

# A. F. KASHEVAROV, THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMPANY, AND ALASKA CONSERVATION

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## ABSTRACT

As Russia debated selling Alaska in the 1860s, A. F. Kashevarov, an Alaska Creole, published his thoughts about reforming the Russian-American Company (RAC). In several articles for the Russian naval journal *Morskoi Sbornik*, he described the RAC's hunting policies and conservation measures. Kashevarov's articles represent some of the few sources providing information on Russian-era traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), even if his depth of knowledge concerning Aleut (Unangan) and Alutiiq environmental practices and conceptions is uncertain. Despite company claims of conservation successes, in Kashevarov's view the RAC had misunderstood the Alaska environment and mismanaged its fur resources. Claiming that marine mammals behaved unpredictably and were entwined in a complex ecology, Kashevarov insisted that company attempts to create *zapusks* (closed seasons) did not work. Instead, he proposed that only Alaska Natives understood the animals well enough to manage them and thus should be ceded control over Alaska's environment. Though these radical claims were met with company derision, Kashevarov's pleas for ecological sophistication and ecological justice provide some glimpse into the desires of Alaska Natives shortly before the colony's demise.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1860s, as the Russian empire debated selling Alaska to the United States, some new, unexpected voices arose to challenge Russian-American Company (RAC) administrators and imperial officials and put forth their own plans for the colony. Among those voices was that of the Creole Alexander Filippovich Kashevarov, who had been born on Kodiak Island around 1809. As an aging naval bureaucrat living in St. Petersburg, he wrote a series of articles for the journal *Morskoi Sbornik* [*Naval Collection*], in which he laid out his vision for the colony's future, one that would turn over control of Alaska's resources to the Aleuts and Creoles. In the process, Kashevarov revealed some otherwise little-known Russian policies towards the colony's environment and suggested some of their complex origins. Kashevarov's articles and the company's responses, still mostly untranslated into English (for one translation

see Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:518–524), shed valuable light on Alaska's environmental history, the RAC's conservation policies, and the history of Alaska Natives and hint at alternate paths not taken but that still seemed possible before the American sale. Despite uncertainty about Kashevarov's knowledge of Aleut and Creole culture, his articles also provide unique, if imperfect, documentary evidence concerning Aleut and Alutiiq conceptions of the RAC and Alaska's fur-bearing animals.

While historian Roxanne Easley (2010) has written insightfully about Kashevarov's Creole identity, scholars have not focused on Kashevarov's observations on the Alaska environment. His ideas, taken at least in part from Alaska Native environmental conceptions, acquire new relevance with contemporary attempts to recover and employ traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), particularly in Alaska

(Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005; Griffin 2009; Hunn et al. 2003). Such attempts have not been without controversy, with some ecologists “dismissive of the possibility that indigenous, traditional, and/or small-scale subsistence communities might conserve their natural resources” (Hunn et al. 2003:79). Others have claimed that little or no truly indigenous ecological knowledge remains (see Hunn et al. 2003). These conceptions have real-world consequences, as decisions about TEK’s validity affect management decisions (Hunn et al. 2003). Current fisheries policies in the Aleutian Islands, for example, have sometimes been made in ignorance or neglect of Aleut observations of their local ecologies (Reedy-Maschner 2010). As Kashevarov’s case demonstrates, though the terminology may now be different, divides in Alaska over TEK and access to resources are not new. The RAC, too, had deep doubts about the Aleuts’ and Creoles’<sup>1</sup> ability to effectively understand and manage their environment. The historical dimension of this divide is very little known, and Kashevarov’s articles provide a rare glimpse of what must have been much more substantial issues during the day-to-day administration of the colony (Mitchell 1997).

### ALASKA CREOLE WITH A GLOBAL LIFE

Kashevarov’s relationship with the RAC and the depth of his knowledge about Aleut ecological conceptions and practices are uncertain. His globe-spanning life offers contradictory clues. Kashevarov was probably the son of a Creole mother, Aleksandra Petrovna Chechenova, and a Russian father, Filipp Artamonovich Kashevarov, an influential school teacher in the colonies. The young Kashevarov spent the first decade of his life on Kodiak, where he likely gained some knowledge of Aleut and Russian hunting practices. Kashevarov’s Russian biographer surmises that “from early years Aleksandr Filippovich observed in his house the unique combination of Russian and Aleut cultures, witnessing how his neighbors went to sea in light *baidars* to hunt sea animals” (Demin 2006:12). No documentary evidence backs these assertions, though they are reasonable given the centrality of the maritime hunt to Kodiak life. By 1818, Kashevarov’s father had been transferred to New Archangel (Sitka) (Pierce 1984:174), where Aleksandr Filippovich may have had further chances to learn about marine mammal hunting. In 1821 he was shipped off to Russia to enroll in the St. Petersburg Navigational School.

On the long journey there he rounded Cape Horn and docked at Rio de Janeiro and Copenhagen.

In St. Petersburg, Kashevarov attended the School of Navigation, along with other Creoles and Russians. He graduated in 1828, at the age of nineteen, having received broad training in several disciplines and qualified to be a senior navigator (Demin 2006; Records of the Russian-American Company [Records] 1828:CR 6 f. 326). That same year, Kashevarov was dispatched back to the colonies, for two years sailing a circuitous route to Alaska that exposed him to much of the Pacific Ocean. While on the RAC ship *Elena*, he stopped in Australia, met native Micronesians in the Marshall Islands, and made his first attempts at producing new maps on his own. In 1831 he again sailed around the world, this time on the company transport *Amerika*. Kashevarov again visited Australia and Brazil, while also sailing through Polynesia and Melanesia. Under the command of V. S. Khromchenko, the ship also undertook an in-depth study of the equatorial Gilbert Islands (Ivashintsov 1872). By the time he returned to the colonies in 1832, Kashevarov had seen a great deal of the world and of Russian and foreign cultures.

Kashevarov’s travels did not end with his return to Alaska. He spent 1833 to 1837 aboard various company boats; picking up cargoes of timber, furs, whale meat, and walrus tusks; training new navigators; and making hydrographic, geographic, and ethnographic observations around Kodiak Island, the Aleutian Islands, Bristol Bay, the Pribilofs, the Alexander Archipelago, and the Yukon Delta. In 1863, he was also involved in an attempt to apprehend Eskimos who had attacked the Russian settlement of Mikhailovskii Redoubt on the Yukon River, though he did not succeed (Bolkhovitinov 2005). In 1838, Kashevarov undertook pioneering explorations of Alaska’s Chukchi and Beaufort sea coastlines, keeping a journal that he later published in St. Petersburg (Kashevarov 1977). He also sometimes transported Aleut hunters to various hunting grounds. In 1835, Kashevarov sailed a fleet of Aleuts south to Fort Ross (today California), where he was to “find out how best to conduct the hunt” (Records, 1835:CS 12 f. 212), and in 1841 he carried sea otter hunters to Kamchatka and checked their prowess with rifles (Records, 1841:CS 20 f. 97). These were some of his best opportunities to observe the sea otter hunt since his childhood, though not in Aleut home waters.

