

NUMBER 70

Russian Dependence Upon the Natives  
of Russian America

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Conference on Russian America

Sponsored by

The American Historical Association  
and  
The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies  
The Wilson Center

# RUSSIAN DEPENDENCE UPON THE NATIVES OF RUSSIAN AMERICA

by

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In the literature on the early relations between the native occupants and the European colonizers of North America the former have commonly been seen as rather helpless dupes who were manipulated almost at will by the latter, and it has often been contended outright or at least assumed that the natives soon became dependent upon European trade goods, particularly guns, liquor, tobacco, metalware, textiles, and even foodstuffs. Recently, however, this characterization of the contact period has been called increasingly into question. This paper carries the revisionism even further by trying to show that in the case of Russian America -- or, more accurately, Russian America's insular and coastal margins, where the Russian presence was largely confined -- the traditional characterization is not only oversimplified but downright erroneous, for in fact virtually the opposite situation obtained, with the Russians being dependent upon the Aleut, Kodiak, and Tlingit for such basics as furs, provisions, labor, and sex.

The fur trade was, of course, the raison d'être of Russian America, just as it had been of Siberia. Russian eastward expansion from the Urals was really a rush for "soft gold" -- principally sables in Siberia and sea otters in America. The latter succeeded the former as the world's most valuable fur bearers, and the resultant overhunting took the Russian promyshlenniki (fur traders) ever eastward -- from the basin of the Ob to those of the Yenisey and Lena, then to the peninsula of Kamchatka, along the Aleutian archipelago to the Gulf of Alaska, and finally down the Northwest Coast. The depletion of sea otters was especially rapid because of the

creature's low fecundity (one offspring per year per dam) and high value (of the dam in particular). Thanks to the high luster, dark color, large size, and durability of sea otter pelts, they were the most prized of all furs, especially by the Chinese. In the 1810s a prime adult female pelt could bring the Russian-American Company up to 1,000 rubles (Anonymous 1835: 92), as much as the total annual salaries of three promyshlenniki. Other fur bearers, particularly fur seals, were hunted in Russian America but none even approached sea otters in value.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Russians were primarily interested in sea otters, they themselves did not actually hunt them. In the continental fur trade of Siberia the promyshlenniki were able to bag sables as readily as the Samoyed, Buryat, Yakut, Koryak, and other natives, but the maritime fur trade was quite another matter. Pelagic hunting was foreign to the Russian landsmen, as indeed was seafaring in general. So they became abjectly dependent upon native hunters who had a tradition of, and an expertise in, the killing of sea animals, especially sea otters, whose capture was the most demanding. As Governor Ferdinand von Wrangell (1830-35) noted, "of all hunts, the sea otter hunt requires the most experience, skill, and patience. Fur seals, sea lions, and walruses, despite their strength and size, are caught more easily and more quickly" (Wrangel 1835: 501). Moreover, the sea otter chase was "very toilsome, and sometimes dangerous," according to the Russian Navy's Captain Otto von Kotzebue, who twice visited the colonies (Von Kotzebue 1830, II: 47).<sup>2</sup> The inexperienced Russians were reluctant to exert their brawn and risk their lives, particularly when highly skilled and largely defenseless native hunters were readily available. Besides, the hunting of elusive sea otters in the open sea from flimsy kayaks with short harpoons was a formidable task that the

natives practised from childhood and took years to master. It was an integral component of Aleut and Kodiak culture. The German naturalist and physician George von Langsdorff, who accompanied the first Russian circumnavigation in 1803-06, found that "scarcely has a [Aleut] boy attained his eighth year, or even sometimes not more than his sixth, when he is instructed in the management of the canoes [kayaks], and in aiming at a mark with the water javelin" (Von Langsdorff 1813-14, II: 41). In the same year Captain Yury Lisiansky, one of the commanders of the circumnavigation, remarked that the Kodiak (Konyaga Eskimo), "exercised from their childhood to this sort of hunting, are very expert at it" (Lisiansky 1814: 204). And in 1820 on Unalaska Island Lieutenant Alexis Lazarev of the Russian Navy observed that "an Aleut is, so to speak, born in a kayak, skilful in all forms of hunting, and familiar from childhood with winds and currents" (Lazarev 1950: 186).

Furthermore, according to Father Ivan Veniaminov, who spent a decade (1824-34) among the Aleut as a missionary, they were physically superior to the Russians as hunters. He pointed out that the Aleut were solidly built and broad shouldered and hence made strong, tireless workers.<sup>3</sup> Veniaminov added that:

The Aleuts' eyesight is very good, and in comparison with that of the Russians incomparably superior . . . . The Aleuts' estimation by sight is also very good. On rough seas they always guess the height and the speed of the waves, and they invariably distinguish between an ordinary wave at open sea and a wave in shallows and shoals. For this reason, only Aleuts, or people with such eyesight and sight estimation, can hunt otters at sea, and Russians . . . can never be otter hunters (Veniaminov 1840, II: 13-14).

The Aleut were better sea otter hunters than the Kodiak, too. They even liked to hunt sea otters, or so it was alleged by their Russian masters. One of them, Cyril Khlebnikov, who probably knew Russian America

better than any other colonial official, having served fifteen years (1817-32) there, declared that the Aleut were the only natives with an innate passion for hunting sea otters ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 35). Similarly, Warrant Officer Frederick Lütke of the Russian Navy observed in 1818 that the Aleut were as fond of catching sea otters as cats were of catching mice (Shur 1971: 145). More importantly, the Aleut were better kayakers than the Kodiak (or any of the coastal natives of the Gulf of Alaska, for that matter), probably because they had better craft. Light, fast, and maneuverable, with a shallow draught, kayaks were admirably suited to the pursuit of sea otters in the kelp and shellfish beds of the rocky and shallow coastal waters. They weighed less than thirty-six pounds and could be carried by a seven-year-old boy, and in a "moderately smooth" sea they could easily do ten miles per hour (Sarychev 1952:213; Sauer 1972:159; Veniaminov 1840, II: 221).<sup>4</sup> Veniaminov asserted that "it seems to me that an Aleut kayak is so perfect in its type that not even a mathematician could add very much or scarcely anything to the perfection of its nautical qualities" (Veniaminov 1840, II: 222).

So the Aleut, as Governor von Wrangell acknowledged, were the most skilful hunters of sea otters (Vrangel 1835: 496). In fact, their expertise with kayak and harpoon was such that under Russian pressure it contributed to the rapid diminution of the sea otter population.<sup>5</sup> It was also such that the Russian promyshlenniki became totally dependent upon the Aleut, not even bothering to learn how to hunt the animals themselves. Martin Sauer, secretary to the Billings Expedition (1785-94), observed on Kodiak Island in 1790 that foxes and ground squirrels were the only animals that the Russians were capable of killing (Sauer 1972:179). Lieutenant Lazarev noted on Unalaska Island in 1820 that the Russians were less com-

petent kayakers than the Aleut, so much so that if the latter were to refrain from hunting, the Russian-American Company would be deprived of sea otters. He explained that "if the company should somehow lose the Aleut, then it will completely forfeit the hunting of sea animals, for 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" (Lazarev 1950: 186, 235, 282). And in 1830 the colonial administration admitted that the Aleut skill in sea otter hunting was irreplaceable (USNA 1942, roll 33: 169v). Little wonder that Governor von Wrangell referred to the Aleut as the "sole miners of the company's wealth" (Pasetsky 1975: 134).

