institute of the Economy and Organization of Industrial Production in the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences. From July 14, 1961, until December 27 of that year she participated in an expedition studying the Itelmen, Koryaks, Evens, and Aleuts. She spent more than a month on the Commander Islands, from August to September 1961. Orlova (1962) published an article stemming from her research amongst the Aleuts. In the MAE archives there are also several variants of other articles that Orlova had planned to publish. She wrote:

In 1961 I found out from the Aleuts, that for collective hunting they had earlier used a large baidar rowed by twelve men, called an *ulukhtakh*. The *ulikhtakh* had a double leather lining, composed of 6 to 12 sea-lion skins. The women came together on the street to sew the lining together. Several old women took part in sewing the covers for the baidars. They remember well the unparalleled seaworthiness of the baidar *ekiakh*, which had one hatch, in which the hunter commonly sailed alone to sea. Baidars with two hatches were built to train twelve-year-old young men to hunt at sea. The framework “grid” was made from light pieces of driftwood, which had come from the American shore. To cover a one-hatched baidar required two large sea-lion skins. The baidar hatches are supplied with a special waistband-cover “togo,” whose width is from 40 to 50 centimeters, sewn from sea-lion skin and attached to the rim of the hatch with a strip of whale baleen. The baidars went out of use in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They were replaced by whaleboats, motorized boats, and other motorized craft.

From the skins of sea birds—puffins and tufted puffins—the Aleuts sewed warm and light parkas without slits in the front, and hats. When going to sea, on top of these warm parkas they wore *kamleikas* with hoods, stitched with sea-lion intestines. From the Aleuts E. I. and A. I. Badaev, I learned that when going to sea during inclement weather, on top of the sea-otter kamleika they put on another hooded kamleika stitched from the skin

from fur-seal throats for boot tops, seal skin for the front, and sea lion skins for the soles. On their head they wore wooden hats with a bill stretched out in front for protection against wind and sea spray. Set in a baidarka with such an outfit, the hunter was strapped in below the armpits with a waistband called a “togo,” a tightly tied restraint made of whale sinew, which helped him remain completely dry. With this kind of clothing, the Aleuts fearlessly went out to sea in rain, wind, and even in storms.

The Badaevs related how from one large sea lion intestine two adult kamleikas could be sewn. From 50 fur-seal throats they sewed one kamleika, and from 38 throats they sewed men’s pants, gloves, and a hood. With careful handling, a kamleika could be used for 3 to 4, and sometimes even for 5 years, while remaining entirely waterproof. There were special craftsmen to tighten up the hood and sleeves so that no water could leak in. “Your finger could freely go down the hood and sleeves and no water would get in, not even if it got directly in the water”—added E. I. Badaeva. With baidarkas outfitted like this they paddled to Bering Island, to Kamchatka, and even to Attu Island.

Today, the colon, bladder, stomach, and throat of marine mammals are thrown away, while previously these were crucial materials for making hunting clothing, shoes, and utensils, which frequently were not inferior in quality to articles produced in factories.

In the past the Aleuts mainly fed themselves with the meat and fat of marine animals—fur seals, sea lions, seals, walruses, and whales; fresh and dried fish; and bird meats and eggs (from geese, ducks, gulls, *aras*, loons, puffins, and tufted puffins). Hundreds and even thousands of these eggs provided for the entire year. All manner of mollusks and “caviar”—the ovaries of sea urchins—was also available in large quantities. The word *agukh agakbmal*, which indicated high tide, is translated as “sea urchin birth,” and low tide—*agukh chigdul*—is “sea urchin death.” Today they still prefer the same food, and to this day sea urchin “caviar” is considered a delicacy. Seaweed and sea kelp, which abound along the seashore, were and still are used as food, though not as much as previously. The Aleuts still collect and eat wild plants, especially the leaves of the wild onion, as well as wild garlic and sarana root. However, none of these are eaten as frequently as before. Berries still form part of the diet, including the honeysuckle, crowberry, and rowanberry. Nature has generously endowed the Commander Islands with edible products, however

every year the importance of imported, prepared foods rises, including flour, cereals, sugar, candy, tea, butter, oil, and all kinds of canned food, etc.