All in all, Kashevarov spent what he described as “eleven years of service in the colonies” (Kashevarov 1862b:161)

before returning to Russia in 1844. He would later serve as commander of the Port of Ayan in eastern Siberia before retiring in St. Petersburg. While in Alaska, he dealt extensively with governors Wrangell and Etolin and also came into contact with New Archangel (Sitka) office manager Kirill Khlebnikov. These men played important roles in developing the RAC's policies regarding conservation and indigenous peoples. Wrangell would also contribute to the debate about Alaska's sale in the 1860s (Wrangell 1857). During these years Kashevarov rose in the estimation of colonial administrators, and he came to occupy a social position somewhere between Creole and full-blooded Russian, as evidenced by Wrangell's equivocation about whether his officer's rank freed him of typical Creole obligations (Records, 1835:CS 12 f. 157).

While in the company's estimation he was a trustworthy and highly competent employee, Kashevarov grew to dislike aspects of the RAC's administration, centered in New Archangel. In fact, a persistent note of resentment towards the colonial capital and defense of the more thoroughly indigenous parts of the colony come through in his writings. He criticized observers who wrote about Alaska from the perspective of New Archangel "and not from Kodiak (the center of the colony)" (Kashevarov 1862b:151). Kashevarov also claimed that the New Archangel administration was a colossal waste of funds, with "luxurious spending on the maintenance of a completely useless port" (Kashevarov 1861:19). These passages suggest not only resentment towards the mostly Russian (and Scandinavian) settlement but also an enduring loyalty to Kashevarov's home town and his mother's people. Kashevarov signed each of his articles "A Creole," likely an attempt to stress his identification with Russian America, as Easley (2010) notes. Of course, in deciding finally to settle in St. Petersburg, Kashevarov chose a path that took him far away from his early childhood and career.

By the 1860s, Kashevarov had been absent from the colonies for nearly two decades, and some of his ideas about company conservation policies seem to owe much more to the uncertain 1840s than to the better-regulated subsequent decades.<sup>2</sup> However, Kashevarov still retained a storehouse of useful knowledge. He had traveled widely throughout the North Pacific and observed sea otter, fur seal, and walrus hunting from Kamchatka to southeast Alaska. He had spoken with hunters about their practices and listened to their advice about where hunting would be best. He had also conferred with company administra-

tors, at times about hunting practices. Kashevarov himself obliquely implied that he had been interested in hunting and conservation, stating that while in the colonies he had never heard of the conservation schemes being mentioned by others in the 1860s (Kashevarov 1862b:157). Being a Creole gave Kashevarov access to both Russian and Alaska Native worlds, even as it kept him from being fully integrated into either. If by the 1860s Kashevarov's knowledge of company practices had become dated, and if he maintained some distance from most of the company's Alaska Native hunters, his broad experience gave him an informed view of sea-mammal hunting as practiced through the 1840s. There are few other contemporary records of such richness.

## THE DECADE OF REFORMS

Kashevarov's unique dual ethnic and geographic standpoints became particularly powerful during Russia's "Age of Reforms," which included both the 1861 abolition of serfdom and the sale of Alaska six years later. Alaska, in fact, played a prominent role in the political turmoil of the time. As Easley (2010:1) writes, "Russian America, under the monopolistic authority of the Russian American Company since 1799, seemed to some a clear example of outmoded and ineffective imperial administration." Hunting policies were a central concern of the reformers. Grand Duke Konstantin, the principal agitator for colonial reform, proposed that all Russian subjects be allowed "to hunt furs and to trade, until now the exclusive right of the company" (Bolkhovitinov 1996:119). The oppression of Alaska Natives and the stifling of private commerce in the Pacific were also listed as significant problems, related to questions of conservation. Company officials, on the other hand, protested that the Alaska colonies were profitable, that the company saved the administration significant sums of money in defense, and that the well-being of Alaska Natives had improved immensely under the company's second two imperial charters. Furthermore, they claimed, opening Alaska up to free enterprise would mean the swift removal of Russians, who would be outcompeted by outsiders. "[F]oreigners will predominate there," they wrote, "until they exhaust all resources to their benefit" (Bolkhovitinov 1996:135), imperiling Russian control of Alaska altogether. One compromise would leave the RAC in control of the seashore and islands, while opening the





Figure 1. The May 1861 issue of *Morskoi Sbornik* [Naval Collection], the journal that played a key role in advocating liberal reforms and aired insiders' views.

interior to trade. The company again rebuffed these reforms, arguing that free interior trade would inevitably provoke hostilities with the Natives there (Bolkhovitinov 1996).

For a period of time, the question of Russian America's future entered the public arena, most prominently in the pages of *Morskoi Sbornik* (Fig. 1), one of the empire's most influential liberal periodicals. In general, the journal advocated economic liberalism and the well-being of Alaska Natives (Vinkovetsky 2011). Other like-minded journals, such as *Moskovskie Vedemosti* (*Moscow News*) and *Severnaya Pchela* (the *Northern Bee*), also contributed to the discussion. Thus, the internal affairs of the Alaska colony received a brief but illuminating airing in Russia's public press. In 1862, *Morskoi Sbornik* published the government's assessment of the Russian-American colonies in the form of Pavel N. Golovin's report of a tour taken through Alaska the previous year. Golovin's influential article advocated the retention of many of the company's colonies but criticized its failure to develop Alaska economically and its treatment of its Aleut subjects. Golovin felt, in particular, that the company's monopoly on landholding and on many industries should be abolished in order to waken the economic vitality of colonial citizens and other Russians who would be attracted to an Alaska open for exploitation (Golovin 1979:118). Aleuts should be freed of the ne-

cessity to hunt for the company, Golovin argued, but the RAC should retain the right to purchase all furs.

Golovin gave several reasons for his suggestions, but two would be crucial in the debate over environmental practices that would ensue. First, out of the ruins of the eighteenth-century private fur trade, the RAC had formed a wise and successful conservation policy. Gains were most apparent among sea otters and fur seals. As Golovin put it, by resting some hunting grounds, “the animals who are usually killed or frightened off in any given place will be allowed to multiply and calm down during a closed season. With this type of conservation it is possible to predict that they will never become depleted or permanently vanish from the shores of our islands” (Golovin 1979:78). Another commentator, former governor Arvid Etolin, drew a contrast with Kamchatka, where government control had seen the eradication of fur-bearing animals that contrasted poorly with the RAC’s flourishing Alaska (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:528).

These men were quite right that the RAC had one of the nineteenth-century colonial world’s best-articulated and consistently managed conservation programs. Beginning in the first decade of the nineteenth century and intensifying after the 1820s, the Russian-American Company had begun regulating and limiting its catch of sea otters and fur seals. Evidence suggests their efforts were successful for fur seals, and their numbers stabilized throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Sea otter conservation was more complicated, for the animals displayed none of the convenient traits that made the fur seal cull relatively easy to regulate—sea otters did not frequently haul out on shore and separate by sex, nor were they polygamous. Therefore, it was extremely difficult to selectively kill sea otters; the only realistic measure for conserving the population was restraining the total hunt, though some Russians claimed the Aleuts could distinguish sea otters by sex at sea. What resulted was a mish-mash of different conservation strategies. In some places firearms were prohibited. Elsewhere, local administrators took on-the-spot, ad hoc decisions to shut down a particular hunt for several years. Sometimes these closures took on the appearance of a semipermanent state, especially when threats from Tlingit or others made hunting in these areas provocative anyway. Perhaps the most common strategy was rotational—sending out hunting parties to alternate locations each year, giving every sea otter ground a one- to two-year break. Conserving Alaska’s fur resources had been and would continue to be

crucial for Russian retention of the colony, whether under company or government rule (Arndt 2007; Jones in press).

