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INTRODUCTION

One of the unfortunate historical distinctions of Aleut culture is that it experienced the longest and harshest history of contact with foreigners of any Alaska Native group. Beginning with the 1741 voyages of Vitus BERING and Alexei CHIRIKOF and continuing over the several decades which followed, Aleuts came under increasing Russian influence and, ultimately, domination. Such domination and culture change continued after 1867, when Alaska was purchased from Russia by the United States.

In this paper, I explore certain aspects of Aleut culture change during the Russian and American periods of Aleut history. In keeping with the theme of this conference, "Development and Environment in the North," I place emphasis throughout my discussion on how the distinctive natural environmental resources, conditions, and constraints of the Aleut region have helped to shape the direction of acculturation processes over the last 250 years, culminating with the Aleut political, economic, and cultural activities currently in progress in this area.

I begin by offering a brief summary of the environment of the Aleut region. Then I present an overview of the main features of traditional, precontact Aleut culture as it existed immediately prior to the arrival of Russians in the region. Together, these provide a basis for the next sections, in which I discuss, in chronological order, some of the major changes which came about in Aleut culture during the Russian period, the American period before World War II, the World War II period itself, and the recent and contemporary period. Finally, I examine some of the issues of importance to Aleuts today.

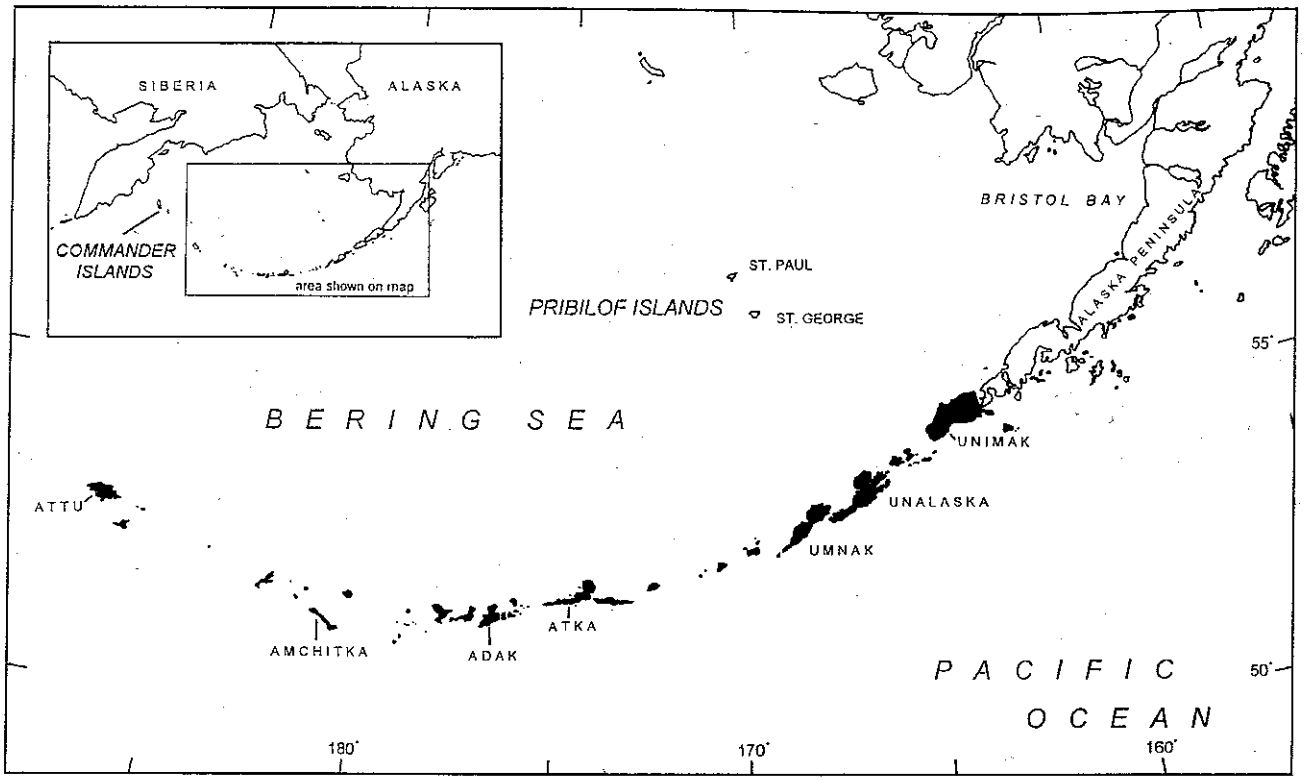
ENVIRONMENT OF THE ALEUT REGION

The Aleut region is that part of southwestern Alaska currently occupied by the Aleut, or Unangan people.[1] It consists of the end of the Alaska Peninsula from Port Moller westward, the Shumagin Islands group south of the Alaska Peninsula, the whole of the Aleutian Islands, from Unimak Island in the east to Attu Island in the west, and, since the early Russian period, the Pribilof Islands group in the Bering Sea north of the Aleutian archipelago. Note should also be made of the Commander Islands, in Russian territory west of the Aleutian Islands, to which Aleuts were relocated in the early 1800s. The Commander Island Aleuts will be mentioned briefly later, but they are otherwise not included in the overall scope of this paper.

