RAVEN AND THE RUSSIANS: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF LOOKING AT ANIMALS IN SIBERIA, 1582-1867

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ABSTRACT

The history of Russia's eastern empire was largely defined by disjointed disparities between a Russian-speaking culture and the numerous indigenous groups of Siberia. Among these disparities were differing conceptions of the animals in the physical environment between the Russians and several of the indigenous groups they encountered as they expanded their claim to empire. This thesis foregrounds the role played by subjective perceptions of what the animal component of the physical environment was and was for by considering both indigenous and imperial perspectives of six animals which played roles in the imperial process.

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INTRODUCTION

"The town of Sibir…was destroyed by the Muscovites and the Cossacks. From this town, the first conquered, the Russians took the name Siberia for all regions both near and far." -*Yuri Krizhanich,1680.* [1]

Between approximately 1582 and 1867 a vast area stretching from the Ural Mountains to the shores of Alaska was slowly conquered and colonized with varying degrees of success by what expanded to become the Russian Empire. The northern Asiatic portion of this region, greatly diverse in geography, ecology, and humanity, is often referred to collectively as Siberia. The history of humanity in Siberia is closely intertwined with the fauna of the region, and the unique relationships people and animals have formed present an array of possibilities for considering differing methodological approaches to placing the histories of animals alongside the history of our own species.

Why consider animals in history? An answer is simple: they were there. More importantly, how should their roles be considered? Animals, like other facets of the physical environment, operate in the historical narrative as functions of the values of historical actors and the historian. The great variety of possible human values which can be ascribed to animals range from the economic to the spiritual in almost innumerable variation. A reindeer can be an economic asset for pulling sledges across the tundra or a spiritual conduit to the sun. A sable can be a raw material and a source of tax revenue, but it can also be the reason for the great human suffering inflicted upon those coerced to extract its fur. The interpretations of these animals can

[1] Basil Dmytryshyn, E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan, and Thomas Vaughan, eds., "Excerpts from 'A History of Siberia, or, Information about the Tsardoms of Siberia, the Coast of the Arctic and Eastern Oceans; the Nomadic Kalmyks; and Accounts of Certain Deceptions Practiced by Jewelers, Smelters, and Alchemists...' by the Croatian Jesuit Iurii Krizhanich," in *Russian's Conquest of Siberia 1558-1700 A Documentary Record*, vol. 1, 3 vols., To Siberia and Russian America: Three Centuries of Russian Eastward Expansion (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1985) 432.

be as granular as the individual involved, or as broad as the motives of an empire. This is not to say that any one of these views of the roles of animals or the broader physical environment are contradictory or in any way mutually exclusive, but to highlight their coexistence within the past.

Ilya Vinkovetsky, in *Russian America,* notes in his introductory text that, "Despite the best efforts of (ethno-) historians, the volume and detail of the sources from the Native populations cannot match the Russians' output. For this reason, the present study, as so many others, is bound to have a Russian accent."[2] While Vinkovetsky was discussing only Russia's North American colonies, this statement is equally accurate for much of Russia's Eurasian empire. An environmental approach helps to broaden the usefulness of available sources by examining the less concrete conceptions of the natural world that are made available through oral traditions and scientific and archaeological data. Oral traditions do not deal with the immediate recordings of events in a chronological sense but do give ample insight into indigenous world views and subsequently inform a historical understanding of the motives behind events. The inclusion of scientific and archeological data broadens our ability to study the past. Therefore, using environmental sources can help historians reduce the problem of the story's "Russian accent."

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the diverse array of interpretations available for examining human views of the animal species which played significant roles in the lives of Siberia's indigenous inhabitants a well as the eastward expansion of the Russian Empire. To this effect, each of the animals discussed will be used to demonstrate a different element of Siberian history, but also a differing methodological approach to considering the roles of animals in