Golovin’s second important point was that Aleuts needed the economic incentive provided by sea otter hunting in order to become responsible colonial citizens. Giving them the freedom not to hunt would be disastrous for Aleut motivation. In that scenario, Aleuts would:

be more willing to sit at home doing nothing until hunger forced them to seek some gain. Furthermore, hunting sea otters, for example, is possible only in groups; the Aleuts themselves would never organize parties, in fact they would not have means to do this if they were not supplied (Golovin 1979:80).

Also, Aleuts might just sell any animals they caught to foreign fur traders. “This would not only be a decisive blow to our colonial industry,” wrote Golovin (1979:80–81), “but the Aleuts themselves would ultimately be ruined.” Thus, Aleut, company, and imperial interests were in fact aligned, at least according to this official.

If Golovin’s assessment of the Aleuts seemed ungenerous, then his description of Alaska’s Creole class was vicious. They were entitled, overly proud, too sensitive, “inclined towards hooliganism, primitivism, dishonesty, and laziness,” and it was apparent to him that “up to the present time the creoles have not been of any use” (Golovin 1979:17). Kashevarov, as a Creole himself, felt compelled to respond to Golovin’s slanders and insistence on Aleuts’ inability to manage themselves. When Golovin then asked for Kashevarov’s impressions of his report, the Creole informed him that he disagreed with much of it. The two men then entered into a written debate, “so that in the *conflict of opinion*, as [Golovin] put it, we would *find the truth*” (Kashevarov 1862b:51; emphasis original). Golovin died suddenly, before Kashevarov could make public the full extent of his violent disagreement, and this caused the Creole to muzzle some of his anger. The Russian-American Company’s Board of Directors in St. Petersburg responded directly to Kashevarov in 1862. Even before Golovin’s report, Kashevarov had become a contributor to *Morskoi Sbornik*. In 1861 he published an article on “Unusual Meteorological Occurrences in the Bering Sea,” establishing his scientific credentials for the journal’s progressive readership. That same year he exchanged some heated articles with former RAC governor Semon Ivanovich Yanovsky, who held negative views of Creoles similar to Golovin’s. Together, these articles demonstrate

the centrality of conservation to Russia's American colonies and to those colonies' eventual sale. Additionally, they exposed deep rifts between Russian and Aleut/Creole understandings of marine mammal ecology and disagreements about proper management of the animals.

## MARINE MAMMALS

In his articles, Kashevarov chose not to tackle Golovin and the RAC's aspersions head-on. Rather, he concentrated squarely on the question of sea mammal conservation. Kashevarov's key article for *Morskoi Sbornik* was entitled, "What is a *zapusk* [hunting closure]?" He explained this focus by stating:

Nearly all who have been writing about Russian America recently are agreed that the organization of Russia's distant possession in the New World demands fundamental transformation. However, at the same time, it is more or less clear there is some fear of the possibility of exterminating valuable fur-bearing animals (the principal wealth of the land) . . . if the natives are given the unrestricted right to hunt fur-bearing animals and use them as their own lawful property (Kashevarov 1862a:86).

These initial thoughts reveal two things about the sale debate. First, issues of conservation apparently played a much more important role in Russian discussions than historians have noted. Second, it reveals the extent to which conservation had come to occupy Alaska administrators' minds. They were proud of their accomplishments in this area and saw it as one of the principal issues that would decide the future of the colony.

At the heart of Kashevarov's concerns were the various proposals suggesting that the RAC give up its monopoly on hunting and fishing throughout its territories in Alaska. The RAC had responded to such suggestions by claiming that only their form of conservation could ensure the future of Russian control. The focal point of RAC conservation, as Kashevarov laid it out, was the *zapusk*, the "temporary suspension or lessening of hunting of some species of fur-bearing animals which have declined in numbers due to increased or long-standing catches . . . with the goal of letting it reproduce" (Kashevarov 1862a:86–87). Such measures could be and had been applied to sea otters, river otters, foxes, fur seals, and walruses. Kashevarov's purposes demanded that he question the success of the *zapusk* system.

*Zapusks* forged different outcomes for different species and different locations. For animals found on islands, such as foxes, Kashevarov claimed, *zapusks* were not hard to maintain. "With the ice-free sea all around them, without any way of leaving their islands . . . it is not hard to know both the time for a *zapusk* and the time when traps can again be set" (Kashevarov 1862a:87). Island populations were easy to monitor, as prey animals had no escape, and there was no possibility of in-migration. Thus, foxes were not part of the company's conservation problem. Fur seals and walruses presented, in some ways, similarly convenient ecologies, for they too were confined on or near islands in the sea for at least some of the year. Echoing a common observation in the colonies, Kashevarov described how fur seals were driven to a convenient place on the island, then killed with clubs "almost selectively and in the number possible and necessary" (Kashevarov 1862a:87). Other colonial officials described the fur seals almost as domestic cattle, so easy had they become to manage.

However, Kashevarov added two important qualifications to the idea that fur seal management represented an unqualified success for rational Russians. First, he introduced a note of doubt surrounding fur seal ecology:

By a mysterious law of nature, still not figured out, every summer the fur seals arrive from the south into the Bering Sea and reproduce on the Pribilof and Commander Islands. . . . It is possible that they spend the northern wintertime somewhere on the bottom of a warm sea, like bears who spend the winter doing nothing but sucking on their paws in a den (Kashevarov 1862a:88).

Thus, fur seals were not like domestic cattle, for they lived much of their lives mysteriously outside the sight of humans. In fact, Kashevarov revealed the full and continuing extent of Russian ignorance about the seemingly familiar animal, which certainly did not hibernate over the winter but instead ranged far south in search of food. Second, Kashevarov reminded readers that fur seal conservation was not an exclusively Russian matter. Fur seal population counts and reproductive estimates were based on a "long term observation of the age and reproductive increase of fur seals" made by the observant manager of St. Paul Island, the Creole Shaeshnikov, and the Aleuts long resident there (Kashevarov 1862a:87). This indigenous contribution formed the basis of the reproduction tables that the Russian Orthodox priest Ivan Veniaminov had put together to enable successful conservation by cal-



culating sustainable harvest numbers. Creoles and Aleuts, then, had provided integral service for the RAC's successful environmental policies, which, Kashevarov admitted, "had brought real benefit to our nation" (Kashevarov 1862a:88).

Even these fairly mild criticisms brought a harsh response from the company two months later. In an article entitled "Remarks of the Board of Directors of the Russian-American Company," the St. Petersburg directors asserted a much more positive environmental legacy than even Kashevarov had allowed. The Board of Directors (1862) wrote that "fur seals are killed *not almost* selectively, but with the strictest possible selection." While the Creole had granted that fur seal conservation was possible, the board asserted that it was wildly successful. Reports of stunning fur seal abundance, their continued colonization of new breeding grounds, and the possibility for increased hunting attested to the company's incomparable environmental management (Board of Directors 1862:1–2). As a second example, St. Petersburg noted the successes in the Pribilof Islands, where fur seals were increasing, but which had previously been uninhabited and controlled entirely by the company. In an "Answer to the Remarks of the Board of Directors," Kashevarov (1862b) disputed such reports of unqualified success in the Pribilofs. He noted that the numbers of fur seals taken from the islands were not nearly as high as they were during Veniaminov's time. He claimed there were considerably fewer fur seals there now, and that sea lions had declined to an even greater extent. Sea otters were entirely gone. Yet, "[b]efore the arrival of the Russians all of these animals lived and multiplied in peace" (Kashevarov 1862b:157).