They also dominated fur seal hunting. The principal fur sealing grounds were the Pribilof Islands of St. George and St. Paul, where from 1786 through 1830 3,144, 494 fur seals (an average of nearly 70,000 every fall!) were killed (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 356v-57). In 1810 200 Aleut were sent from Unalaska to the Pribilofs, and in 1820 the fur seal hunt there was done by 380 Aleut and only 10 Russians (Gibson 1976a: 187; Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 212). Not surprisingly, the essential Aleut constituted nearly one-third of company employees in 1832 (Von Wrangell 1839: 22).

Because their expertise was so necessary to the prosecution of the maritime fur trade, the Aleut were severely exploited by the Russians. At first sea otter pelts were exacted from the islanders as tribute, and hostages were taken to ensure payment. This practice was banned in 1788 but lasted until 1794 (Pierce 1978: 55); it was replaced by compulsory labor, with the Aleut becoming, in effect, corvée serfs who were paid in kind (clothing, tobacco, food). All Aleut males between the ages of fifteen and fifty had to work for the Russian-American Company (Veniaminov 1840,

II: 172), which monopolized the administration and exploitation of the colony from 1799 to 1867. They were forcibly separated from their families, moved to new hunting grounds, subjected to arduous labor, and exposed to cold, hunger, accidents, disease, and Indian enemies. By 1790, following fifty years of Russian contact, the Aleut population may have decreased by as much as two-thirds (Sarychev 1952: 211). On the Fox Islands, the most densely populated of the Aleutians, the number of natives fell from 1,904 in 1806 to 1,046 in 1817 (Von Kotzebue 1821, III: 315n) -- a decline of almost 50 percent in a dozen years.

This decimation of the colony's best sea otter hunters prompted the Russians to use more and more Kodiak or, as they were known to the Russians, Konyaga, whose ability with kayak and harpoon was second only to that of the Aleut. Already by 1790, for instance, 600 two-hatched kayaks with 1,200 Kodiak were hunting sea otters around Kodiak Island for the Golikov-Shelikhov Company (Sauer 1972: 171). And in 1803 880 Kodiak kayaks were hunting sea otters in the Gulf of Alaska for the Russian-American Company; one group of 500 was supervised by fewer than 10 Russians (Davydov 1977: 194-95). Such exploitation quickly began to affect Kodiak numbers, too. Their population fell from 5,700 in 1792 to 1,500 in 1834 (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 118v; Veniaminov 1840, I: vi) -- a decline of 75 percent. From 1792 through 1805 751 Kodiak were killed in accidents alone, including 350 from drowning in 1805 (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 119). Fortunately, for the Russians, the rate of decrease of the Aleut and Kodiak was exceeded only by that of the sea otter, so a shortage of expert sea otter hunters did not arise.

The Russians even relied upon the Aleut and Kodiak to hunt land fur bearers; otherwise they were bartered from independent natives. On Unalaska Island the Aleut trapped foxes during the fall for the Russian-American

Company. In the Kodiak District in the last half of the 1790s an average of 250 natives and only 25 Russians hunted land fur bearers (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 119v-20). "Very few" Kenai (Tanaina Indians) of Cook Inlet were employed by the company, probably because they were not considered "good sailors" (Davydov 1977: 196; Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 137v), but they hunted and traded land furs and skins (marten, lynx, bear, wolverine, river otter, beaver, muskrat, mink, caribou) for the company whose Fort St. Nicholas derived most of its business from these natives.<sup>6</sup> And most of the land furs produced by the Sitka District (especially mink, beaver, and river otter) were obtained for the company by the Tlingit.

The insular and coastal natives of Russian America were not only the providers of the Russians' peltry but also the suppliers of their very sustenance. The colony suffered from a chronic problem of supply, particularly food supply (Gibson 1976b). The shipment of provisions overland and overseas from Siberia vis Okhotsk and from European Russia via Cronstadt and the Cape or the Horn was prolonged and expensive, as well as subject to considerable loss. Importation from nearby foreign countries, colonies, and companies brought better provisions more rapidly and more cheaply but made the Russians precariously and embarrassingly dependent upon their American, British, and Hispanic rivals for control of the Northwest Coast. Farming in Russian America itself was unproductive, owing mainly to the raw climate and inexperienced manpower.<sup>7</sup> Only certain vegetables, chiefly potatoes, succeeded. Aleuts worked the vegetable gardens at Sitka (New Archangel), the colonial capital, but not with spectacular results (Table 1). Nevertheless, potatoes fared better at Sitka than anywhere else in the colony. They were fertilized with kelp, and yields averaged 7 1/2-fold in the 1820s



([Khlebnikov] 1976: 78, 99). Six hundred 145-pound barrels of potatoes were produced at Sitka in 1821, and 150 barrels in 1825, and in some years 100 barrels were sold to visiting American and Russian ships ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 54, 78, 99; USNA 1942, roll 27: 288v). The potatoes were tasty and nourishing and rivalled bread as a staple.

It was, however, the unruly Tlingit or Kolosh, as they were called by the Russians, not the placid Aleut, who became the principal growers of potatoes. Relations between the Russians and the Tlingit contrasted sharply with those between the Russians and the Aleut and Kodiak. The promyshlenniki failed to subjugate and pacify the Tlingit, who consequently retained their culture longer than the islanders, and always remained suspect. The hapless Aleut and Kodiak were subdued quickly and easily, but the Tlingit, who were not encountered by the Russians until 1783, were able to resist them much more successfully.<sup>8</sup> Described by Russian observers as strong, agile, hardy, brave, and clever, the Tlingit had a richer environment (more timber, fish, and land animals) and a larger territory (including a continental interior) to exploit, and they were less essential to the acquisition of sea otters than the Aleut or Kodiak.<sup>9</sup> They were also more numerous, numbering 10,000 in 1805, including 2,000 Sitkan Tlingit (Lisiansky 1814: 237, 242). In 1818 on Baranof (Sitka) Island alone there were 1,000 Tlingit, whose number doubled during the spring herring run (Anonymous 1835: 63). The Tlingit population still totalled 10,000 in 1835, although by 1838 it had been reduced to 6,000 by smallpox (Z[avoiko]. 1840, II: 90). Furthermore, the Tlingit were better organized than the Aleut or Kodiak, thanks partly, at least, to their more abundant food supply, which left them more time to create a more elaborate social system. They lived in large dispersed villages, each consisting socially of several independent clans whose intervillage allegiances overrode

Table 1

Harvest of Russian-American Company Vegetables at Sitka, 1831-65

Year	Harvest	Year	Harvest
1831	"much more than usual"	1847	"mediocre"
1832	"no worse than previously"	1848	"normal"
1833	"prolific"	1849	"very mediocre"
1834	"half as against previous years"	1850	"very mediocre"
1835	"very good"	1851	"mediocre"
1836	"no worse than in previous years"	1852	"very meager"
1837	"not very prolific but no worse than in other years with harvests"	1853	"very meager"
1838	"no worse than in normal years"	1854	"utterly nil"
1839	"fairly good"	1855	"utterly nil"
1840	"fairly good, except for potatos"	1856	"quite meager"
1841	"not prolific"	1857	"meager"
1842	"nearly failed"	1858	"very prolific"
1843	"very mediocre"	1859	"less than the previous year by half"
1844	"very good"	1860	"fairly prolific"
1845	"negligible"	1861	"very satisfactory"
1846	"even less" than "very little"	1862	"mediocre"
		1863	"very negligible"
		1864	"unsatisfactory"
		1865	"very meager"