The Aleutian Islands comprise a chain of more than 70 islands stretching for 1,800 km westward from the tip of the Alaska Peninsula and forming the boundary between the North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea. The entire region is volcanically and tectonically active, with a high frequency of strong earthquakes.

The Pribilof Islands consist of two major islands, St. Paul and St. George, and three islets, Otter Island, Walrus Island, and Sea Lion Rock. The islands lie in the Bering Sea some 400 km directly north of the Islands of the Four Mountains group in the Aleutians. Like the Aleutians, the islands are primarily volcanic in origin, although they have not recently been active. Coastlines of both the Aleutians and Pribilofs are often precipitous, with narrow, rocky beaches far more common than sandy shoreline.

The Aleutian and Pribilof weather pattern includes cool summers and warm winters, with annual mean temperatures ranging from 13℃ to -2℃ in the



Aleutians and slightly cooler in the Pribilofs. Wind and cloud cover are virtually constant, and precipitation is frequent, although locally variable. Weather systems generally move quickly from west to east, a single day often experiencing a wide range of weather phenomena. The Pribilofs are near the southern limit of sea ice in most years; ice surrounds the islands perhaps once or twice a decade. Except rarely near the Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian ocean waters do not freeze.

Coastal and lowland areas in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands are blanketed by moist tundra vegetation composed of crowberry, grasses, sedge, hair moss, angelica, and reindeer lichen. Some dwarf shrubs are sometimes present, although large native trees are absent in these islands. Higher elevations often have sparse alpine tundra vegetation of lichens and crowberry intermingled with areas of exposed rock. There are abundant kelp and seaweed around the coasts.

Native terrestrial fauna are absent from much of the Aleutians, although lemmings, ground squirrels, shrews, voles, and red fox are indigenous to portions of the Eastern Aleutians, while arctic fox, shrews, and lemmings are native to the Pribilofs. Other resources of the Aleutian and Pribilof region include a host of marine mammals, plentiful ocean and anadromous fish, and abundant intertidal invertebrate species. Although terrestrial birds are quite limited, the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands constitute a major breeding area for pelagic birds as well as for other waterfowl and shorebirds. Nearly 200 species total in the millions in these islands, with a large variety of ducks, geese, and alcids being those most important from an Aleut subsistence standpoint.

PRECONTACT ALEUT ADAPTATIONS

A brief review of Aleut culture as it existed immediately prior to Russian contact illustrates the technological, social, and ideological ways in which Aleuts adapted to their natural environment. This also provides a useful foundation upon which to assess the nature and extent of the cultural changes which have occurred over the last two and a half centuries.

It is nearly impossible to establish precisely how many Aleuts there were at the time of Russian contact. Because the Aleut population declined so drastically and so rapidly following contact (LANTIS 1970:179), and because it was only much later in the Russian period that accurate censuses were made (e.g., SARYCHEV 1802), we have only archaeological data and early fur hunters' reports from which to derive our best estimates of the aboriginal population size. Although some figures go higher (e.g., LAUGHLIN 1980; LIAPUNOVA 1990a:136) and some lower (e.g., LIAPUNOVA 1990b:5), it is reasonable to estimate that some 12,000-15,000 Aleuts lived in the region in the precontact period (LANTIS 1970:174, 1984:163). Because the islands of the eastern Aleutians are generally larger and have more coastline available for settlement, the Aleut population was correspondingly larger there, with fewer people living in the central and

western portions of the archipelago.

Aleut life focused almost exclusively on the sea as the source of most food and fabricational resources, and their subsistence economy was predicated upon cooperation in obtaining many food resources and upon sharing of those products within a large family sphere. Food items included marine mammals (like sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, fur seals, and whales), marine invertebrates (like sea urchins, clams, mussels, chitons, and octopus), eggs and birds (like murres, puffins, ducks, and geese), and fish (including ocean species like cod and halibut and anadromous species like several species of salmon and Dolly Varden). Plant foods (like crowberries, wild rice, and wild celery) provided only a small percentage of the Aleut diet. Sea mammal and bird hunting on the open ocean was done from superbly crafted kayak-style boats, *baidarkas* (Aleut: *iqyax̂*), by men hurling harpoons and spears at their prey with the aid of throwing boards for greater speed.

In addition to their value as food resources, most of the animals Aleuts hunted were also valuable for the fabricational materials they provided. Sea lions are a good example of this (LAUGHLIN 1980:49). Their bones were used for various tools, including harpoon heads and digging tools; skins were sewn into boat covers; whiskers adorned bent wood visors; cleaned and split intestines provided material for rain gear; esophagus, stomach, and intestines were made into a range of storage containers; and teeth were grooved so they could be suspended as pendants. Other animals were used in similar fashion.

Nonedible resources used solely as fabricational resources included driftwood, which provided the main building material for Aleut houses; stone, such as basalt and obsidian, which was chipped into a wide range of projectile points, knives, adzes, and scrapers; grass, especially beach rye, which was collected to be made into finely woven baskets, mats, and other items; and ochre, an iron-rich stone which was ground into a fine powder that served as an important paint pigment.