If island fox and fur seal management constituted a qualified success—though not one entirely due to the company's insights or full mastery of the species—the conservation of mainland terrestrial fur bearers and sea otters appeared to Kashevarov to be impossible. His arguments for each were slightly different. Minks, weasels, and other land animals caused no worries, as they had lots of space into which they could escape and reproduce in peace. Beavers, however, presented some problems. In the 1860s the animals were becoming a more important part of Russian trade, and every year in the "inhospitable part of our land" many were being killed. Kashevarov had some experience in the inland fur trade, having visited Mikhailovskii Redoubt, helping to facilitate trade with the Alaska Natives there and tal-

lying the numbers of fur bearers traded (Bolkhovitinov 2005). Lavrenty Zagoskin, a Russian in naval service who had explored much of the Alaska interior in the 1840s, reported that new ways of hunting were causing serious problems. Especially around the Kuskokwim River, Russian hunters were destroying beaver lodges to get at their prey, a method that usually netted only the male, while the female and young were left homeless to perish without their pelts being collected. Hunters had also begun shooting beavers. According to long-standing Russian belief, firearms permanently frightened the animals away. Thus, rifles were not used in the sea otter hunt, and Zagoskin (1967) condemned the practice with beavers as well.<sup>3</sup> Kashevarov, though, was much more pessimistic. He thought beaver conservation inherently impossible. "One cannot even think about creating *zapusks*," he wrote, as beavers are caught by "independent natives, who recognize no power over them besides custom and tradition handed down to them from their ancestors" (Kashevarov 1862a:88).

On one level, Kashevarov's claims that beaver conservation was impossible were practical. The RAC really had no authority in indigenous Alaska societies of the interior. On another level, though, the claims expressed Kashevarov's (and Russians') dislike of the loose organization of non-hierarchical, "primitive" societies. As government inspector S.A. Kostlivtsev remarked at the same time, the interior Alaskans were a "warlike and bloodthirsty people, who are hostile not only to Russians, but to all who intend to encroach on their independence" (Bolkhovitinov 1996:128). One also hears in Kashevarov's statements about interior Natives echoes of his earlier, more vicious depiction of the Eskimos he had encountered in the 1830s:

The life of the Eskimo, like that of other savages, proceeds regularly, monotonously, like a wound-up machine. He stays within bounds, within the cycle he follows: here now, tomorrow there, and all for the same reasons, for one and the same goal: to live like an animal, as his forefathers existed. He knows what his ancestors knew and acts in the same way as they did, inventing nothing, perfecting nothing, losing nothing. . . . Without convictions, guided in life only by experience, the savage is in unquestioning service to the customs of his ancestors (Kashevarov 1977:91, 92).

One could hardly think such custom-bound, machine- and animal-like humans might act with the forethought necessary to practice husbandry for the future. Kashevarov's

preferences for social progress would deeply influence his understanding of sea otter conservation as well.

Unwilling to concede any point, and full of righteous anger in defense of the company's pristine conservation record, the Board of Directors (1862) directly challenged Kashevarov's assertion that company conservation was impossible in interior Alaska. In fact, the former governor insisted, with the company's keen grasp of ecology, even here it had achieved successes. The key was to offer the independent Alaskans very low prices or refuse to buy pelts at all during times when fur bearers were known to be reproducing: "In this way the savages of necessity accustom themselves to following the general order" (1862:6). Such measures had already proven their success on the Alaska Peninsula, where animals were said within a year or two to have regained their former abundance, greatly benefiting Russia's indigenous subjects there (Board of Directors 1862:6). The Board of Directors' claims demonstrate both the RAC's preoccupation with conservation and its paternalistic readiness to force its schemes on unenlightened Alaska Natives. In this, the RAC differed little from the Hudson's Bay Company's policies in the Pacific Northwest. At around the same time, the British company was also despairing at Native Americans' unwillingness to adhere to conservation policies and attempting to manipulate prices in order to enforce compliance (Ray 1975).

### THE PROBLEM OF SEA OTTERS

Thus far, the disagreement had revolved around differing estimations of the RAC's conservation success. When it came to sea otters, though, Kashevarov revealed that much deeper differences involving ecological conceptions were in play. One of Kashevarov's most important claims was that, in essence, sea otter ecology was too complex for the company to effectively manage. While the company thought in terms of raw numbers—fewer catches today would mean more tomorrow—Kashevarov thought in terms a modern wildlife ecologist might find more convincing. The Creole made the very reasonable point that sea otter catches depended on many factors besides the overall population. Among the most important of these factors was the availability of food, which Kashevarov (1862b) thought consisted of mollusks and seaweed. Stormy weather could reduce catches and make it look like conservation was not working, while unusually good weather might make sea otters look abundant and

encourage overhunting (Kashevarov 1862a). In addition, frequent earthquakes and volcanic activity added uncertainty to humans' impacts on sea otters. Volcanoes' "suffocating, stinking smoke and soot," which often spread far offshore, either killed the animals or forced them on one of their migrations, discussed below (Kashevarov 1862b). In fact, volcanic activity has been shown to have significantly affected sea otter distribution and abundance. For example, the 1964 Good Friday earthquake in the Gulf of Alaska displaced many sea otters (Black 1981). Sea otters that survived human persecution and natural disasters also grew "smart and careful" and became difficult to find, giving another false indication of their numbers (Kashevarov 1862a). Such complex ecology rendered conservation of the animals nearly impossible.

Sea otter migration, though, presented the greatest obstacle to effective conservation. Sea otters could not be counted on to be present at the same places every year. If sea otter food was scarce the animals might not return for several years, frustrating any attempt to determine whether their numbers were increasing or decreasing. For example, experienced hunters knew which sea otter "banks" (nearshore kelp beds) looked good in a given year and therefore would concentrate their hunting there while ostensibly resting other areas. However, Kashevarov (1862a:89) asked, could not the hunters actually be killing "the very same sea otters, that had, so to speak, migrated to this new place"? He was uncertain this was the case, but it seemed very possible that "resting" sea otters might actually mean that hunters were merely following them from place to place. Kashevarov found it persuasive that sea otters learned to flee human persecution and thus would not return to recently hunted locations. Citing Veniaminov liberally, he provided numerous examples of how sea otters "cannot, or better said, do not wish to live where humans disturb them...as soon as they sense the smallest sign of human presence, they begin to search for a new spot" (Kashevarov 1862b:156). Thanks to ubiquitous hunting, sea otter biogeography had changed, perhaps permanently. Now sea otters were only found far away from shore, in shallow seas, especially where seaweed grew. The animals only took to shore during winter storms. This unpredictability clouded the company's conservation's record. Kashevarov admitted that company policies had worked in the Atkha department, but in other places over twenty years of experience had yielded no real proof.