Source: USNA 1942, rolls 34: 203v-04; 35: 87, 36: 214v, 37: 196, 318v, 39: 246, 40: 291v, 42: 306, 43: 220v, 45: 274, 46: 266, 47: 426, 48: 332, 50: 204, 51: 187, 52: 134v, 326, 54: 209v, 55: 125v, 56: 125, 57: 251, 58: 189v, 59: 308v, 60: 25, 61: pt. 1, 85, pt. 2, 50, 62: pt. 1, 63v, pt. 2, 72, 63: pt. 1, 76v, pt. 2, 39v, 64: pt. 1, 59v, pt. 2, 41v, pt. 3, 14v, 65: pt. 1, 57, pt. 2, 32v.

all intravillage ties; the Aleut, by contrast, lived in more numerous and smaller scattered villages closer to scarcer food sources, each village consisting socially of one autonomous extended family ruled by one man, with weak intervillage loyalties (Coppock 1969). Among the Tlingit clan identity and solidarity were accentuated by the restriction of inheritance to the female line and by the imposition of phratric exogamy (Sapir 1966). This solidarity enabled the Tlingit to much more effectively resist Russian control. As Von Langsdorff noted in 1805, "single families, as well as single tribes [clans], have contentions sometimes with each other . . . but if attacked by a common enemy, suppose the Russians, they unite for their common defence" (Von Langsdorff 1813-14, II: 130). Consequently, as Khlebnikov warned, "to kill several hundred of them would be to instill a tribal vengeance into several thousand men" ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 101). The Russian Navy's Captain Basil Golovnin, who made a tour of inspection of Russian America in 1818, recognized Sitka's Tlingit problem:

But because the local natives do not constitute one single tribe under one chief but are divided into various clans who live or roam as they please, quite independent of one another (often one of them even fights another), it is not possible to take revenge on them, for one cannot tell to which clan the guilty belong, unless one were to make it a rule to take revenge indiscriminately. But in that case they would all unite to attack the company's settlement (Golovnin 1965: 141-42).

Golovnin added:

The Aleut and Kodiak had permanent dwellings in villages and did not have firearms, so the company with a handful of promyshlenniki easily kept them in subjection; but the inhabitants of the Northwest Coast of America . . . are strong, patient in their work, and extremely bold . . .; they love independence so much that they would rather part with life than freedom, and to subjugate them is not only difficult but impossible, for they do not have permanent dwellings but roam the channels from island to island and live in huts; they build

their boats so well that no European rowed vessel, except a whale boat, is able to overtake them . . . ; in battle they are so courageous that they are rarely captured alive, and they have learned quickly to use firearms, and they shoot very accurately ([Golovnin] 1864, V: 179-80).

The Tlingit adoption of firearms was yet another advantage. In this they were abetted by American traders, whereas the Aleut and Kodiak, being completely under Russian control, were unable to turn to foreign vessels. Yankee "coasters" supplied the Tlingit with powder, shot, and guns, including falconets, instructed them in their use, and incited them against the Russians.<sup>10</sup> In the process the Americans deprived the Russians of many furs; in 1805, for instance, Captain Lisiansky found that Sitka could be getting 8,000 instead of 3,000 sea otter pelts annually but for American traders (Lisiansky 1814: 236). Lisiansky and Von Langsdorff also found that the Tlingit had virtually abandoned their spears and bows and arrows in favor of the best English guns, which could be purchased more cheaply on the Northwest Coast than in England itself. The Sitkan Tlingit had muskets and small cannons, as well as iron breastplates, and Chief Kotlean owned no fewer than twenty of the "best" muskets and was an "excellent" marksman (Lisiansky 1814: 231, 238-39). In 1825 Captain von Kotzebue observed that "no Kalush is without one musket at least, of which he perfectly understands the use" (Von Kotzebue 1830, II: 54). In addition to guns and ammunition, American skippers dealt blankets, tobacco, rum, rice, and molasses, which the Tlingit then traded to interior Indians at a profit of 200 to 300 percent (Jackman 1978: 44).

No wonder that the Russians treated the Tlingit gingerly and respectfully, so much so that during the first fifty years of Russian contact, which reduced the Aleut population by two-thirds, the Tlingit population

remained undiminished. And little wonder that the Tlingit impressed Captain von Kotzebue as a "warlike, courageous, and cruel race" (Von Kotzebue 1830, II: 38). They hated the Russians for having seized their ancestral lands, occupied their best fishing and hunting grounds, desecrated their burial sites,<sup>11</sup> and seduced their women. Their hatred soon made itself felt. In 1802 about 600 Tlingit under Kotlean, all of them armed with guns, attacked and captured Sitka three years after its founding; 20 Russians and 130 Aleut were killed, 3,000 furs were lost, and a ship under construction was burned (Lisiansky 1814: 219; Tikhmenev 1978: 65). The settlement was rebuilt in 1804 amid some 2,000 Tlingit (Andreyev 1952: 174), the Russians still being eager to tap the sea otter reserve of Norfolk Sound.<sup>12</sup> In 1805 the Indians struck again, destroying Yakutat and killing 27 Russian occupants (Tikhmenev 1978: 99). As late as 1866 Sitka was again attacked; it was not captured, but 2 Russians were killed and 19 were wounded and 60 to 80 Tlingit were killed or wounded (ORAK 1854-55: 33-36; Tikhmenev 1978: 353).<sup>13</sup> The colonial capital was precariously situated, for it was in fact a double settlement -- a Russian fort with a Tlingit village just outside the walls; the former contained 1,280 souls in 1845 (USNA 1952, roll 51: 427) and the latter 500 to 600 Indians in the middle 1820s and 750 in 1838 ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 102; Z[avoiko]. 1840, II: 90). Governor Nicholas Rosenberg (1850-53) reported in 1851 that "new fewer than 500 well-armed savage Kolosh, who are always ready to take advantage of our negligence, live right by our settlement" (USNA 1942, roll 57: 331). Furthermore, every spring the two-to-three-week herring run brought even more Tlingit to Sitka; in the early and middle 1820s up to 2,000 assembled in Sitka Bay every April to obtain herring roe ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 102; Lazarev 1832: 161). So many hostile and well-armed Indians so close to Sitka endangered its residents and restricted their

activities. Everything that company employees did outside the fort's walls -- hunting, fishing, gathering, felling, watering, ballasting -- was imperilled. As late as 1861, only half a dozen years before the sale of Russian America, an inspector reported that "no Russian dared to go 50 paces from the fort" for fear of the Tlingit (Doklad 1863-64, I: 132, II: 310-11).