One of the distinctive aspects of the Aleut subsistence economy was that the diverse resources included some plentiful forms which were obtainable by Aleut males and females of almost any age. For example, it did not take an especially knowledgeable or courageous hunter to walk along the shore at low tide and collect sea urchins, chitons, and other marine invertebrates. Likewise, Aleuts too infirm to venture out in boats could still fish for halibut, cod, salmon, and other fish directly from the shore. Thus, while on the one hand only the younger men hunted sea mammals pelagically, on the other hand all members of an Aleut community - young and old, females and males - could participate to a significant degree in feeding their families.

Because of Aleuts' reliance on the sea, it is not surprising that their settlements were situated at the most advantageous coastal locations. Sheltered bays, stream mouths, and spits of land were all favored locales from which to hunt and gather the broad and plentiful spectrum of food and fabricational resources available. As did Natives throughout Alaska, Aleuts maintained both main villages and seasonal subsistence camps, the latter used by smaller groups for tasks such as hunting and fishing. However, the abundance and concentration of food resources in the Aleut region made possible the maintenance of fixed village locations for long periods of time, something not possible in all areas of Alaska. For example, at the well-known archaeological site of Chaluka in the contemporary village of Nikolski, a record of essentially continuous Aleut occupation extends from 4000 years ago to the present (DENNISTON 1966; MCCARTNEY 1984:130). Indeed, some of the residents of Nikolski still live atop this ancestral site. Further, it is likely that many of these locations represented sedentary occupations, where at least a portion of the population remained for the entire year.

Aleut villages were flexible in membership and variable in size, some consisting of only a family or two, while others may have numbered more than two hundred. Extended families lived together in semisubterranean *barabaras* (Aleut: *ulax̂*) - houses built from driftwood, whale bone, and stone and having roof entries. While archaeologically known Aleut houses from the central and western regions of the Aleutian Islands are small and have only a single room, some houses in the eastern area are quite large and complex. These houses had main living areas as large as 7 x 45 m in size, with several additional semisubterranean side rooms attached to this through narrow passageways in the walls. Such structures could have been home to 100 or more people (MCCARTNEY *et al.* 1991).

One area of some uncertainty regarding precontact Aleuts is the realm of social organization, particularly the method by which Aleuts reckoned kin relations. The precontact kinship system changed significantly before many details of it were recorded, and anthropologists are left to discern the underlying system from the few kinship terms recorded by early travelers and from evidence contained in oral traditions. One possible interpretation (LANTIS 1970; LIAPUNOVA 1996:132) holds that Aleuts possessed a matrilineal kinship system, similar in basic form to that well known from other cultures of the southern coast of Alaska, including the Tanaina Athabaskans of Cook Inlet and the Tlingit Indians of southeastern Alaska. In such a society, the most important kin ties are traced by men and women through their mothers, not their fathers. Patterns of working, sharing, and marriage were all influenced by one's membership in a particular matrilineal group. Other interpretations have been advanced, although they have not been described in

detail.

Aboriginal Aleut society was also ranked, at least in the eastern Aleutians, with the highest ranking going to those individuals having the greatest wealth, the most slaves (Aleut and Eskimo war captives), the largest families, the most local kin support, and the closest proximity to important subsistence resources (TOWNSEND 1980). Signs of rank included finer dress and elaborate personal ornamentation, such as tattooing and wearing of lip plugs - labrets. Regional political alliances beyond the village level existed, although the manner in which they functioned and their time depth are unclear. As has been suggested by TOWNSEND (1980), eastern Aleuts were possibly on the verge of becoming stratified at the time of Russian contact.

Compared with that of other Alaska Native peoples, the realm of Aleut ideology is also not especially well known. As elsewhere in Alaska, Aleut religion was clearly animistic, there being a general belief in the existence of spiritual aspects of humans, animals, and objects, such as rivers and mountains. Successful life, including good health and luck in hunting, was predicated upon living in harmony with spiritual forces, and Aleuts followed specific protocol to maintain this balance. SARYCHEV (1807:57-58), for example, reports that the person who obtained the first sea lion of the season shared it with all the members of his village; afterwards, all of the bones were returned to him, and he threw them back into the sea. Whaling, too, was surrounded by behavior governed by spirits: a man, after wounding a whale, would go into seclusion and behave as though he were sick, thus hastening the whale's demise (VENIAMINOV 1984:224).

Belief in the power of human spirits was nowhere more clearly evident than in the various means by which deceased persons were treated. While slain enemies were sometimes dismembered to release their otherwise powerful and dangerous spirits, deceased relatives were treated with great care and respect. Some were interred in laboriously constructed burials on hills close to a village, while others - likely those men, women, and children of highest rank - were occasionally mummified and placed with their belongings in caves along the shoreline. Because mummies retained the power of the living hunter, men made visits to mummy caves to acquire good luck in their own hunting.

Shamans served as magical-religious specialists, mediating between the everyday and spirit worlds. They were called upon to cure the sick, ensure hunting success, bring victory in battle, and so forth. Although much was never recorded before being lost, Aleuts had a rich oral tradition which included stories of ancestral heros, myths of animal protectors and other supernatural beings, songs, narratives of everyday life, and proverbs (BERGSLAND and DIRKS 1990).