With this discussion, Kashevarov reopened the entire question of sea otter migration that had preoccupied earlier Russian observers, who had a very difficult time understanding the animals' oceanic movements. Kashevarov did at least provide a patina of sophistication to this uncertainty. Whereas earlier observers had postulated merely that sea otters fled persecution, Kashevarov pondered whether sea otters, like fur seals, regularly migrated. He claimed that at the beginning of June, when the RAC prohibited hunting, sea otters left Alaska waters for an unknown destination. When the Board of Directors questioned these migrations, Kashevarov cited a number of examples, predominantly in the Aleutian Islands, in which sea otters were seen during the summer but not during winter. Additionally, the Creole found it strange that most marine animals were known to migrate, yet observers still resisted the idea that sea otters did the same. The ecology of migration made intuitive sense, for the sea otters' food (including seaweed and small invertebrates) varied by season. As final proof, Kashevarov referenced his own experience. In July 1837, he was commissioned to take a hunting party from Ukamok (Chirikof) Island to Kodiak. However, upon arrival at Ukamok, he found that a number of the hunters had already left a week earlier, risking a dangerous *baidarka* voyage across open ocean. When Kashevarov asked why they had taken such a risky decision, the hunters answered that sea otters always left the area around that time, would not return that year, and thus the men had decided to leave immediately. At Three Saints Harbor, Kashevarov found that the hunters had in fact made it and also that they believed sea otter movements were tied to fluctuating abundance of seaweed and mollusks. His main informant was a man named Panfilov, "the Creole manager of Three Saints *artel'* [hunting band], an experienced sea otter hunter, and party leader," and thus an excellent source of indigenous ecological knowledge (Kashevarov 1862b:160).

Such migrations could potentially present terrible problems for the Russian colonies, because they exposed the animals to foreign hunting. What if American ships, which roved throughout the North Pacific, were to stumble upon the winter sea otter grounds? They would surely not show any moderation in the hunt, cutting into their numbers as they did those of whales elsewhere. Kashevarov may have meant this somewhat tongue-in-cheek, playing on the company's sometimes exaggerated fear of foreign poaching. In an earlier article (Kashevarov 1861), he had decried the RAC's refusal to allow an American whaler

to hunt in North Pacific waters. In that same article, he demonstrated a long-term opposition to the company's conservation policies, writing that "the imaginary fears of the Russian-American Company about the extermination (*istreblenie*) of fur seals on the islands of the Bering Sea by whalers has seriously harmed the development of hunting in Kamchatka together with the wellbeing of the region" (Kashevarov 1861:19).

The Board of Directors painted a much simpler picture of sea otter ecology than did Kashevarov. First, it dismissed the notion that sea otters migrated, "which [Kashevarov] of course could not have had the opportunity to see" (Board of Directors 1862:3). Nor had the board ever heard of anyone in the colonies who would agree that sea otters left the colonies at the end of July. They also claimed that sea otter dispersal had nothing to do with food, but had everything to do with the presence of humans with loud ships ("especially steamships"), firearms, and the working of the coal mines on the Kenai Peninsula. Drawing on the empire's Siberian and California experiences as well, the board gave the RAC's most complete statement on the colony's environmental history:

Isn't it so, that out of thousands of sea otters only hundreds have remained, and that this animal, especially such a lover of cleanliness and peace, has decreased not only because of hunting, but also because it does not breed when confronted with the least disturbance, and finally, isn't it so that an animal in general is annihilated by continual pursuit, as is proved by the scarcity of sables, foxes, and squirrels in Siberia and Kamchatka, and the complete destruction of sea otters in the straits and especially in California, where they abounded in countless numbers? (Board of Directors 1862:4).

In other words, sea otters reacted primarily to human disturbance and were very little affected by changes in the ecosystem. The very fact of massive sea otter decline proved this point: "the insufficiency of food cannot be a reason for sea otter migration, for these very same places used to feed thousands of sea otters. Why could they now only feed hundreds, when the growth of seaweed and the reproduction of mollusks have not changed?" (Board of Directors 1862:4). Such a simplified version of sea otter ecology argued for the promise of carefully managed hunting in Alaska.

In his response, Kashevarov (1862b:155) refused to abandon the idea of sea otter migration. "Isn't it the case," he asked, "that this breed of marine animal has the ability

to migrate from one place to another, even to a feeding ground previously unknown to it, and to swim such a significant distance, as for example... from Shumshu Island [in the Kuriles] to Copper Island...?" Multiple reports of new sea otter colonies appearing up and down the coast of Kamchatka and throughout the Kurile Islands seemed to confirm Kashevarov's claims. "From where, after a prolonged absence, did these sea otters reappear? Where had they been?" Kashevarov (1862b:155) asked. Additionally, he thought the board's claims of ecological stability proved nothing: "The former thousands of sea otters had their haunts along the whole vast extent of the shores of Russian America, where to this time the growth of seaweed and the reproductive increase of mollusks *have not changed*," and yet only hundreds of animals now remained (Kashevarov 1862b:155). Kashevarov's ecological claims here were obscure, but he hinted that Aleuts understood sea otter biology in subtler ways than did Russians, a topic Kashevarov would emphasize repeatedly.

Both sides' ideas remained far from the modern conception of the animal, though the board probably had the upper hand concerning migrations. Kashevarov's conceptions, however, exhibited a more complex accounting of a multitude of ecological factors. Even his admission that "this question is unresolved" (Kashevarov 1862b:159) resembled modern ecologists' uncertainties. In part, this sensitivity to complexity conveniently buttressed his main argument. As he concluded, many uncertainties and contradictions pervaded the company's conservation policies. The Atkha district, one of the colony's success stories, was in fact one of the few places where no systematic sea otter protection had been instituted. Furthermore, the measures undertaken had not been extended to the Kurile Islands, which threw the company's own faith in them into real question (Kashevarov 1862b). Of course, if the animals migrated as prolifically as locals and Kashevarov claimed, conservation success would be as elusive as a July sea otter anyway.

Clearly, Kashevarov and the board's ideas about sea otters diverged radically. What is less clear is how representative Kashevarov's ideas were of broader Aleut, Alutiiq, and Creole conceptions. The board believed that Kashevarov understood little about Alaska. "Presumably," they remarked sarcastically, "someone [Kashevarov] who both in print and orally proclaims himself to be specially acquainted with his homeland would not be prevented from knowing [the efficacy of the company's beaver conser-

vation]." Additionally, regarding the dangers of the walrus hunt, they accused him of letting "passion take precedence over truth" (Board of Directors 1862:6-7). Kashevarov claimed, though, that he was well informed, having paid attention to discussions of sea otter behavior in the colonies and in St. Petersburg (Kashevarov 1862b:159). Several of his statements, cited above, demonstrate that he had observed hunting taking place and had talked with indigenous hunters. Additionally, contemporary sources provide some confirmation that Kashevarov reflected continued traditions of ecological knowledge. Hank Eaton, a Kodiak Island elder interviewed in 1996, stated that nearby sea otters had "eaten all of the food so they're moving on to other grounds" (Alutiiq Cultural Atlas 1996:§K59), suggesting that sea otter migration of some nature held an important place in local ecological conceptions. There is also a continued tradition of Aleut skepticism towards numbers-based conservation: "Management' of the environment and its resources is an absurd concept to many Aleutian fishermen" (Reedy-Maschner 2010:196). Such comparisons must of course be treated with caution, since Aleut and Alutiiq culture have undergone many changes since Kashevarov's era.

The best that can be said, perhaps, is that Kashevarov offers a glimpse of what must have been a sophisticated indigenous comprehension of sea otter ecology. It seems likely that the Alaska Natives hunting for the RAC thought sea otter numbers were closely tied to food availability, seasonality, volcanic activity, and human activity, and they may have understood the animal to undertake seasonal migrations. Wrangell, another keen observer of Native hunting, simply stated that the "Aleuts were familiar with the instincts of the sea otter and know where to find them" (Wrangell 1980:36). What seems clear is that Kashevarov and those he knew did not think there was a simple relationship between human hunting and sea otter numbers.