[2] Ilya, Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

historical narratives. This thesis is organized thematically around six animals, and the themes also roughly parallel the eastward expansion of the Russian Empire chronologically. These animals are the woolly mammoth, the reindeer, the sable, the bowhead whale, the sea otter, and Raven. The woolly mammoth is an animal whose ongoing economic significance to the story of Siberia demonstrates the ties of humanity to the deep geological past and suggests the necessity of an exceptionally long-form view to understand the region. Raven is not an animal in the same sense as the others. Raven is a cultural hero of the Tlingit civilization and clarifies in the starkest terms why the Russian enterprise struggled so painfully in a land of plenty while also blurring the line delineating the human and animal dichotomy. The reindeer is an animal whose synergistic relationship with humanity has defined history in Siberia for thousands of years and suggests the viability of a non-linear, cyclical model for the past. By contrast, the sable's desirable fur brought Russians eastward and represented an emerging view of animals as commodities. The bowhead whale and its predation by predominantly American rather than Russian whalers reveals much about the society the Russian conquest of Siberia produced, while highlighting the reasons for its limitations. The sea otter's story brings the consideration of Siberian history to the shores of Alaska and forces hard questions about where the history of Asia stops and the history of North America begins.

Concerning sources, this work owes a great debt to the collection translated by Basil Dmytryshyn and his colleagues at the Oregon Historical Society, who brought into the English language a trove of documents pertaining to the Russian conquest of Siberia and the colonies established by the Russian Empire in Alaska and California. A majority of the primary sources traditionally utilized by the Western historical tradition, including letters, reports, petitions, treaties, and orders, have largely been drawn from this collection. The collection lists one of its

goals in the publication of the set as being the expansion of English-language scholastic inquiry into the dynamics of Russian activity in Siberia and the Pacific. It is my hope that these documents have been used for their proper purpose.

Animals, like people, exist in physical environments, and so the physical landscape and climate of Siberia bear mention. Siberia has three distinct regions, each of which has posed its own challenges to human and animal adaptation. The first is the tundra, which follows the Arctic Ocean along the northern coast of Asia. This area is characterized by the small amount of scrub and grass able to grow there, as well as the lichens with cover the rocks and stones that dot the landscape. The people who lived there before the arrival of Russians subsisted largely on sea mammal hunting and other products of the sea. Siberia's many reindeer herding cultures often guided or followed their herds onto the tundra during the summer to graze them on lichen and avoid the overwhelming insect swarms of the southern forests. Below the tundra is the taiga, the world's largest forest. The taiga is a wet, largely coniferous forest covered in larch, fir, spruce and cedar, all growing over peat bogs, marshes, and permafrost.[3] These trees were not insubstantial, with the European larch capable of growing as tall as forty-two meters, producing towering forests.[4] In places, the taiga is interspersed with meadowlands which have allowed for grazing.[5] Here reindeer herders spend most of the year, moving in the summer when the swarms of insects become unbearable. Below the taiga is the steppe, a vast plain where nomadic cultures have traditionally dominated. Siberia is characterized by numerous rivers which flow from south to north into the Arctic Ocean. These rivers have traditionally made north-south navigation relatively simple, by boat in the summer and sledge over ice in the winter, but lateral travel

[3] John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 523-526.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

overland between the rivers has been notoriously difficult. This simple overview of the geographic features of the region is not exhaustive but highlights features which shaped the way imperialism manifested as the Russian Empire followed the path of least resistance in land whose natural barriers were formidable to Russian travelers.

These features of the physical environment, while they were barriers and causes for hardship for Russian conquerors, also constituted suitable homes for the animals which had adapted to live there. It was the permafrost of the taiga that preserved the corpse of the Berezovka mammoth, introduced in part one, the contrast between the tundra and taiga that drove the reindeer migrations in part two, the vast larch forests of the taiga that sheltered the sables in part three, and the chilly, shellfish-rich waters of the north Pacific that formed the ancient homes of the sea otter and bowhead whale. While this thesis focuses on the human and animal denizens of these environments, it should not be forgotten that trees, ice, lichens, rivers, bogs and brush of Siberia formed an influential backdrop to the stories of people looking at, and interacting with, animals in Siberia.