THE RUSSIAN PERIOD

Following their initial 1741 arrival in Alaska, Russian fur hunters, *promyshlenniki,* set out with increasing frequency to the rich waters of the Aleutian archipelago. Dozens of hunting expeditions were made during the first several decades of the Russian period, as the hunters looked ever farther eastward in their pursuit of a dwindling population of sea otters. These voyages often lasted several years, with crews returning to their homeland only when a sufficient supply of skins had been amassed (BERKH 1974; MAKAROVA 1975).

The *promyshlenniki* exploited not only the fur resources of southwestern Alaska but the indigenous Aleut population as well. Because Aleut men were skilled at sea mammal hunting, they were forced to hunt sea otters, first for independent Russian fur trading companies, and, after 1799, for the Russian-American Company (SARAFIAN 1970). In the early years, *promyshlenniki* collected tribute, *iasak,* in the form of sea otter and other pelts from the Aleuts, and, to insure that peaceful relations would be maintained and the required skins would be produced, they often took hostages from among the Aleuts.

After the Pribilof Islands were discovered by Russians in 1786 and 1787, Aleuts were taken there from their homes in the Aleutians to form the bulk of the work crews to harvest the northern fur seals, which came to the islands in great numbers to breed each summer. What began as seasonal labor for Aleut men changed in the early 1800s when they and their families were made permanent residents of the Pribilof Islands. To an extent greater than for Aleuts elsewhere, these Aleuts were virtual slaves of their Russian managers, who completely controlled their lives (TORREY 1978).

By 1799, the various fur hunting companies of the preceding decades had been reduced to a single entity, the Russian-American Company, which had monopolistic hunting rights north of 55° north latitude (TIKHMENEV 1978). In the Aleut region, the Russian-American Company continued to depend heavily on Aleut labor, in part because there were usually fewer than 600 Russians in all of Alaska at any one time (FEDOROVA 1973). Moreover, Aleut hunting proficiency was unsurpassed; this was noted by one Russian naval officer in 1820 (quoted in GIBSON 1976:8):

> If the [Russian-American] company should somehow lose the Aleuts, then it will completely forfeit the hunting of sea animals, because not one Russian knows how to hunt the animals, and none of our settlers has learned how in all the time that the company has had its possessions here.

By the beginning of the 1800s, therefore, Aleuts had lost control of their own lives. Their precontact adaptive strategies were simply not adequate for

dealing with the kind and magnitude of change which occurred in the early Russian period. While all facets of Aleut life had experienced change, perhaps the most significant of these was population decline (VELTRE 1990). Regardless of the precise precontact Aleut population size, by the early 1800s only about 2,500 Aleuts remained, an overall loss of from 70-85 percent in only fifty years. This loss occurred from the combined effects of Russian-Aleut conflicts, Russian atrocities, introduced diseases (MILAN 1974), and increased accidental deaths, all of which most likely played out in a complex, interconnected fashion which will render the accurate determination of the relative contributions each made to population loss nearly impossible to achieve.

Concomitant with this severe population loss was population resettlement. Villages became fewer in number, frequently consolidating with others in an area. Especially in the central and western Aleutians, entire islands and island groups became deserted. Whole Aleut villages (or the remnants thereof) and occasionally entire island populations were sometimes resettled at the discretion of the Russians. Such was the case in the early 1820s, when Russians moved Aleuts from Atka to the previously uninhabited Commander Islands between the western Aleutians and Kamchatka, where, like the Aleuts who had been moved earlier to the Pribilofs, they worked at harvesting fur seals. By the end of the Russian period, population loss and resettlement had left only a small handful of Aleut villages in existence throughout the islands.

Settlement patterns at the household level changed as well during the Russian period. Precontact multifamily *barabaras* gave way to a variety of new forms following contact. Most were smaller and housed fewer people. By the 1820s, some Aleut houses were built mostly above ground and had windows, side entries, interior metal stoves, and other modern trappings (e.g., drawing by Kittlitz [LITKE 1987:216]).

The Aleut subsistence economy also was affected by the Russian presence. Aleuts were compelled to labor for furs for the trading companies and were often removed from their villages and, therefore, unavailable for subsistence activities. Because of this, it is likely that proportions of traditional subsistence foods changed during this time (e.g., TURNER 1981). Since introduced foreign foodstuffs were expensive and limited in quantity, they did not assume a significant portion of the Aleut diet. Instead, throughout the Russian period and well into the American period, most Aleuts continued to be highly dependent on traditional resources, procured largely by traditional means.

One aspect of the precontact subsistence economy which did change significantly during the Russian period was the spiritual realm. Precontact beliefs and ceremonies regarding animal spirits and the placation of game were integrated into and in part replaced by the beliefs and practices of the Russian Orthodox Church. While church tradition limited subsistence activities at certain times (such as during Lent), it also was intimately involved with those enterprises in other ways. Even today, at the start of the halibut fishing season on St. Paul, for example, the priest blesses the fishing boats, and prior to the fur sealing season he also blesses the workers and the harvest.