In fact, the RAC's comprehension of sea otter ecology may not, in practice, have been as distant from Native ideas as board insisted. A key idea of Alutiiq cosmology is the belief that each animal has a *sua* ("life force" or "its person"), and humans must take care to treat them respectfully or risk hunting failure (Crowell et al. 2001:163; Partnow 2001:51). Numerous RAC documents suggest that the Russian administrators were at least partly influenced by such ideas. Even the board's statements stressed that sea otters do "not breed with the least disturbance" (Board

of Directors 1862:4). More tellingly, in 1817, the French-German naturalist-scientist Adelbert von Chamisso, who was sailing with Captain Otto von Kotzebue, stopped at the Pribilof Islands and remarked:

Only thirty years ago sea otters were here in such abundance, that a man could catch from two to three hundred of them in an hour; but when these animals, which are accounted by the Aleutians as the most cunning, saw themselves so pursued, they suddenly vanished from these parts (Kotzebue 1821:177).

Here Chamisso stated explicitly that accounts of sea otters fleeing Russian persecution came at least partly from the Aleuts themselves. It was the animals' awareness of being hunted, much more than their numerous deaths, that explained poor hunting results. Veniaminov stressed something similar, noting that the reason sea otters had grown scarce was "not because they were hunted out, but because . . . they do not like to live where they are disturbed. The sea otters are as much exterminated as frightened away" (Veniaminov 1984:332).

### WHO SHOULD OWN ALASKA?

Even if the RAC's on-the-ground conservation practices did not differ substantially from what Aleuts and Alutiit thought appropriate, the debate over environmental knowledge was not academic. The future of the colony was at stake; thus, Kashevarov and the Board of Directors also employed environmental ideas to make concrete arguments about the proper property relations in Alaska.

In this respect, Kashevarov steered the debate about the sale of Russian America beyond the parameters set by either the reformers or the company. In his estimation, Aleuts and Creoles could run the colony just fine themselves. Even in the context of increasingly liberal and favorable policies towards the Creole class, this was an audacious suggestion for the time. While the formation of the RAC may have ended some of the worst abuses against the Aleuts and Alutiit, the company's charters also strengthened and codified Native dispossession of the most important products in their lives. All fur-bearing animals became property of the RAC; any animal caught had to either be turned over to the company (if the hunter was on salary) or sold to it. Marine mammal products, such as whale meat or *baidarka* covers, could be bought from the company.

Now, in order to save the colony from "the possibility of exterminating the precious fur-bearing animals," Kashevarov (1862b:163) thought the time had come to entrust their hunting to those who knew them best. Aleuts, he claimed, possessed unique insights into the North Pacific environment that could circumvent the difficulties posed by marine mammal (especially sea otter) behavior. The proof was all around in Alaska. Kashevarov claimed that "hundreds of sea otters are found exclusively in those places where they are hunted *only* by Aleuts—conscientious [*dobrosovetnyye*] masters of their trade" (Kashevarov 1862a:91; emphasis original). Aleuts managed the environment not through quantitative analysis or rigid rules, but rather through flexibility and instinct: "Creating *zapusks* at the right time, where necessary—this is the specialty of native hunters," wrote Kashevarov (1862a:91). According to him, Aleuts had always possessed such skills and maintained a natural proficiency and caution in hunting. In his strongest statement concerning Aleut relations with animals, Kashevarov wrote:

In this native and hereditary art [sea otter hunting], they have never adopted anything from others, and could not adopt anything. The Aleuts also understand very well the circumstance that if few sea otters appear on the sea, it will be a useless labor to go far out to sea to hunt (Kashevarov 1862b:162).

Aleuts, in other words, were not inclined to overhunt a region when all the signs pointed to sea otter decreases.

Preempting fears that the Aleuts' instincts might prove insufficient, Kashevarov also noted that there were simply not enough of them to eradicate marine mammals. "It is pointless to fear, that under the free hunting of marine mammals, undertaken by *local* hunters, that they would be exterminated—there is not enough local manpower in Russian America for that!" (Kashevarov 1862a:91; emphasis original). This mattered a great deal because Aleuts remained the only ones capable of hunting sea otters and thus were a limiting factor in the hunt. Foreign whalers, commonly cited as potential environmental robbers in the Pacific, were unlikely sea otter hunters. "They love to smoke and eat well," Kashevarov wrote, "they need a hearth and consequently fire and smoke, which Aleuts avoid during the entire time they are hunting, because sea otters, as I have already said, do not like smoke" (Kashevarov 1862a:91–92). Thus, Kashevarov formulated an interesting paradox—only Aleuts really understood sea otter ecology well enough both to kill and save them.

RAC administrators held rather dimmer views of Aleut environmental knowledge. Ex-governor Etolin, writing to the government, painted a dreary picture of Aleuts rendered helpless in the hostile North Pacific environment. Alaska, he claimed, was too dangerous for Aleuts to hunt alone, which they would have to do if the company withdrew its material support and organization. Additionally, “quite apart from the danger [of hunting individually] . . . the Aleuts often vanished without a trace” (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:530). There were many cases, Etolin claimed, when rescuers “discovered entire families who had settled somewhere or other on distant headlands, all dead in their baraboras; every one of them poisoned from the foolish consumption of dead whale or toxic shellfish” (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:530). Thus, in Etolin’s telling, Aleuts had lost entirely the ability to understand the Alaska environment.

Beyond the question of the Aleuts’ ecological knowledge and behavior, Kashevarov presented another argument: In the new Russia of freedom, these people also deserved control of their own resources. The freedom to hunt underpinned hopes Aleuts had for becoming modern, enlightened citizens like other post-emancipation Russians. This was especially true in relation to seals and sea lions, so important for Aleut domestic economy. “If he will not have the right to hunt *these marine animals* for himself,” wrote Kashevarov (1862a:90; emphasis original), “what can a free Aleut citizen do for himself without them?” Because of “climatic conditions,” the Aleuts had to have the products of such animals, as well as those of whales and walrus (Kashevarov 1862a:90). These claims mirrored Kashevarov’s assessment of Alaska Eskimos. That group of benighted savages “has learned to conquer and, through hard trials and experience . . . and everything he sees is almost certain to become his prey. He has raised himself to human status with these resources” (Kashevarov 1977:83). A stadial theory of cultural advancement through increased economic activity and market participation underlay Kashevarov’s prescriptions for indigenous hunters, both Eskimo and Aleut. Certainly, he was no proponent of returning Aleuts to precontact subsistence practices.

Though in concord with reformist ideas about the need to stimulate commerce, Kashevarov challenged some of their ideas as well. He came out against the suggestion of taxing fur-bearing animals, then being proposed as a way of paying for government administration of the colony (CSRAC 1863:261). Kashevarov (1862a:91) was

“completely convinced, that taxing [*zastrakhovat*] marine animals (except fur seals) is not at all called for and is useless. It is also somehow strange to deprive the inhabitants of a maritime colony of the right to freely use the products of his native sea, sent down to them by God for his prosperity!” In the face of such compelling environmental and legal arguments, the RAC’s continued monopoly could only appear monstrous. Closing with the rallying cry of the liberals, he wrote, “better *everything* or *nothing*” (Kashevarov 1862a:92; emphasis original).