On the Commander Islands there are six national songs, which the Aleuts sing in their Native language, namely: *Agitadam* (“Comrade”)—the most beloved song, which is about a friend who drowned in the sea; *Yagnanasim askhinuis* (“A successful hunt for women”); *Kikhyakhchis malgadulas* (“Singing songs and crying”); *Itan, ikh* (“First”); *Sulkhayakhtas* (“Deceiver”); and *Ukogom yaman, ayu* (“I can hardly wait”). The song *Agitadam*, performed by the Aleut P. F. Volokitin, was recorded on magnetic tape. Volokitin was my teacher at the Far Eastern Technical College for Peoples of Siberia and a participant in the linguistic brigade. Under my direction, from 1931 to 1932, he wrote the first Aleut primer, *Agadgikh khan, akikh* (“Sunrise”), which was approved for printing by the *Uchpedgiz* (Teacher’s Pedagogical Printing House), but was unfortunately not published.

In the 1940s the Commander Islands Aleuts often practiced five different dances, some of which are still performed. They included “Balances,” the Quadrille, “Q and Reverse Q”—“the longest and most beautiful dance” in their estimation. These dances, without a doubt, were borrowed from the Russian hunters and officials, however several alterations were made to suit the national taste. Two have been preserved that are definitely Native—the dramatic dances *Tulukidakh* and *Kagadugekh*. The latter dance depicts the life of a hunter from his early youth until old age. It is performed in Native dress. The men perform in *kamleikas*, boots made of seal skin with black tops and white soles made of sea lions, wooden hats, and hold spears and arrows in their hands. The women are dressed in parkas and hats sewn from puffin and tufted puffin skins, or in double-breasted jackets sewn from fish skin. On their legs they wear boots with black tops and white soles. For the dance *Tulukidakh* the men came out into the center of a large room and began to play on the drums, beating them with their hands—no drumsticks were ever used. The drums were small and round with pendants or bells. The dance depicted various scenes of hunting marine animals. The women sat to the right of the exit and clapped to the beat of the drums while shouting: *Hee-hee, ha-ha! Hee-hee, ha ha!*

From 1945–46, these dances began to be performed in different clothes. The men danced in all black, with a suit and tie, although they certainly needed white shirts. The women, all as one, wore

black skirts and white blouses, boots with black tops, white soles, and white tied belts. The Aleuts thought it very beautiful that there was no hard banging on the floor, but only the soft shuffling of the soft leather soles. Men and women always danced in pairs; unmatched people were never allowed into the game or dance circle, but had to sit at the wall.

In recent years the Aleuts have begun to forget their dances, and are even ashamed to perform them. The young people much prefer to dance modern ballroom dances. The only native game that has been preserved is the adult game of accuracy, called *kakan, is*—“stones.” “Stones” was always played with the bones of the sea cow (there were six of them, though one was made of copper). In the event that one wins in the middle of “stones,” the copper “stone” was thrown, and the winner cried: *Kudakh!*—“I won.” *Kakan, is* was usually played at home during bad weather. On the walls of the most distant dwellings, a pillow was placed on the floor a depression was made in it, and “stones” were thrown at it from the other side of the room. The stones were supposed to land on the depression made in the pillow (AMAE, f. 23, op. 1, l. 28–30).