In sum, the ways of life of all Alaska Natives who came into contact with Russians were unavoidably, and in most cases, purposefully changed. Nowhere was this more extreme than for the Aleuts of the Aleutian Islands. The maintenance of precontact Aleut cultural traditions was at best a secondary consideration both to the Russian fur hunters, whose primary purpose in coming to Alaska was to exploit the natural and human resources of the region, and to the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose fundamental goal was to instill a new religion. Especially during the first half of the Russian era, Aleuts experienced their greatest population and cultural losses, most settlements were relocated, the pattern of forced labor of Aleuts became set, and Russian Orthodoxy began to take hold.

THE AMERICAN PERIOD TO WORLD WAR II

The United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. Throughout the Aleut region, the monopoly and forced labor system of the Russian American Company gave way to the independent commercialism of private trading companies and other enterprises bringing wage employment to the people. For the first time, Aleuts could purchase a wide variety of material goods, ranging from boats to clothes to food, and, as they did so, they became increasingly, albeit slowly, drawn into the larger western economic realm.

These new economic ties were coupled with both governmental and non-governmental assimilationist policies that undermined aspects of traditional Aleut language and culture. Sheldon Jackson, a missionary and the first United States agent of education in Alaska, stated: "[Indian education] was to instruct a people the greater portion of whom are uncivilized, who need to be taught sanitary conditions, the laws of health, improvement of dwellings, better methods of house-keeping, cooking and dressing, more remunerative forms of labor, honesty, chastity, the sacredness of the marriage relationship, and everything that elevates man" (quoted in JONES 1976:22). American schools, to a significant extent unlike the earlier Russian schools, became a prime means of bringing about culture change, especially in terms of the Aleut language.

As in the preceding Russian period, the economic

backbone of Aleutian Island Aleuts in the early American period was sea otter hunting. By the turn of the century, however, sea otters had been nearly exterminated from the Aleutian region. In the eastern Aleutians, commercial cod fishing filled the void left by sea otter hunting. Many Scandinavian fishermen came to the area at this time, staying to marry and raise families.

Salmon fishing and processing also became important during the early 1900s in the eastern Aleut area, as did herring fishing. In the central and western Aleutians, where fisheries were less productive, fox trapping and fox farming assumed leading importance by the 1920s and early 1930s.

For the Aleuts of the Pribilof Islands, the American period was somewhat different. Profit from the commercial fur seal harvest in these islands was perhaps the major initial interest the U.S. had in Alaska. To this end, the government entered into long-term agreements with commercial enterprises to manage the seal harvest on St. Paul and St. George. These agreements gave way in 1910 to direct government operation of the fur seal business, something that was to continue until the 1980s.

As during the Russian era, the lives of the Pribilof Aleuts continued to be controlled by outside interests directed to the fur seal business. The American period in these islands has been described as one of "hidden, internal, colonialism [in which] the [federal] government sought unlimited control over the Aleuts' economic behavior. . . . Government managers dominated the Aleuts' political and juridical institutions; they controlled the Aleuts' use of money and manipulated their work classifications" (JONES 1980:173-174). In short, Pribilof Aleuts lacked the civil liberties of other Americans, something which would continue until well after World War II.

In sum, between the sale of Alaska to the United States and the beginning of World War II, the economy of the Aleut region continued to be based on the exploitation of the fur and fish resources of the area, with Aleuts providing much of the labor for these efforts. While certain aspects of traditional Aleut culture - especially the use of subsistence foods - continued to be maintained, other aspects - like language - were being lost at an increasing rate. Those villages which were the most isolated, Atka and Nikolski, remained the most traditional, while those in the center of the fishing and sealing enterprises, such as St. Paul, St. George, Unalaska, and Sand Point, underwent more changes.

WORLD WAR II AND ITS LEGACY

During World War II, Aleuts experienced new kinds of changes. Because of its natural geographic configuration, the Aleutian archipelago had obvious military significance to both the Japanese and Americans. When the war came to the Aleutians in 1942, the 42 Aleut residents of Attu Island were taken by the Japanese to the city of Otaru, where they remained until the end of the war (STEIN 1976).

For the Aleuts of most other villages, the war brought a different fate (KOHLHOFF 1995). Although for several months, American government and military officials had discussed various options, including evacuation, for protecting the Aleut people, the actual outbreak of the war at Dutch Harbor in June, 1942, caught the planners off guard. "Tragically, through bureaucratic indecision and delay, the opportunity to plan sensibly for the orderly evacuation of exposed Aleut villages and to institute safely and effectively this plan if such action became necessary, had been lost. . . . This lack of planning for evacuation was merely the result of administrative failure" (KIRTLAND and COFFIN 1981:11-12).

Thus, beginning on 12 June in the village of Atka, and continuing over the next several weeks in the remaining six Aleut villages west of Unimak Island[2] (Nikolski, Kashega, Biorka, Makushin, Unalaska, Akutan) and in the two Pribilof Islands villages (St. Paul and St. George), Aleuts were hastily boarded on ships and evacuated. In all cases, Aleuts were allowed to take only minimal possessions with them. In Atka, American forces burned the village to the ground immediately following the evacuation, to preclude Japanese use of any buildings in the event of an occupation of that island. Such occupation never occurred.