At first the Tlingit were understandably reluctant to trade with the Russian invaders. By 1805 the Sitkan Tlingit had largely discarded their fur and hide garments for woolen clothes (Lisiansky 1814: 237-38), but American and British traders, not Russians, were undoubtedly responsible. At this time the Tlingit even refused Russian offers of liquor, fearing that it would render them easier prey (Von Langsdorff 1813-14, II: 111, 131). In 1821 Lieutenant Lazarev found that trade between the Russian-American Company and the Tlingit was "very insignificant" because American traders paid higher prices (Lazarev 1950: 283). Thereafter, however, the Indians turned increasingly to the Russians for trade goods as their Yankee suppliers gradually disappeared from the coast with the decline of the maritime fur trade and as the Muscovites under the post-1818 breed of governors (naval officers) permitted closer but stricter contact and offered higher prices.<sup>14</sup> Mostly land furs and provisions, including potatoes, mountain sheep, halibut, salmon, shellfish (especially crabs), wildfowl (grouse, ducks, and geese), birds' eggs, berries, roots, herbs, and even snails (or marine slugs), were provided by the Tlingit. By 1830 traffic had increased to the point where Governor von Wrangell was moved to complain that "we buy much of our food every year on the Kolosh market, in spite of the ever-increasing prices, which are now extremely high" (Von Wrangell 1834: 361). The fact that the Russians were willing to pay the mounting prices indicates that the Tlingit provisions played a vital role. In 1831 the company traded 29,100 rubles

worth of goods (mainly blankets, cloth, iron utensils, axes, tobacco, and paper) for Tlingit furs (chiefly beaver, mink, fox, and land otter), provisions, bark (for siding), clay (for bricks), and fat (for candles); the provisions accounted for 8,000 of these rubles, and they consisted mostly of mountain sheep, halibut, salmon, birds' eggs, grouse, ducks, geese, and berries ([Khlebnikov] n.d., no. 111: 107-07v, 108v, 112v-13). In 1832 the Russians introduced liquor into the "Kolosh trade" (Simpson 1847, II: 206), probably in order to meet increasing competition in the "straits" from the Hudson's Bay Company's new coastal posts. The explorer Lieutenant Lawrence Zagoskin reported from Sitka in the spring of 1840 that "the Kolosh . . . daily bring the food we eat in return for much tobacco and rum" (Michael 1967: 73). The trading was done at a special bazaar inside the fort. It was described in 1842 by Dr. Alexander Rowand, who visited the colonial capital with Governor George Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Comapny:

their market, which is held within the Russian settlement, appeared to me quite extraordinary, presenting to view a goodly supply of deer carcasses, with salmon, cod, red-rock fish and herrings, together with abundance of wild fowl, partridge and wood-cock. The women are the sellers; their husbands considering them far more successful in driving a bargain than they could be (Rowand n.d.: 7).

By now Russian-Tlingit relations were close and busy, albeit still somewhat uneasy. The last of the Indians' American suppliers had withdrawn from the coastal trade, so the Russian-American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were the only sources of trade goods.<sup>15</sup> Tlingit resistance had been further weakened by smallpox in the last half of the 1830s; in 1836 alone 400 -- almost one-half -- of the Tlingit living at Sitka had succumbed (USNA 1942, roll 38: 103v). Perhaps the missionary zeal of the astute Ivan Veniaminov at Sitka (1834-38 and 1841-50) also served to mollify the Tlingit. And perhaps they were additionally placated by the abolition of the rum traffic

in 1842 by the two companies. Whatever the reasons, from the early 1840s the "Kolosh trade" boomed, and mainly on the strength of potatoes, mountain sheep, and halibut.

The Russians had shown the Tlingit how to plant and utilize potatoes, probably in the late 1810s or early 1820s ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 101; Von Kotzebue 1830, II: 43-44).<sup>16</sup> Adoption was undoubtedly facilitated by the existence of a root-collecting tradition and of more or less permanent camps among the Tlingit. They were selling potatoes to the Russian-American Company as early as 1841 (when an annual fair was inaugurated at Sitka to facilitate the Indian trade), and thereafter almost every year until at least 1861, but particularly during the 1840s (Table 2). In 1843 the Kaigani Tlingit-Haida of Prince of Wales Island accepted the offer of Governor Adolph Etholen (1840-45) to bring potatoes to Sitka every fall. In October, 1845 160 to 250 Tlingit boats, many of them from as far away as the Queen Charlotte Islands, arrived at Sitka to sell potatoes (USNA 1942, roll 50: 344, 51: 187v). This traffic allowed the company to ship 200 barrels of the tubers to Kodiak Island that year (USNA 1942, roll 50: 359v). It also provided the Russian residents of Sitka with their principal fresh vegetable.<sup>17</sup>

More important, however, than native farming to the sustenance of the Russians were hunting, fishing, and gathering on the part of the Aleut, Kodiak, and Tlingit, and even the Kenai of Cook Inlet and the Chugach Eskimo of Prince William Sound. Native hunting, which was dominated by the Tlingit,<sup>18</sup> provided virtually the only fresh meat in winter, since colonial stock raising did not thrive. The chief game were two species of sheep (perhaps Dall and Bighorn) and one species of goat, all found in the coastal mountains, including Baranof Island. One of the species of sheep and the goats had "very tasty" flesh, and the other species of sheep had thick, smooth wool (Davydov



Russian-American Company Purchases of Potatoes from the Tlingit  
at Sitka, 1842-61

Year *	Barrels **	Year *	Barrels **
1842	550 ***	1852	0 <sup>+</sup>
1843	490	1853	0 <sup>++</sup>
1844	130 ****	1854	0
1845	1,060 ***	1855	0
1846	102	1856	?
1847	160	1857	?
1848	606	1858	? <sup>+++</sup>
1849	500	1859	55 <sup>++++</sup>
1850	?	1860	?
1851	450	1861	260

\* These figures actually refer to the Russian-American Company's accounting year of mid-May to mid-May rather than to the modern calendar year.

\*\* These were probably 145-pound barrels.

\*\*\* At 4 rubles per barrel.

\*\*\*\* Out of 300 barrels brought for sale, and at 3 rubles per barrel.

+ 70 barrels were purchased from settlers on Kodiak Island, and the company's own gardens at Sitka furnished 33 barrels.

++ 113 barrels were purchased from settlers on Kodiak Island.

+++ 135 barrels were purchased from settlers on Kodiak Island.

++++ An additional 135 barrels were purchased from settlers on Kodiak Island.

Source: USNA 1942, rolls 47: 426, 48: 332, 50: 204, 51: 187, 52: 326, 54: 209v, 55: 125v, 56: 125, 58: 189v, 59: 308v, 60: 25, 61: pt. 1, 85, 62: pt. 3, 47, 64: pt. 1, 56v.