The Board of Directors countered Kashevarov’s pleas for indigenous control of resources with a blunt insistence that Aleuts and Creoles were far too primitive to be entrusted with conservation. An earlier article by Yanovsky (1861:8) expressed this chauvinism: “The company of course does desire progress for the colonial natives (*urozhentsi kolonii*) no less than you [Kashevarov], but it must be said that it now looks with sorrow at its unfulfilled hopes.” Kashevarov himself, educated at company expense, served as an ungrateful example. He had not achieved “true nobility of the soul” but instead found recourse in “hackneyed liberal phrases and other similar means which will not lead down the road to progress, and will not bring the smallest benefit to your homeland” (Yanovsky 1861:8). Kashevarov’s goals “might bring some material gain to [him] personally, but not at all in moral terms.” Adopting a tone of personal attack not uncommon in their exchange, the ex-governor concluded the same article by stating, “For my part, I feel obliged to tell you my personal opinion about Creoles: Many of them are intelligent and moral, the rest are evil and ungrateful. I say this from experience” (Yanovsky 1861:8).<sup>4</sup>

Proof of this incivility lay in Russia’s Pacific subjects’ previous poor management of the hunt. In 1854, sea otters had appeared at Copper Island, in the Commander Islands off Kamchatka, for the first time in decades. The Board of Directors (1862:4) thought they had probably been frightened there from Kamchatka or the Kurile Islands by Siberians, “unfamiliar with the methods and order of the hunt.” When the Copper Island Aleuts saw the animals, they eagerly decided to hunt them, but the steady hand of the company held them back. Sea otters were now on the increase. *Zapusks* run according to company methods everywhere were coaxing depleted sea otter grounds back to life. Meanwhile, Creoles on Afognak and Unga, as well as Aleuts, “sometimes allow themselves to violate the established order and at their own behest



head for the sea otter breeding grounds in one or two baidarkas... Not able to hunt them with arrows, they shoot [the sea otters] with firearms” (Board of Directors 1862:4). Kashevarov admitted such accusations held some truth, but that they were not representative—“every family has its black sheep, and sometimes hunger drives Aleuts [to overhunt]” (Kashevarov 1862b:162).

Such breaches of order were for the Board of Directors ample proof of Aleut immaturity and even inability to understand their own self-interest. When the Creoles and Aleuts broke hunting protocol, they “did harm to themselves” (Board of Directors 1862:4). This paternalistic attitude permeated the company’s denial of Aleut rights to hunt animals for themselves. In fact, claimed the board, they already possessed rights sufficient to their well-being:

Sea lions and seals and all the products obtained from them really are essential and irreplaceable in native life, but it is well known that their products, or, better, the hunting of sea lions and seals is left entirely to the Aleuts. The Company only acquires them for its stockpile solely with the goal of assisting the Aleuts in satisfying their needs (Board of Directors 1862:4).

Golovin added, in his review of the Alaska colony, that Aleuts in fact had much control over their own hunting. “If the Aleuts go out to hunt not altogether willingly, at least they are not forced to do so,” he wrote with little apparent concern for self-contradiction (Golovin 1979:80).

The company had to control the animals because not all Alaskans could equally access these essential creatures, and only the company could ensure the overall well-being of Alaska. The Aleuts of Kodiak, Atka, and the Kurile Islands had special need for sea lions and seals, but were unable to catch enough for themselves and instead had to rely on imports from Unalaska and the Pribilof Islands (Fig. 2). Aleuts and others could not be expected to sail such long distances themselves. Further, foreign whalers lurked offshore, ready to plunder the islands given the first chance. Paradoxically, then, company control of sea lions, sea otters, and fur seals was absolutely essential for Aleut well-being. Whales too, were carefully husbanded by the company against future need. Thus, environmental catastrophe would have ensued had it not been for “the supervision of the company and the systematic management of the hunt... consequently, the company does not hamper the Aleuts even in this respect. Just the opposite; it helps

them and even ensures the fulfillment of their needs” (Board of Directors 1862:5).

The Board of Directors also raised a somewhat bizarre issue anticipating later arguments that deny indigenous peoples control of their resources when that use is not considered traditional. Because the Aleuts had no attachment to the Pribilofs—they had been forcibly transported there after the islands’ discovery around 1790—and because they lacked sailing vessels, the board predicted they would abandon the islands as quickly as possible if the company lost control. That would, of course, turn the islands’ animals over to the American whalers, who all could agree were the worst environmentalists in Alaska (Board of Directors 1862). Kashevarov countered that, in the interest of geopolitics, Aleuts and Creoles would be given “public” vessels with which to sail to the Pribilofs, harvest their resources, and protect them for the Russian empire. Such measures had been taken in other parts of the empire, after all, and they would help to integrate Alaskans into society (Kashevarov 1862b). The idea that Aleuts should be given access to Russian hunting technology flew in the face of the board’s conception of primitive Native people and fulfilled Kashevarov’s fondest dreams of advancing and modernizing Alaska Natives.

Finally, the Board of Directors thought that Alaska plans for conservation would shatter in the conflict between Creoles and Aleuts. “Will [the Aleuts] unite with the Creoles, the very same *promyshlenniki* [hunters], who for some reason, attributing more right to themselves, never willingly look out for the rights of the Aleuts?” The Creoles “in general do not respect the Aleuts and do not consider them equal to themselves” (Board of Directors 1862:7–8). Even if the Aleuts would agree to support *zapusks*, the Creoles would disrupt them. The proof was that the Creoles already were violating hunting restrictions, as they were using firearms in “sea otter breeding grounds” (Board of Directors 1862:7–8). Kashevarov recoiled at such slanders, noting that “such an opinion about the Christian native population of Russian America discredits the value of [the company’s] own administration, under whose guardianship we have been for over sixty years” (Kashevarov 1862b: 167). Whatever its reflection on the company, the Board of Directors insisted that the Aleuts’ unenlightened environmental conceptions and practices presented a grave threat to Alaska’s future and perhaps presaged violence. “Among the Aleuts the observation of delimitations in the conduct of the hunt will end,” they