Not only the village evacuations themselves but also the subsequent decisions regarding where to take the Aleuts were made in an air of haste and confusion (STEIN 1984). It was not until the evacuation ships were underway that final destinations were decided upon. The Atkans were taken to Killisnoo, an abandoned fish cannery about three miles from the Tlingit Indian village of Angoon. Pribilof Aleuts were taken to an abandoned cannery and an abandoned mine on Funter Bay, on the west coast of Admiralty Island, some sixty miles from Juneau. The Aleuts from Nikolski, Akutan, Makushin, Kashega, and Biorka were settled in a Civilian Conservation Corps recreation facility at Ward Cove near Ketchikan. Finally, Aleuts from Unalaska were taken to an abandoned cannery on Burnett Inlet on Etolin Island, near the town of Wrangell. In all, 881 Aleuts were evacuated and most resettled in internment camps in southeastern Alaska.

The living conditions at the Aleuts' internment camps were appalling (BERNSTEIN *et al.* 1982; KIRTLAND and COFFIN 1981). Housing was sadly inadequate. Aleuts were often forced to live dormitory-style in dilapidated buildings or in cramped quarters, with little or no privacy. Sanitation, including a safe water supply and adequate toilet facilities, was

poor or non-existent. Medical care and supplies were minimal. And some Aleuts, used to living in the openness of the treeless Aleutians, found it unsettling to be confined by forests of huge southeastern Alaskan trees.

Following the war, U.S. government treatment of Aleuts continued to be harsh. When the Attuans were returned from Japan to the United States following the war, they learned that "the Bureau of Indian Affairs, perhaps with the aid of military authorities, [had] concluded that there were too few - nine men, six women, and ten children - to form a viable community on Attu, where their village had been totally destroyed by American bombs" (STEIN 1976:15). Although the Attuans were wholly displeased with this reasoning, their protestations were to no avail, and by the end of 1945 they were finally resettled in the Aleut village of Atka, in the central Aleutians.

Return of interned Aleuts to their villages took place from May, 1944, to June, 1945. Many families returned to find that the military had destroyed or damaged their homes and had stolen their personal possessions (KIRTLAND and COFFIN 1981:78-89). Recent video productions (ATN and A/PIA 1981; Gaff Rigged Productions and A/PIA 1992) concerning the Aleut experience in World War II have included poignant personal accounts of the years of internment and the situations that awaited them when they returned to their villages. Several communities (Biorka, Makushin, Kashega, and Attu) were not resettled at all, and government support to repair and rebuild the others and to compensate for losses was minimal.

Over the decades following the war, several principal issues regarding the internment of the Aleuts became the cornerstone for a legal and political movement to seek reparations from the federal government. With the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 and the formation of regional and local Aleut profit and non-profit corporations, this interest became a more specific agenda for the Aleut people. Eventually joining political forces with Japanese Americans interned during the war, Aleuts made their case to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (BERNSTEIN *et al.* 1982), a body established in 1980 to review the wartime treatment of Aleuts and Japanese Americans and to recommend appropriate remedies.

The principal points of contention in the Aleuts' claims for wartime reparations were the following:

(1) ***There was racial motivation regarding the evacuation.*** In Unalaska, for example, where both whites and Aleuts lived, it was only the Aleut residents who were removed, even though it was ostensibly for their protection and not because they were considered to be a security risk.

(2) ***Aleuts were kept interned long after the Japanese threat had passed.*** Although the Japanese had been removed from the Aleutians by mid-1943, it was nearly two years later before all Aleuts allowed to return to their homes. It is interesting to note that the government's economic necessity apparently outweighed its safety considerations for the Aleuts, for during the summer of 1943 some 151 Pribilof Aleut men, whose labor was required if the government was to make money at the fur seal harvest, were taken back to the Pribilof Islands for the summer so that sealing operations could be undertaken. Likewise, in 1944, the government's economic interest in the fur seal harvest guided the repatriation itself: the first Aleuts to be repatriated to their villages were those from the Pribilofs. Aleuts of other villages waited over a year longer to return to their homes.

(3) ***Personal property was used and destroyed.*** While Aleuts were interned, their homes were used to billet U.S. troops. Many Aleuts had been allowed to take only a single suitcase with them; when they returned home, they found their personal possessions, including irreplaceable family belongings and religious icons, had been damaged or stolen.

(4) ***Conditions at the internment camps were deplorable.*** Given the poor housing, sanitation, and medical facilities, it is likely that Aleuts would have been better off had they never been evacuated at all. It has been closely estimated that, in all, some 82 Aleuts - approximately 10 percent of those interned - died during the two to three years away from home.

(5) ***Adequate reparations had never been paid.*** Following the war, "claims for personal property loss were limited to an average of about $32.25 per person" (KIRTLAND and COFFIN 1981:107). This amount was wholly inadequate to compensate for the material losses which the Aleuts had sustained.

The result of the Aleuts' complaints was the passage in 1988 of Public Law 100-383 (U.S. Congress 1988), which implemented the recommendations of the Commission. Title II of the law, the "Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act," specifically addresses the treatment of Aleuts. Its major provisions include the following:

(1) Establishment of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Fund, administered by the Secretary of the Interior.

(2) Establishment of a trust, funds from which may be used for the benefit of elderly, disabled, or seriously ill persons, for students in need of scholarship assistance, and for the preservation of Aleut cultural heritage and historical records.