1977: 213). The Kenai and Chugach bagged some of these animals for the Russians, but the Tlingit were the main suppliers. They hunted the mountain sheep with dogs and bows and arrows, usually from November into May, when the animals were driven to lower ground by deep snow (Davydov 1977: 213).<sup>19</sup> From the "whitish, fine, and very long" wool, which rivalled silk "in the delicacy and softness of its texture," the Tlingit wove their "very handsome" Chilkat dance blankets, which were "as soft and fine as the Spanish marino" (Lisiansky 1814: 238; Von Kotzebue 1830, II: 45; Von Langsdorff 1813-14, II: 75). From the same wool the Russians knitted stockings and hats, and from the skins they made leather; from the horns the Tlingit also carved spoons, but it was as a source of yamanina (mutton) that the mountain sheep became important to the Russians at Sitka. During the 1820s the company's Aleut at Sitka were bagging as many as 200 animals in a good year, but as early as 1824 the Tlingit were furnishing the settlement with a "sufficient number" of mountain sheep, ducks, and geese ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 99; Zavalishin 1877: 153). From 1844 they supplied a remarkable average of more than 500 mountain sheep annually (Table 3). During the 1850s Sitka consumed an average of up to 400 mountain sheep (and up to 1,000 wildfowl) yearly (Doklad 1863-64, II: 95, supp. 17), thanks to the Tlingit. The mutton was vital as inexpensive fresh meat for the colonial capital's officials and invalids; indeed, it was the only fresh meat available during the winter.<sup>20</sup>

Fishing was even more important than hunting as a source of food for the Russians. Owing to the difficulties of colonial agriculture and the irregularity of importation, as well as the "superfluity" of fish in colonial waters, the diet of the Russians and natives alike was dominated by fish. As Lieutenant Lazarev noted at Sitka in 1821, "fish . . . are to this place what bread is to Russia" (Lazarev 1950: 284). Even the opening of trade with

California's missions in the late 1810s brought little relief. In 1824 Zavalishin found that there was barely enough beef and milk at Sitka for the governor himself (Zavalishin 1877: 150). And in 1831 Governor von Wrangell reported that company employees at Sitka were buying fish, wildfowl, and snails (or marine slugs) from the Tlingit at high prices for want of salted beef and cow's butter (USNA 1942, roll 33: 3-3v, 114v). Fish, supplemented by some flour and meat, remained the dietary staple.<sup>21</sup> It was the main source of protein and vitamin D. The most common food fish were salmon, halibut, herring, and cod, with halibut being preferred by the natives. Halibut and cod were abundant year round, although the former were caught mostly in winter; herring peaked in spring and salmon in summer. Shellfish, especially crabs, were also eaten. Most of the fish catch was salted, not dried, because of the dearth of sunshine. Captain Golovnin found in 1818 on Kodiak Island that frequently 10,000 to 20,000 fish had to be discarded because they could not be cured in the "prolonged rains" (and probably also because there was a shortage of salt) (Golovnin 1965: 134).<sup>22</sup> And at Sitka in the middle 1820s the "continuous dampness" impeded fish drying so much that less than half of the yukola (dried fish) was fit for consumption ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 54). Another problem had to do with fluctuations in the spring herring and summer salmon runs, which could range from "nil" through "moderate" to "very prolific". Nevertheless, fishing was much more productive than farming and from the late 1840s Sitka was even able to export salted fish.

Natives did the fishing. On Unalaska Island the Aleut men fished all summer for the Russian-American Company under the supervision of a Russian promyshlennik, and the women, girls, and schopans (homosexual boys) cleaned and dried the catch. On Kodiak Island the native men fished and whaled for the Russians in spring and summer; the catch was prepared by the women and

Russian-American Company Purchases of Mountain Sheep from the  
Tlingit at Sitka, 1844-66

Year *	Head **	Year *	Head **
1844	400	1856	82
1845	324	1857	339
1846	899	1858	232
1847	1,118	1859	1,320
1848	290	1860	969
1849	329	1861	2,774
1850	100	1862	1,150
1851	25	1863	634
1852	19	1864	254
1853	70	1865	77
1854	7	1866	492
1855	15		

\* These figures actually refer to the Russian-American Company's accounting year of mid-May to mid-May rather than to the modern calendar year.

\*\* The figures for 1844 through 1851 actually refer to pudy (1 pud = 36 pounds) of mutton rather than head of mountain sheep. But because a fat animal weighed 75 pounds ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 99), and an average animal probably about 60 pounds, 60% (or 36 pounds) of which was likely edible, one pud of mutton has been equated with one mountain sheep.

Sources: ORAK 1860: 44, 1861: 17, 1862: 28, 1863: 22; USNA 1942, rolls 50: 204v, 51: 188, 52: 326v, 54: 209v, 55: 126, 56: 125, 57: 251v, 58: 189v, 59: 309, 60: 25, 61: pt. 1, 85-85v, pt. 2, 50, 62: pt. 1, 63v, pt. 2, 71v, 63: pt. 1, 76, pt. 2, 40, 64: pt. 1, 59v, pt. 2, 42, pt. 3, 15, 65: pt. 1, 57v, pt. 2, 33, pt. 3, 53v.

children. Around 1800 more than half a million fish were dried annually on Kodiak Island (Tikhmenev 1978: 84). The catch was smaller on Baranof Island, where Aleut employees did the company's fishing at Sitka itself and nearby Ozyorsk Redoubt. Most of the catch (including all of the herring and some of the salmon) was salted; from 1858 through 1862, for example, an annual average of 21,650 fresh and 90,350 salted fish (including 48,700 salted fish for export) were taken (ORAK 1860: 44, 1861: 17, 1862: 28, USNA 1942, rolls 62: pt. 2, 71v-72, 63: pt. 1, 76v, pt. 2, 39v-40, 64: pt. 1, 59v, pt. 2, 41v-42). The company's catch of halibut, which was consumed fresh, was more modest, averaging 13,500 fish per winter from 1838-39 through 1847-48 (USNA 1942, rolls 42: 306v, 43: 220v, 45: 274, 46: 266v, 47: 426v, 48: 332v, 50: 204v, 51: 188, 52: 326v, 54: 209v). But even more halibut were purchased from the Tlingit (Table 4), who again played a crucial role. Indeed, Tlingit provisions came to loom large in Sitka's food supply, as Governor Michael Tebenkov (1845-50) reported in 1846:

The harvest of vegetables and potatos [at Sitka in 1845] was negligible because the gardens, which formerly extended along the entire shore towards the rocks, have been reduced by more than one-half by the construction of a bishop's house, a seminary, and a barracks for the married men. A major replenishment of potatos was made by the Kolosh, from whom up to 1,060 barrels were bought. They brought them on request . . . . The Kolosh came to Sitka in October in about 250 boats. The industry, enterprise, and energy of this tribe warranted surprise; many of them were from the [Queen] Charlotte Islands! If we take into account all of the meanders of the straits that they travelled, their homes were probably no less than 300 miles from Sitka. In 1844 they supplied Sitka with 300 barrels [of potatos], and it is likely that [my predecessor] Adolph Karlovich [Etholen] did not suspect that they would expand this business when he said "Bring as many potatos as you have, we shall buy all of them" and that they would bring 1,060 barrels . . . . During the winter [of 1845-46] 20,950 pounds of halibut were caught, and 11,700 pounds of mutton were bought [from the Tlingit]. There was no herring catch at all in the spring; the herring passed us by, and only once were we able to fill over half of

a six-oared seine boat. Fortunately, this shortage of fresh food at that time [spring] was not felt by us at all. Expecting the Kolosh in the spring [March], I intended to have a fair for them; about 1,500 of them gathered at Sitka. So as not to waste their time these active people veritably flooded our market with fresh provisions, so that this spring we feel no want of fresh food (USNA 1942, roll 51: 187-88v).