In 1952, Rosa Gavrilovna Liapunova (1928–1992) began working at the MAE. She began her work by studying the museum’s Aleut collection. In the 1970s and 1980s she undertook additional research amongst the Aleuts of the Commander Islands. Liapunova joined the Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Union’s Academy of Science’s (Moscow) Permanent Northern Expedition, working under the general director of the Department of Siberian Peoples, A. S. Gurvich. As part of the expedition, Liapunova undertook additional research in 1975, 1976, and 1977. The MAE only holds some of the documents resulting from the expeditions. Liapunova wrote:

From 1975 to 1977, amongst the Commander Islands Aleuts, we recorded the indigenous knowledge about the ethnogenesis and settling of the islands by groups of Aleuts, their previous territorial subdivisions, and the origins of the Commander Island Aleuts themselves.... It was interesting to procure lists of old Aleut families, which we took down from interviews with elders in 1975. Every island had a unique list, duplicated only in one or two cases (Liapunova 1987:185–186).

The MAE archive (*delo* no. 1305) contains information about indigenous medical knowledge, the methods for processing pelts, fishing, etc. (AMAE, f. K-I., op 2.,

no. 1305, l. 29–57). These observations were collected by Liapunova during the 1976 expedition. It is known that in 1976 she recorded two early unpublished Aleut myths about the deeds of eagle and raven, dictated from information provided by the Aleut Pankov.

In 1976, on Copper Island, Liapunova also conducted archaeological excavations in the town of Preobrazhenskoe. The artifacts Liapunova discovered were sent to the Aleut Local History Museum in the village of Nikolskoe on Bering Island. These artifacts included a hook for pulling the catch out of the water (no. 137), a lead weight shaped like a fish (nos. 8, 9, 10, 64/1-2), a fishhook for catching halibut (no. 12), a mold for casting weights in the shape of a fish (no. 136), half of a split mold for casting weights in the shape of a ship (no. 268), a bone object with openwork carving (no. 197), a hook for walking on slopes (cat's hand) (no. 11), and copper harpoon tips (nos. 6, 7).

In the 1980s, Liapunova spent another three seasons among the Commander Island Aleuts. In 1981 she traveled there together with A.N. Anfertevii (Institute of Ethnography, Moscow), in 1985 she went with G.I. Dzeniskevich, and in 1988 she went with V.T. Bochever (MAE). The MAE financed these expeditions, and as a result the reports and other materials are located in the museum's archives (AMAE).

The results of the 1981 explorations include an entire diary, Liapunova's report, and lists of Aleuts. We will include several quotations from Liapunova's report:

The Aleut national region is the smallest in our country. Its territory consists of two islands, Bering and Copper Islands. Today, there is only one inhabited location, the village of Nikolskoe. The population is around 1,350 people, out of which 275 are Aleuts. It is not possible to get a more exact number of inhabitants, since there is constant migration between the islands and the mainland. As a rule, all children from mixed marriages are included as Aleuts, irrespective of which parent is an Aleut. The explanation for this is first of all that all Aleuts receive certain benefits given to the "small people" of the North. These benefits are particularly in the salmon fishery.

Animal farming occupies a central place in the economic life of the region, contributing around 91% of the gross domestic product (AMAE, f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1307, l. 1–2).

The pronounced numerical superiority of the Russian population developed during the last two or three decades. Naturally, it leads to a reduction

of the ethnic differences between the Native and immigrant populations. The low number of Aleuts is explained by the growing tendency, especially strong in the last few years, to enter into mixed marriages. Before our eyes many features of traditional life are disappearing. The linguistic situation demands special attention. During the entire time Aleuts have been on the Commander Islands they have written in Russian and used the Aleut language only in conversation. As there are two islands separated from each other, two separate dialects developed—the Bering and Copper Island dialects. Therefore, the inhabitants predominantly use Russian when they come together. Both dialects have been frozen in their development, and not enriched, because for some time their use has been counted as a mark of low culture. The creation of such an opinion has much to do with the nefarious politics of the administration in the area of language, expressed, in particular, by the fact that children are forbidden to speak Aleut at school. Today only the elderly actively use Aleut (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1307, l. 4–5).