(3) Compensation for damaged or destroyed church property.
(4) Compensation of $12,000 to individual Aleuts who were interned during the war.
(5) Restitution through payment for loss of traditional Aleut lands and village properties on Attu Island.

It is interesting to note that this legislation dealt only with the treatment of Aleuts and their property during World War II by the United States; reparations for the Attuans were not a part of the act. To remedy this situation, the Aleut Corporation (the regional for-profit Aleut entity created by the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) gave each Attuan survivor $15,000, an amount which, after taxes, closely approximated the tax-free compensation afforded other Aleuts through the act.

Of the many changes which have occurred in Aleut culture over the years since World War II, those that are most directly attributable to war itself include the following:

(1) New patterns of leadership and decision-making. Before the war, many Aleut communities made their decisions concerning which men would go fox trapping, who would travel to the Pribilofs to work, and so on on a communal basis. Chiefs, recognized as leaders because of their traditional values, were spokesmen for their communities. World War II provided the opportunity for Aleuts to gain education and practical experience in the outside world. Upon repatriation to their villages, it was these Aleut men and women who began to replace the traditional leaders in the increasingly complex political and economic realms of post-war Alaska. Today, there are no traditional chiefs, as other political and community entities have come into being and subsumed chiefly functions.

(2) New strategic and economic interests in the Aleutians. Although the military had withdrawn most of its forces from the Aleutian Islands by the war's end, the strategic significance of the Aleutian Islands to the defense of North America was firmly established. Though some, like the famous DEW Line stations, are now defunct, other major military and communications facilities, including Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force bases, are still maintained in the islands. Likewise, economic interests, primarily ocean fisheries and off-shore oil exploration, have expanded since the war, particularly in the eastern Aleutian Islands region. These military and economic developments have brought new employment opportunities, albeit often unskilled and temporary, to the Aleut people.

(3) New population base. With increased military and economic interest in the Aleutian Islands has come to some communities an influx of non-Aleuts. This has been particularly substantial in the town of Unalaska where Aleuts, once the majority of the population, has now become a relatively powerless minority of less than 10 percent of the community.

(4) Loss of environmental integrity. The war's toll on the natural environment of the Aleutian Islands was staggering. Tens of thousands of military troops were stationed the length of the archipelago, and by the end of the war there had accumulated a tremendous amount of debris, from buildings to airstrips to ordnance to leaking fuel drums. Not until the 1980s did substantial clean-up occur, though only in today's more populated areas. To this day there are many traditionally important Aleut resource locales which have remained untouched since the war, including previously productive salmon streams blocked by debris, lakes and streams polluted by fuel and chemicals, and so on.

RECENT AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

While the Russian period and World War II brought fundamental and largely devastating change to Aleuts, the last thirty years have witnessed changes of another sort. The single most important factor responsible for these changes has been the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). A piece of federal legislation of enormous complexity, ANCSA, in brief, provided for the creation of regional and local for-profit Native corporations in Alaska, with village residents becoming shareholders of both. In the Aleut region, the regional corporation is the Aleut Corporation, and there are thirteen local village corporations. With the passage of ANCSA, Aleuts for the first time became business men and women - in business not as individuals, but as representatives of their own people.

There has been much debate in Alaska over the wisdom of ANCSA. On the one hand, in its creation of autonomous village corporations, the law served to separate and segment Aleut society, thereby serving to some degree to undermine traditional cultural cohesion and values of reciprocity. On the other hand, in the formation of the regional Aleut Corporation, ANCSA also brought people together as corporate shareholders, as owners of lands and assets, and as decision-makers involved with region-wide issues. Regardless of one's point of view, it is undeniable that as recipients of cash and land under ANCSA, Alaska's Native peoples became politically and economically empowered to an extent not previously experienced.

In the Aleut region, there are many regional and village economic enterprises currently being pursued, all based on the particular natural resources and geographic location of the Aleutian and Pribilof islands.

Among these are halibut fisheries, tourism, sand and gravel supply, construction, reindeer, cattle, and sheep ranching, and shore-based fishing support. By far the largest venture today is the regional corporation's acquisition and management of the former United States Naval Base on Adak Island, in the central Aleutians. This completely equipped, but now largely vacant, city is being developed by the Aleuts for its potential as, among other things, a port for ocean-going vessels, an air refueling station, an on-shore support locale for fisheries and oil exploration, a research locale, and a tourism center. With a current population of about 300 and a capacity for 5,000, it is rapidly becoming the newest Aleut community.

Under ANCSA, the Aleut Corporation will obtain ownership to several hundred archaeological sites in its region. This provision of the law provided financial support for the creation in 1998 (by the Aleutian/ Pribilof Islands Association, the regional non-profit Aleut corporation) of the region's first Cultural Heritage Program, which is already achieving success with various projects, including collecting oral histories, teaching traditional dance, and working towards the repatriation of Aleut burial materials from museums around the United States.

Another very recent development is the September, 1998, formation of the Aleut International Association, an alliance of Alaskan Aleuts with Aleuts of the Russian Commander Islands. This organization is based not only on the common ancestral bonds of these two groups, but also on their mutual concern over the declining health of the Bering Sea ecosystem. The Association intends to bring a strong voice to the international environmental and cultural issues of importance in this part of the world.