The company's Head Office also acknowledged the contribution of the Tlingit, telling its stockholders in 1845 that "the Kolosh abundantly supply the New Archangel market with fresh provisions and firewood, giving the colonial authorities the means for rendering more assistance to company employees and for making life in New Archangel more economical" (ORAK 1844: 31).

Native gathering was a final and important source of food for the Russians, for berries and roots took the place of fresh fruits and vegetables. They at least served as antiscorbutics. Kodiak Island abounded in bilberries (cowberries), cloudberry, crowberry, blueberry, and cranberry, which were generally large and juicy, if somewhat watery, as well as mushrooms and roots, particularly the Kamchatka or yellow lily, whose dried bulb was savored as sarana. The Kodiak women and children picked berries and dug and washed roots for the Russians in spring, summer, and fall; so did the Kenai and Chugach. Bilberries and sarana were occasionally even shipped from Kodiak Island to Sitka, although berries, at least, also proliferated on Baranof Island. Some berries, roots, and herbs were supplied by the Tlingit.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the Russians were dependent upon the natives of the Russian-American colony -- again primarily the Aleut, Kodiak and Tlingit -- for labor and sex. One of the main reasons why the Russians relied so heavily upon the natives for so many goods and services was the shortage of Russians themselves. The legal bonds of serfdom immobilized most of the inhabitants

Table 4

Russian-American Company Purchases of Halibut from the Tlingit  
at Sitka, 1846-66

Year <sup>*</sup>	Pounds	Year <sup>*</sup>	Pounds
1846	56,986	1857	50,654
1847	43,299	1858	45,538
1848	27,482	1859	43,697
1849	76,812	1860	31,599
1850	74,032	1861	56,589
1851	138,096	1862	53,664
1852	125,745	1863	94,616
1853	107,075	1864	44,900
1854	91,342	1865	22,269
1855	34,223	1866	46,730
1856	83,493		

\* These figures actually refer to the Russian-American Company's accounting year of mid-May to mid-May rather than to the modern calendar year.

Sources: ORAK 1860: 44, 1862: 28, 1863: 22; USNA 1942, rolls 52: 326v, 54: 209v, 55: 126, 56: 125, 57: 251v, 58: 189, 59: 309, 60: 25, 61: pt. 1, 85-85v, pt. 2, 50, 62: pt. 1, 63v, pt. 2, 71v, 63: pt. 1, 76, pt. 2, 40, 64: pt. 1, 59v, pt. 2, 42, pt. 3, 15, 65: pt. 1, 57v, pt. 2, 33, pt. 3, 53v.

of Russia,<sup>24</sup> and for those not tied to a landlord (or for those who simply fled) Siberia was a more attractive alternative than Russian America because it was less distant and more tamed. So few Russians went to "barbarous, desolate Sitka," as it was described by Governor Simon Yanovsky (1818-21) (Kashkarov 1899, pt. 1: 137), and those who did tended not to stay long (unless they had to stay in order to work off debts to the Russian-American Company). Of 35 families of settlers sent to Alaska in 1784, only 4 individuals remained in 1818, whereas they should have multiplied to at least 175 souls by then (assuming that every family had stayed and had grown to 5 persons ([Golovnin] 1864, V: 182n). In 1838 Governor Ivan Kupreyanov (1835-40) bemoaned the "utter shortage at present of workers in the colony" (USNA 1942, roll 40: 246). The company was often simply unable to replace employees who died or quit. From 1838 through 1842 101 laborers left Russian America for Russia proper, and 80 died in the colony, but only 67 recruits arrived from the motherland, for a net loss of 114 (ORAK 1843: 25). In 1839 the colonial administration reported that the colony lost about 40 laborers annually, and the company's Head Office in St. Petersburg resolved to send 40 replacements every year; in fact, 70 were needed yearly, but instead 40 arrived in 1825, 81 in 1827, 50 in 1828, 30 in 1829, 33 in 1830, 40 in 1833, 55 in 1837, 31 in 1838, and 42 in 1839 (USNA 1942, rolls 6: 47v, 7: 124-24v, 8: 317, 10: 450v, 493v-94, 11: 161, 30: 37, 31: 56, 32: 108, 42: 462). In 1846 Governor Tebenkov complained that "there is much work but no men" (USNA 1942, roll 51: 426). In 1849, when the colony was short 100 men, he declared that "the shortage of laborers in the colony greatly influences everything and, incidentally, is very unfavorable" (USNA 1942, roll 55: 136v). In the spring of 1851 Governor Rosenberg reported that there were 426 adult male employees of the company at Sitka but that there should be 638 (USNA 1942, roll 57: 331v). From 1854 through 1858 131 laborers (plus 202 soldiers) reached Russian America but



176 departed for a net loss of 45 (ORAK 1859: 106). Such labor deficits obviously weakened Russian occupancy, particularly in the face of Tlingit hostility and American rivalry. For example, until the arrival of the Russian Navy's 83-man Loyal and 74-man Discovery in the fall of 1820, Governor Muravyov's force of some 200 Russians at Sitka was insufficient to allow the sending of any men outside the palisade to cut timber for a new fort (the old structure being so dilapidated that it had begun to collapse), for this would have left the post without enough defenders (Lazarev 1950: 234-35).

Russian America's image was tarnished not only by its remoteness and savagery. The foul climate, heavy work, low pay, and spare diet further sullied the colony's reputation; hence a deacon's remark that "it is better to go into the army than to go to [Russian] America" (Barsukov 1883: 10). Moreover, these punitive conditions -- plus negligence (there was no doctor or infirmary at Sitka, for instance, before 1820) -- debilitated the few Russians who did go there. Sickness and mortality rates were high.<sup>25</sup> In the spring of 1819 Governor Yanovsky reported that one out of every six men at Sitka was sick on account of the unhealthfulness of the climate and the scarcity of fresh food, and in 1829 Governor Peter Chistyakov (1825-30) asserted that one-third of Sitka's laborers were usually incapacitated by illness (USNA 1942, roll 31: 389v). The smallpox epidemic of the last half of the 1830s especially reduced colonial manpower, native in particular. But the most common afflictions, according to Alexander Rowand, the Scottish physician who visited Sitka in 1842, were hemoptysis, typhus, pulmonary disorders, and venereal diseases (Rowand n.d.: 3; Simpson 1847, II: 190). During the 1850s a Russian doctor found that rheumatism and catarrh predominated, owing to the changeable weather and the excessive drinking

(ORAK 1860: 94). No wonder that the number of deaths not infrequently exceeded the number of births at the colonial capital (Table 5).

The disease-ridden labor force was further handicapped by drunkenness and incompetence, both of which were chronic problems in Russia proper. In 1815 the Commandant of Okhotsk, where the Russian-American Company had an agency, reported that most of the company's laborers were drunkards and ruffians (Materialy 1861, pt. 1: 8). In 1842 Simpson pronounced Sitka the most drunken and dirtiest place that he had ever visited (Simpson 1847, II: 207). His companion, Dr. Rowand, agreed, stating that the company's employees were a "drunken and dissolute set" (Rowand n.d. : 51). Little wonder that 150 of the company's laborers on Baranof Island in 1846 were considered "useless" (USNA 1942, roll 51: 426). Apparently healthy, sober, skilled men simply tended to spurn service in the company's territory. The Head Office admitted in 1818 that it was unable to hire

good men who know skills and trades, for . . . there are always very few such men, not even enough to replace those who are leaving, since good men and craftsmen can find work and make a living at home without seeking them in a distant land and without exposing themselves to dangerous seas and other risks (Fyodorova 1971: 190).