The fundamental shortcoming of the ethnic situation on the Commander Islands today can be expressed thus: the interests of the local, indigenous population has taken second place behind the attempt to develop mink farming and increase the population of these animals. It is imperative to fundamentally reorient the economy towards the needs of the indigenous population, on the foundation of sound scientific recommendations. It is imperative, in this region which carries the name of the Aleut nation, that primary attention is turned to elevating Aleut culture.

The representatives of local organizations sometimes express strange views about these issues. In a conversation with us, the new director of the fur farm, P.F. Danilin, asserted that the foreign workers worked more effectively than the locals. He claimed that the reason lay in the violation of workplace rules—several Aleuts, after being fired, went on an extended binge, and were returned to work under pressure from the District Party Committee and the Executive Committee only because they were Aleuts. Because of this, many exist solely on government largesse and are able to freely get drunk. P.F. Danilin sees the government interest as strictly punishing any violation of workplace discipline, no matter the national origin of the rule breaker. He does not even think about the origins of the socioeconomic structures which would allow the Aleuts to reach a place more conducive for cultural growth. It must be noted, that proclama-

tions about the effectiveness of Aleut labor are extremely contradictory. This is explained by the fact that Aleuts are irreplaceable in hunting and other similar kinds of work in which there is no standard working day, and which demand initiative in conjunction with physical dexterity. However, it is very difficult to get used to the monotonous labor performed hour after hour on the fur farms. New skills cannot be inculcated within the life of one generation (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1307, l. 12–13).

There are several documents from the 1984 season in the MAE archive, including Liapunova's notebooks, a draft of her daily diary, and two diaries from Dzeniskevich. According to Liapunova's information, on July 1, 1984, there were 292 Aleuts on Bering Island, including 146 men and 146 women. The average salary for Russians was 778 rubles per month, and 158 for Aleuts. Dzeniskevich notes in his field diary concerning the educational level of the 178 that 3 were illiterate, 30 had only a beginning education, 78 had begun middle school, 44 had completed middle school, 20 had specialized middle school, and 3 had higher education (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1390, l. 22 ob–23).

Dzeniskevich noted that around thirty Aleuts spoke their Native tongue. Attempts to teach English as an option in school had brought no success. Dzeniskevich's additional notes are fairly sketchy. For example, after a conversation with a teenage girl named Anna Fedorovna, he wrote:

Very few experiences for children, loosely attached to culture. Need to orient children better to technical schools and without examinations, and those in midland, and not in local ones. More excursions, in order to mature, they pay little attention [to that]. It is right to be embarrassed of the Russians (without bribery it is impossible to buy a book, for example like the Russians).

There are study groups in school. The boys are very drawn to technology. A technical group for children would be very good [to organize]. The local cadres will not grow, unless they have this kind of relationship with the Aleuts. The Aleuts are kind and unselfish. To inspire children, to civilize them—that is the main task—Artek and Orlenok [children's camps] are not for everyone (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1390, l. 17–18).

From the 1988 research, the MAE archive (AMAE) holds the field journal, notes from the household books

from Nikolskoe, and lists of its Aleut inhabitants. Liapunova wrote in the field journal:

In everything one must note, that the non-native population—for the most part temporary—is much larger (almost 5 times) than the local population, that the non-natives have more education, they occupy the more prestigious posts, and their initiative (especially for enrichment) suppresses the initiative of the native inhabitants—Aleuts and a small number of old-timer Russians. In all it works out that the Aleuts in their own homeland are in a marginal situation. The higher socioeconomic status of the temporary immigrants creates the threat of the social and national segregation of the indigenous population (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1390, no. 1595, l. 5).