Not all significant cultural changes of the last 30 years are attributable to ANCSA, nor can they easily be associated with environmental factors. One such change is the on-going shift of the language from Aleut to English (HALLAMAA 1997; KRAUSS 1997). While partly a legacy of federal assimilationist policies earlier in this century, recent Aleut language change also has had other causes. For the last century, Aleut villages have varied a great deal in terms of the degree to which the Aleut language was spoken in them. In general, the more isolated communities, like Nikolski and Atka, retained use of the language longer than did those communities, like the Pribilof villages and Unalaska, which had experienced more intense and sustained contact. Of the various reasons for language shift over the historical period, one of the most recent was the introduction of satellite-based television service beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Atka, for example, where the Aleut language was spoken by all ages in the mid-1970s, the youngest fluent speakers are now in their 30s. Although the Aleut language is taught as a subject in the Atka school, it is not likely that it will ever recapture its former vitality.

In spite of the many changes which have occurred over the past 250 years, some precontact cultural traditions endure. Perhaps the strongest tie of today's Aleuts to their traditional past lies in the realm of subsistence (VELTRE 1985). In Aleut communities today, almost all families still use many of the resources obtained by their ancestors in precontact times (VELTRE and VELTRE 1981, 1982, 1983). Subject to environmental limitations (such as the absence of salmon in the Pribilofs), it is significant that Aleuts continue to procure all of the major categories of food resources, including birds and eggs, marine mammals, fish, marine invertebrates, and plants. Likewise, non-food resources such as driftwood and grass are also used.

Other traditional subsistence patterns remain as well. The precontact settlement use of base villages and seasonal satellite camps continues to be maintained. Similarly, two closely related basic tenets of precontact Aleut hunting, fishing, and gathering - cooperation and sharing - are very much a part of resource use by Aleuts today. Sharing also extends to the exchange of foods between distantly separated villages. For example, salted fur seal flippers from the Pribilofs are often sent to relatives in the Aleutian Islands in exchange for salmon, which is not found in the Pribilofs (VELTRE and VELTRE 1981). Thus, exchange of subsistence foods is an important means of maintaining ties to family and friends elsewhere.

Despite these continuities, the modern subsistence economy reflects important changes. Like hunting and fishing economies everywhere in the North, those of Aleut communities are inseparably linked to the cash economy. Substantial financial resources are required to purchase and maintain the equipment necessary to procure various resources, so people must work to earn that money. However, work schedules rarely deliberately make room for subsistence pursuits, and even though cash might be available for such endeavors, time is often not. Similarly, the time that does become available after seasonal employment or during full time employment may not coincide with optimum resource procurement periods. Solutions to this situation vary considerably. Some Aleuts are postponing or rescheduling subsistence activities to fit job constraints, and some are financially or otherwise supporting the hunting and fishing activities of a relative or friend, from whom they receive subsistence foods.

CONCLUSIONS

As reviewed in this paper, most of the major changes which have occurred in Aleut culture since initial Russian contact over 250 years ago can profitably be viewed from an environmental perspective. The fur

and fish resources of the Aleutian and Pribilof islands, in particular, played a large part in bringing foreign exploitation to Aleut territory. We can not, of course, let ourselves make the mistake of concluding that all Aleuts have had the same experiences and the same responses to cultural change. Nevertheless, they are bound by common ancestry, common occupancy of a traditional region, common cultural and religious heritage, common membership in contemporary local and regional Aleut corporations, and common participation in today's political and economic world system.

In a general way, the Russian period and World War II were similar in their impacts on Aleuts: the outside world thrust itself upon the Aleuts, whose fundamental rights and welfare were at best a secondary concern to those in control. In both periods, changes included both significant population loss and village relocations and resettlement. In contrast to this, the most recent changes in Aleut culture have come about largely with the direct involvement of Aleuts themselves. Especially since passage of ANCSA, Aleuts have had the financial, political, and resource means to take greater control of their own future, making the most both of the natural resources of their region as well as of their area's strategic location in the north Pacific arena. Significantly, too, the Aleuts' future is one which will include not just economic development but also a revitalization and rediscovery of their own traditional past.

END NOTES

1. The name "Aleut" is of uncertain origin, although it likely was traditionally used by those people living in the Near Islands group, at the far western end of the Aleutian archipelago, to refer to themselves. It was only after the arrival of Russians that "Aleut" became widely applied, and it was (and is) often broadly - and confusingly - employed to include both Aleuts as well as Native residents of Alutiiq-speaking areas to the east. Today, the traditional name *Unangan* (in the eastern dialect) or *Unangas* (in the Atka, or central, dialect) has begun to be used (often in the form *Unangaŝ*) by some Native residents as a more accurate autonym.
2. At least one author has suggested that the decision to make Unimak Island the cutoff for evacuation was related to economic, rather than safety, issues (JONES 1976:30):

> While to my knowledge there was no public statement as to why the cutoff was at Unimak, it is interesting to note that all the salmon-packing plants in the Aleutian area lay east of that line, and at no time in its history has the salmon industry shown any reluctance to exercise its considerable influence.

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