Governor von Wrangell in 1832 decried the "downright shortage of healthy and competent men, especially sailors," and ex-governor Tebenkov admitted in 1852 that "a good worker not only will not go to the colonies but a good man can get there only accidentally" (USNA 1942, rolls 20: 21, 34: 141v).

Not surprisingly, then, the Russian-American Company hired many native workers. The use of Aleut and Kodiak hunters has already been detailed. Eventually even Tlingit were employed, mainly from the early 1840s, when the company was particularly desperate for recruits and the Tlingit were seeking new trading partners in the aftermath of the departure of American

Table 5

Number of Births and Deaths at Sitka for Various Years Between  
1831 and 1846

<u>Year</u> <sup>*</sup>	<u>Births</u>	<u>Deaths</u>
1831	28	19
1832	29	26
1833	38	19
1834	29	33
1838	30	54
1839	32	34
1840	52	33
1842	39	37
1844	44	25
1845	47	51
1846	41	40

\* These figures actually refer to the Russian-American Company's accounting year of mid-May to mid-May rather than to the modern calendar year.

Source: USNA 1942, rools 34: 204v, 35: 87, 36: 215, 37: 196v, 42: 306v, 43: 221, 45: 275, 47: 427-27v, 50: 205, 51: 188v, 52: 326v.

vessels from the Northwest Coast. In 1842 for the first time the company hired some Tlingit at Sitka (at one-half of the cost of Russian laborers, incidentally) (ORAK 1843: 40). Every summer from 1842 through 1846 fifty Tlingit, and from 1847 twenty, were employed as sailors, woodcutters, stevedores, and fishermen (Sarafian 1970: 209-10).

Not only was there a want of Russians in general but also a lack of Russian women in particular. The colony had even less attraction for Russian females than males, and females were less mobile anyway, apart from the loyal and daring wives of some officials. For example, Russian males outnumbered females 29 to 1 in 1819, 14 to 1 in 1820, 9 to 1 in 1833, and 8 to 1 in 1836 (Gibson 1976b: 18; [Khlebnikov] n.d., no. 111: 110v; Tikhmenev 1978: 161; Von Wrangell 1833-34: 326). So the Russian men turned to native women -- mostly Aleut and Kodiak but also Pomo and eventually even Tlingit -- for sex.<sup>26</sup> The offspring of these liaisons were termed creoles, the counterparts of New France's métis and New Spain's mestizos and mulattos. Most creoles were illegitimate, their fathers not wanting to legalize the alliances because they already had wives in Russia proper. Considered to be "handsome and intelligent" by Lieutenant Zagoskin (Michael 1967: 68), creoles were educated at company expense as prospective employees. In 1817 there were up to eighty creole pupils on Kodiak and at Sitka (Pierce 1976: 41). And about the same time a dozen creoles were sent to St. Petersburg to be taught technical skills, especially navigation and shipbuilding; they learned quickly, but only two returned to the colony, the rest dying in Russia of consumption and melancholy (Kashkarov 1899, pt. 2: 3). Upon graduation most creoles became artisans or laborers for the company; under the company's second twenty-year monopoly charter (1821) creoles educated at the firm's expense became, in effect, temporary serfs, having to serve the company for ten years

(with compensation). As employees they helped to offset the shortage of Russian manpower, particularly skilled manpower.<sup>27</sup> By 1818 there were already one-half as many creoles (280) in Russian America as there were Russians (450), and at Sitka there were just as many creoles (206) as Russians (204) (Anonymous 1835: 66, 79; Golovnin 1965: Table A). In 1832 152 of the company's 1,025 colonial employees, or 15 percent, were creoles (Von Wrangell 1833-34: 22). By 1843 creoles outnumbered Russians 2 to 1 (ORAK 1843: 30).

Clearly, then, the Russians became very dependent upon the coastal natives of Russian America for essential goods and services,<sup>28</sup> just as they likewise became dependent upon American, British, and Hispanic rivals for such necessities as grain, beef, salt, and manufactures. This dependency, which reflected the cultural versatility and resilience and commercial acumen of the natives, as well as the small numbers and limited skills of the Russians, was both a serious economic drain and a major geopolitical weakness. Lieutenant Lazarev noted in the early 1820s that "the upkeep of this colony costs the company very dearly" (Lazarev 1950: 234). It was to cost even more. Annual upkeep rose from 150,000-175,000 rubles during the first half of the 1820s to 250,000-300,000 rubles during the last half of the 1830s, thanks to the construction of new posts inland, the depletion of fur bearers near old posts, the raising of the salaries of employees, and the expansion of various services (churches, schools, hospitals, charities) (Tikhmenev 1978: 236, 240). Between 1824-25 and 1838-39, when the Russians were becoming increasingly reliant upon the natives for food and labor (and when fur bearers were becoming increasingly scarce), colonial expenses rose 91 percent from 337,000 to 645,000 rubles while colonial revenues rose only 13 percent from 1,189,000 to 1,341,000 rubles (USNA 1942, roll 14: 110v-11). The dependency made Russia's imperial position in the North Pacific very

tenuous, and it suggests that in the New World, at least, Russia's imperial system, traditionally continental in disposition, was simply no match for those of the maritime European colonial powers. The only reason why Alaska remained in Russian hands as long as it did was the absence of any serious foreign competition for the land; there was such competition for the maritime resources, but the mainland was not a necessary adjunct to the acquisition of those resources. So the Russians were able to persevere, just as they had in Siberia in the face of minimal aboriginal resistance and virtually no foreign rivalry; being largely unopposed Russia had been able to move eastward successfully with limited manpower. No other Great Powers really coveted the forbidding spaces of Siberia and Alaska. If they had, Russia probably would not have been able to acquire, let alone hold, the two territories, for her eastward drive was too undermanned and too overextended, especially in Russian America, where native support was consequently crucial.