And further:

Here the informal gatherings of Aleuts around some Aleut leader (man or woman) must be discussed. Rather, it is not a leader in the full sense of the word, but a person in whose house a group might get together without shame, eating traditional food (salted fur-seal flippers, real, unsalted, fermented *yukola*, salted fur-seal meat, etc.), conversing in Aleut or in Russian. Here one can hear original Aleut folklore. Unfortunately, Aleuts gather together here to drink. And among this group of people are preserved... traditional Aleut marriage relations, i.e., free relations before marriage, toleration of extramarital affairs, temporary, easily dissolved marriages. From these practices there are unmarried Aleut women with children, women with Russian husbands and from one to two and even three children with Aleut first names and patronymics (as a rule, in the case of premarital or extramarital children, the first name and patronymic are taken from the children's uncle or the first husband, who is usually an Aleut). These informal groups more than any others maintain Aleut national traditions, language, character, and some habits. It is to a large degree thanks to these groups that the Aleut people did not end up as prophesied almost thirty years ago by I.S. Gurchich, who foresaw the total merger of Aleuts with Russians in the near future. We believe this will not take place to any large degree in the near foreseeable future—thanks to the existence of such groups. These groups preserve the traditional Aleut practice of adopting orphaned children out to relatives (usually on the mother's side) (AMAE n.d.: f. K-I, op. 2, no. 1390, l. 10–11).

Regarding the transformation of the collected field notes into scientific works, Liapunova used them to write the chapter “Ethnohistory of the Commander Island Aleuts (first half of the nineteenth century to present)” in her monograph, *The Aleuts: Ethnohistorical Essays* (Liapunova, 1987:177–201). Her ethnographical descriptions of Aleut culture were not included in the chapter. In writing the chapter, Liapunova used the same sociological scheme applied earlier by M. A. Sergeev (1938:88–110). She repeated these same observations in two other articles (Liapunova 1989, 1999).

During the course of her long life, Liapunova maintained professional contact with the American archaeologist William Laughlin (1919–2001). As mentioned, in 1938 he visited the Commander Islands as part of Aleš Hrdlička’s expedition. In 1973 he attended an international symposium on “Beringia in the Cenozoic,” in Khabarovsk. The Siberian archaeologists A. P. Okladnikov, R. S. Vasilevskii, N. N. Dikov, and Yu. A. Mochanov were also there. William and Ruth Laughlin, D. Hopkins, F. West, and others were part of the American delegation. At the end of the symposium, the American academics visited Novosibirsk, Moscow, and Leningrad. William Laughlin invited Okladnikov to take an archaeological expedition to Umnak Island (Aleutian Islands). This took place in July–August 1974 (Laughlin and Okladnikov 1975, 1976; Okladnikov and Vasilevskii 1976). The following year the American archaeologists paid a reciprocal visit to Moscow. An agreement was reached to conduct archaeological research on Sakhalin, in Kamchatka, and in the Commander Islands. However, authorities only allowed the research to take place in the region of Pribaikalye. Therefore, Laughlin’s plans to conduct a second anthropological investigation of the Commander Island Aleuts came to naught.

Laughlin traveled to the Soviet Union several times in the second half of the 1970s. He established fruitful academic contacts with the anthropologist Valerii Pavlovich Alekseev (1929–1991), the ethnographer Ilya Samuelovich Gurvich (1919–1992), and with Liapunova. These contacts compensated somewhat for Laughlin’s inability to visit the Commander Islands, as all of his Soviet colleagues conducted field work amongst the Aleuts there. Alekseev went there in 1973 (Alekseev 1981:6–33), Gurvich in 1968 (Gurvich 1970), and Liapunova’s research has already been discussed.

In 2009, N. A. Tatarenkova, a doctoral candidate at the MAE, became deputy director of the Aleut Local History Museum in Nikolskoe, on Bering Island. The theme of her PhD dissertation was “Traditional uses of the environment by the Aleuts of the Commander Islands.”

For over a century, the MAE has received ethnographical collections and conducted academic research on the traditional culture of the Aleuts of the Commander Islands. We hope, that in the coming years new academic monographs will appear describing the traditional culture of this small American nation, which has found a second homeland in Russia.

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