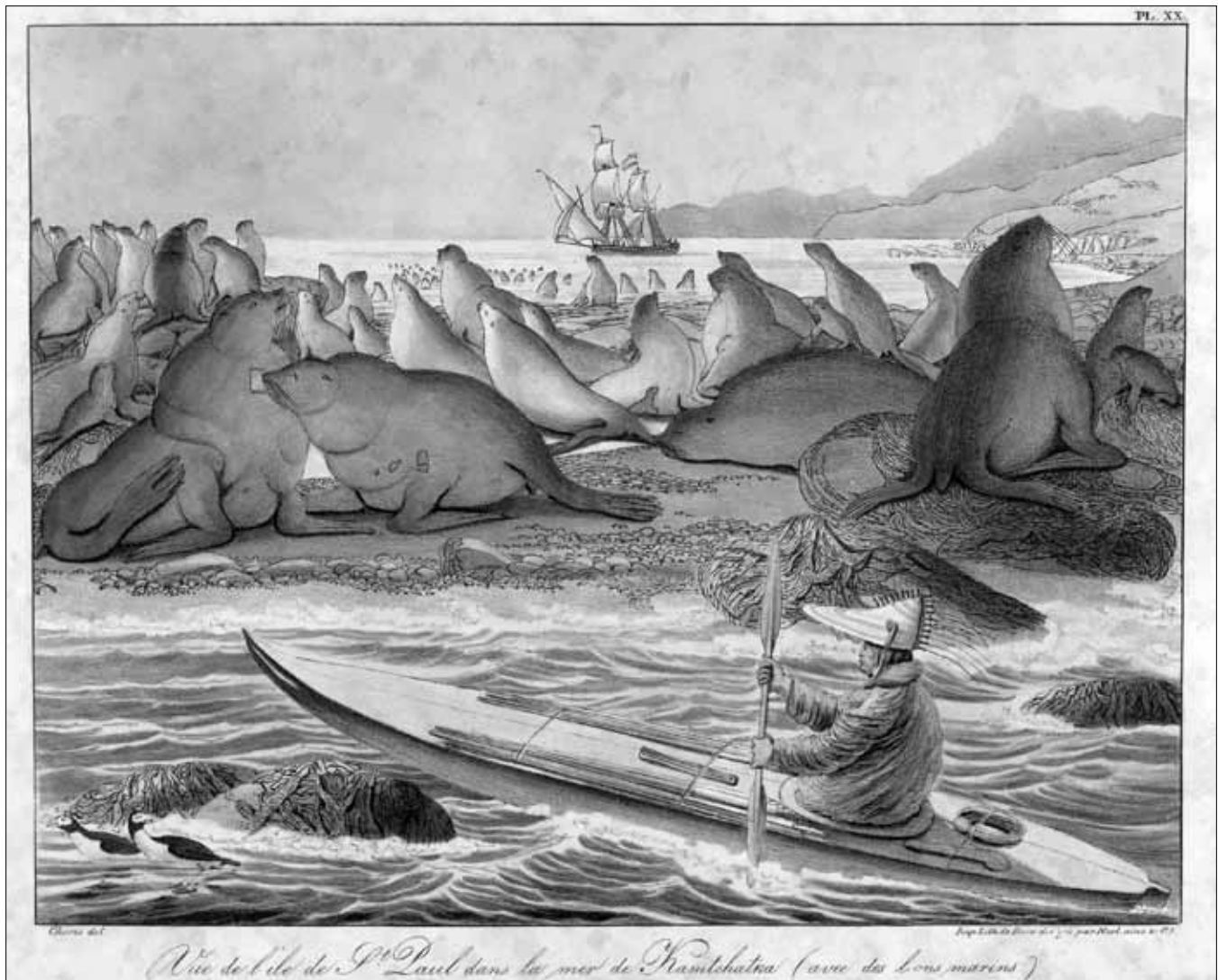


Figure 2. Louis Choris, 1825. “Vue de l’île de St. Paul dans la mer de Kamtchatka (avec des lions marins)” / A View of the Island of St. Paul in the Kamchatka Sea (with sea lions). An Aleut hunter in the Pribilofs with an RAC ship anchored offshore. The RAC argued that the Aleuts had no attachment to the Pribilofs since they had been sent there on company orders. Courtesy John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

wrote, “consequently there be an attempt to gain the rights of ownership—protecting this right will engender strife, with all of its fatal consequences. This is prevented only with difficulty even now, under the most vigilant supervision” (Board of Directors 1862:8).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, alongside a number of other concerns around the potential sale of Alaska that have drawn the attention of scholars—security fears originating from the failures of the Crimean War, desire for a closer relationship with

the United States, anger at company mismanagement and treatment of Native peoples, and financial difficulties (Gibson 1987)—conservationist concerns also played a large role in the Russian debate. Fur-bearing animals had drawn Russians to the North Pacific in the first place; they were the basis for cooperation and conflict with indigenous peoples and for the Russian colonial economy for over one hundred years. The RAC saw its conservationist reforms of the nineteenth century as one of its most important innovations and legacies. No other issue, however, touched upon the well-being of its indigenous subjects as directly, and in this era of change the empire for the first

time heard directly how at least one Creole felt about the RAC's primary industry (Table 1). Kashevarov, it turned out, did not share much of the confidence of the company's directors.

Creole and Aleut ideas about fur-bearing animals, as Kashevarov represented them, did not take a shape entirely in accord with contemporary conceptions of TEK. First, some of Kashevarov's ideas about sea otter behavior were wrong. The animals do not normally or seasonally migrate over long distances, and in this argument the company was correct. Kashevarov's greater sensitivity to larger ecosystem factors, though, does resemble current Alutiiq and many other indigenous understandings. Second, Kashevarov's overall suspicion of conservation measures sits uneasily with some romantic ideas of indigenous "noble savages" (Krech 1999). Kashevarov seems to represent a broad, anticonservationist ethos then present among Alaska Natives, especially those subjected to Russian rule. Since Aleuts were never in fact given control over Alaska's fur resources, but instead shortly thereafter became debt peons to American traders (Partnow 2001), it is impossible to say what the environmental outcome of Kashevarov's plans would have been. A third, related point is that Kashevarov's demands, in opposition to visions of indigenous premodern sensibilities, were decisively pro-capitalist. The debate over Alaska's future ironically pitted

imperial statesmen and indigenous peoples mostly in favor of a free market in furs against a trading company opposed to free trade. The RAC fused a conservative Russian anti-capitalist ethos with the monopolist motivations of colonial business enterprises in the tradition of England's East India Company (Vinkovetsky 2011). Meanwhile, Kashevarov advocated simultaneously respect for traditional Aleut environmental knowledge and a headfirst dash into a modern, property-based economy. Kashevarov himself expressed these ultimately unresolved tensions in an anguished plea: "We [Creoles and Aleuts] are people just like everyone else. If we don't know foreign ways, we know our own very well, and understand that, for the perfection of our own lives, we have to see much, learn and imitate new, useful things from others. Just let it be that others can be fair with us" (Kashevarov 1862b:167).

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*Table 1. Summary of disagreements between Kashevarov and the Russian-American Company.*

Kashevarov	Russian-American Company
Fur seal conservation is done <i>almost</i> without problem and shows qualified success.	Fur seals are essentially perfectly managed and their numbers are increasing rapidly.
Conservation of inland beavers is impossible.	Conservation of inland beavers can be managed by manipulating purchase prices from and to Alaska Natives.
Sea otter conservation is impossible because their ecology is complex.	Sea otter conservation has demonstrated success.
Knowledge of fur seal and sea otter ecology is very spotty.	The company understands fur seal behavior very well and sea otter ecology reasonably well.
Fur seal and sea otter migrations are mysterious.	Sea otters do not migrate.
Creoles and Aleuts contribute in significant ways to conservation ideas and practices.	Creoles and Aleuts do not understand the Alaska environment.
Creoles and Aleuts are the best managers of Alaska's fur resources, using instinct and flexible hunting strategies.	Creoles and Aleuts are not capable of responsibly managing Alaska's animals, as they will fight among themselves and sell out to foreigners.
Creoles and Aleuts deserve to control the resources of their own land in order to become full citizens of Russia.	Creoles and Aleuts have already disappointed hopes of their becoming civilized; their existing rights are sufficient.

## ENDNOTES

1. By the mid-nineteenth century, Russian sources grouped both Aleuts and Alutiit into one category, “Aleuts.” This usage will be followed in this article, though the preferred ethnonym for Aleutian Islanders is Unangan. “Creoles” were the products of Russian unions with Alaska Natives.
2. I am indebted to Katherine Arndt for this observation.
3. I am indebted to Kenneth Pratt for pointing me towards Zagoskin’s remarks.
4. For what it is worth, *Morskoi Sbornik*’s editors rallied to the defense of Kashevarov. In a follow-up article, the journal decried with disgust the Board of Directors’ attempts “to accuse this Creole of ingratitude, lack of understanding, and ignorance of the issue, to allude to his origin, to say that he does not understand ‘progress, which is based on nobility of soul,’ and [to say that] he wants to advance his material interests through slander and distortion of facts” (Anonymous 1861:9).

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