## NOTES

1. In 1834, for example, sea otter pelts and fur seal skins, respectively, fetched an average of 561 rubles and 32 1/2 rubles each at Kyakhta on the Russian-Chinese frontier (in terms of tea) and 600 rubles and 23 rubles each in St. Petersburg and Moscow (USNA 1942, roll 9: 110v, 135v).
2. For example, in 1834 a party of eighty kayaks was absent from Kodiak Island for four months but hunted sea otters for only half a day because of stormy weather (USNA 1942, roll 37: 75v).
3. Veniaminov voyaged in kayaks with Aleut for fourteen to twenty hours with no more than one stop for no longer than fifteen minutes -- and that at sea, not on shore (Veniaminov 1840, 2: 12).
4. It took an Aleut a year or more to build a kayak, largely from driftwood and hide, so it was very expensive (Sarychev 1952: 113).
5. Captain Lisiansky had warned that "the Aleutians . . . from their skill, are sure to commit dreadful depredations wherever they go" (Lisiansky 1814: 242), and he was right.
6. Every April during the 1820s 400 to 600 Kennai assembled at Fort St. Nicholas to trade (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 138).
7. Only in Russian California (Fort Ross, Port Remyantsev, and several ranchos) did grain growing and stock raising meet with some success. Even that, however, was wrought largely by Pomo Indian laborers; they with some Aleut did most of the farm work. In 1838 at Kostromitinov Rancho, for example, 4 Russians supervised 250 Pomo laborers (Z[avoiko]. 1840, II: 97).
8. The Spaniards were the first Europeans to contact the Tlingit (Gormly 1971: 157-80).
9. Without control of the Aleut and Kodiak the Russians would have had to either hunt themselves or, more likely, resort to barter, whereby the supply of pelts would undoubtedly have been less regular and more expensive.
10. According to the political radical and naval officer Dmitry Zavalishin, at first up to six sea otter pelts fetched one ordinary musket, which the Indians "quickly learned to use well" (Zavalishin n.d., f. 48, op. 1, no. 48: 227v).
11. When Sitka was refounded in 1804 at least 100 totems (each topped with a box of human ashes) were destroyed by the Russians (Lisiansky 1814: 240-41).
12. The American fur trader William Sturgis reported in 1799, when Sitka was originally founded, that "vessels that have been the first on the Coast have purchased in this Sound upwards of Eight hundred Skins in four days"; he added that "upwards of a thousand skins have been got there in a season, and I do not know but what I may say twelve hundred, and seven and eight hundred have been bought by one vessel on her first visit" (Jackman 1978: 34, 88).
13. Another source states that 7 company employees were killed and 16 wounded (USNA 1942, roll 60: 78v-79).
14. Governor Alexander Baranov (1799-1818), an old-style merchant, allowed the Tlingit to trade inside the fort during the day only, but he would not permit them to live at the fort or even on the nearby islands. Governor Matthew Muravyov (1821-25) let them build permanent dwellings alongside the fort.

15. No sooner had American fur trading vessels disappeared from Russian-American waters than they were replaced by American whaling ships. Already by 1842 up to 200 Yankee whalers were plying the far North Pacific (USNA 1942, roll 46: 363).
16. By 1835 the coastal forts of the Hudson's Bay Company were buying potatoes from the local Indians (especially the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands) for seed and food, and by 1840 potato growing was widespread among all of the Northwest Coast Indians (Suttles 1951). This raises the question of why the Indians, particularly the Tlingit and Haida, so readily and so successfully adopted the potato, given their abundance of natural resources (Suttles 1968), as well as their aversion to the Russians. Perhaps they did so for commercial reasons, that is, in order to acquire trade goods for barter with interior Indians, and/or perhaps they did so for social reasons, that is, to accumulate surplus goods (wealth) and thereby gain rank and hence privileges (economic and ceremonial) in a very rank-conscious culture. Potlaches, of course, displayed and distributed this surplus wealth.
17. These residents formed the bulk of Russian America's Russian population and company labor force. Three-fifths of the colony's Russians, and three-eighths of the firm's employees, lived at Sitka in the early 1830s, and Sitka accounted for three-fourths of all of the company provisions consumed in the colony (Gibson 1976b: 18, 51, 51n). Moreover, in 1839-1840 the Sitka District accounted for one-half of the value of the total capital assets of the seven districts of Russian America (USNA 1942, roll 14: 344-345v).
18. Kodiak hunting was limited largely to sea birds and ground squirrels, whose skins were sewn by the women into parkas for the company's Aleut. During the middle 1820s in the Kodiak District 20,000 to 25,000 ground squirrels were bagged annually (enough for 200 to 250 parkas) (Khlebnikov n.d., no. 112: 128v); probably two to three times as many sea birds were killed.
19. Sometimes, when the mountain sheep were driven right to the coast by heavy snow (as in the winter of 1859-61), the Tlingit used clubs.
20. Similarly, George Simpson found in 1841 that the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Taku (Durham) just south of Sitka was maintained chiefly on venison (Simpson 1847, I: 214).
21. Officials and officers ate better than laborers, getting more and fresher food, as well as some luxuries like tea, wine, and sugar.
22. At Sitka in the middle 1820s each barrel of 150 salted salmon required 180 1/2 pounds of salt ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 53-54).
23. The Tlingit even came to sell timber to the Russians. For example, from late May, 1848 to late May, 1849 the company bought 1,360 logs (each 21 feet long and 6 inches thick) from the Tlingit (USNA 1942, roll 55: 142v). The undermanned Russians had difficulty meeting their own demand for wood, which rotted after ten years in the dank climate. In 1826 at Sitka fourteen to eighteen men were constantly employed sawing timber, and they were only able to meet the needs of the colonial capital, whose spruce buildings did not last long in the frequent rains and strong winds (USNA 1942, roll 30: 25v).



24. In 1806 Count Nicholas Rezanov, who was making a tour of inspection of the colony, recommended to the Minister of Commerce that anyone who wanted to go to Russian America be allowed to do so, and that 150 to 200 exiles be sent there (Tikhmenev 1978: 95). In 1808, however, the State Council announced that it had rejected the minister's suggestion that "free persons" be permitted to settle in Russian America for fear that the state would lose taxpayers and conscripts (USSR 1965, n. 168: 617-18).
25. So was the accident rate. In 1799, for instance, 115 Aleut hunters died of mussel poisoning and up to 90 Russians were drowned in the sinking of the Phoenix (Gibson 1976b: 13-14).
26. During the middle 1820s at Sitka the Tlingit concubines (mostly girls and slaves) tended to impoverish the promyshlenniki (whose gifts went to the owners of the concubines) and to spread venereal disease, but they also prevented what Khlebnikov called "the sinful unnatural [homosexual] acts which . . . would otherwise result from the shortage of women" ([Khlebnikov] 1976: 71). Both Aleut and Kodiak chiefs sometimes kept homosexual boys (schopans) as concubines, and the Russians apparently risked doing likewise. Once Russian men began taking native wives and mistresses, some customs, especially tatooing, slitting of the underlip, and the wearing of nose plugs and earrings, began to decline out of deference to Russian taste.
27. The creoles were not, however, without disadvantages. They were generally poor substitutes for Russians, Governor Tebenkov asserting in 1846 that one Russian was worth three creoles; also, creoles tended to be weak and sickly, and most of them died of tuberculosis by the age of thirty (Sarafian 1970: 140-41). Moreover, many creoles shunned company service, preferring to live like their maternal relatives.
28. The Spaniards of California were similarly dependent upon the mission Indians, who were exploited to an even greater degree than the Aleut and Kodiak.

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## ABSTRACT

The Russians of Russian America, owing to their small number, sexual imbalance, and limited skills, became dependent upon the coastal natives for peltry, food, labor, and sex, just as they came to rely upon their American, English, and Hispanic rivals on the Northwest Coast for provisions and manufactures. The Aleut and Kodiak served as sea otter hunters and the Tlingit as providers of fish, game, and potatoes, while all three native groups supplied concubines and wives. In addition, the creole offspring of Russian fathers and native mothers acted as skilled workers. This dependency was essential to the maintenance of Russian occupancy.