This thesis is, above all other sub-genres, a work of environmental history. Environmental history is a field that is still in its infancy, and has spawned a diverse array of approaches and subtopics ranging from studies of the exploitation of natural resources and the accelerating march of climate change to the significance of Harrison Ford's chest hair in a commercial from the 1980's.[6] Often, these approaches have developed along different lines in different places. In the United States, environmental history has yielded numerous works concerning the shifting significance of land, resources, and how animals are viewed by humans, with an increasing amount of attention being paid to the intersections between environmental and

[6] David Kneas, "Chest Hair and Climate Change: Harrison Ford and the Making of 'Lost There Felt Here,'" *Environmental History* 22, no. 3 (2017): 516–26.

indigenous histories. In Russia, a different tradition of environmental history has developed which has largely focused on the environmental damage wrought by the Soviet Union and the shifting conceptions of natural resources in the context of shifting Soviet ideologies.[7]

My approach to environmental historiography here will be a mixture of old and new. In terms of what is new, I will be using relatively new ideas of interpreting the physical environment in history drawn largely from the American school of thought. It will be old in the sense that it draws upon a tradition in American historiography of Russia which has long-attempted to see Russia's eastward conquest as parallel to the conquest of the American West. Indeed, there existed a mid-century fad of histories which sought to compare the two conquests side-by-side. The most obvious of this genre was Daniel Henderson's aptly titled, *From the Volga to the Yukon: The Story of the Russian March to Alaska and California, Paralleling Our Own Westward Trek to the Pacific* , which claimed that "No book, so far as we know, has compared the Slavic march across Siberia to Alaska, and down close to San Francisco, California, with our own western trek by way of the Overland Trail. This comparison, when opportunity has afforded, we make."[8] This may not have been entirely true, as Dr. Ruth Gruber's "I Went to the Soviet Arctic", which has a copyright date of 1938 and was published the same year as Henderson's work, states of the Russians, "They started a human migration across Siberia which historians will describe as they describe the westward migration across America."[9] Two years later, the Iowan and future Vice President Henry A. Wallace would write

[7] J. Donald Hughes, *What Is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 56-62.; Paul Josephson et al., eds., *An Environmental History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[8] Daniel Henderson, *From the Volga to the Yukon: The Story of the Russian March to Alaska and California, Paralleling Our Own Westward Trek to the Pacific* (New York: Hastings House, 1944), ix.
[9] Ruth Gruber, *I Went to the Soviet Arctic* (The Viking Press, 1944), x.

in his *Soviet Asia Mission,* "Soviet Asia, in American terms, may be called the wild West of Russia." [10]

Unfortunately, in their quest for similarities these texts often eschewed essential differences and failed to adequately capture the picture of either conquest. It is not to emulate these shortcomings that I draw upon this tradition of placing American historiography in the Russian context. Instead, I have attempted to see what insights can be gleaned by using an American historiographic tradition on a Russian story, rather than simply comparing a Russian story to an American one and seeking the points which the narratives share in common.

The environmental approach to history is useful for its ability to skew borders by moving our views beyond human concerns. Reindeer, boreal zones, shorelines, cold fronts, and ocean currents are notorious violators of national borders. Animal migrations and climatological changes act independently of the Gregorian calendar, which itself respects only one specific feature of the physical environment. Still, it is useful to place dates around a subject for the purpose of relativity, knowing where events fall in relation to familiar temporal milestones. With this purpose in mind, this thesis largely concerns the years between 1582 and 1867 in its roughly chronological sweep of Russian imperialism in Asia. 1582 marks the downfall of the Khanate of Sibir and the subsequent beginnings of movement eastward by agents of the Muscovite Tsar. 1867 marks the sale of the Russian Empire's most eastwardly holding, Alaska, to the United States, thereby marking the end of the Russian Empire's steady eastward expansion and bringing on a new era characterized less by new conquests and more by the consolidation of power in areas the empire already held. In short, these dates demarcate major political developments among the human species in Siberia, and so serve to give some sense of relativity

[10] Henry A. Wallace, *Soviet Asia Mission* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock Publishers, 1946), 20.

to other human events. However, the histories of the other species with which humans interacted over the course of these roughly three hundred years fall far outside of these parameters. The Berezovka Mammoth of the first chapter, for example, lived roughly forty-thousand years before the events of 1582, and the documents used to examine the story of this ancient creature range from a 1901 expedition report to modern scientific findings, all of which fall outside the period. This is simply the nature of the beast when studying beasts: they have always been there, in the physical backdrop of the stories which populate human history but have been so often overlooked that it is often necessary to make use of more modern documentation in reconstructing their pasts and roles in familiar stories. These diversions from the timeline stretching from 1582-1867 are meant only to elaborate upon the physical world which composed the stage on which the narrative is set.

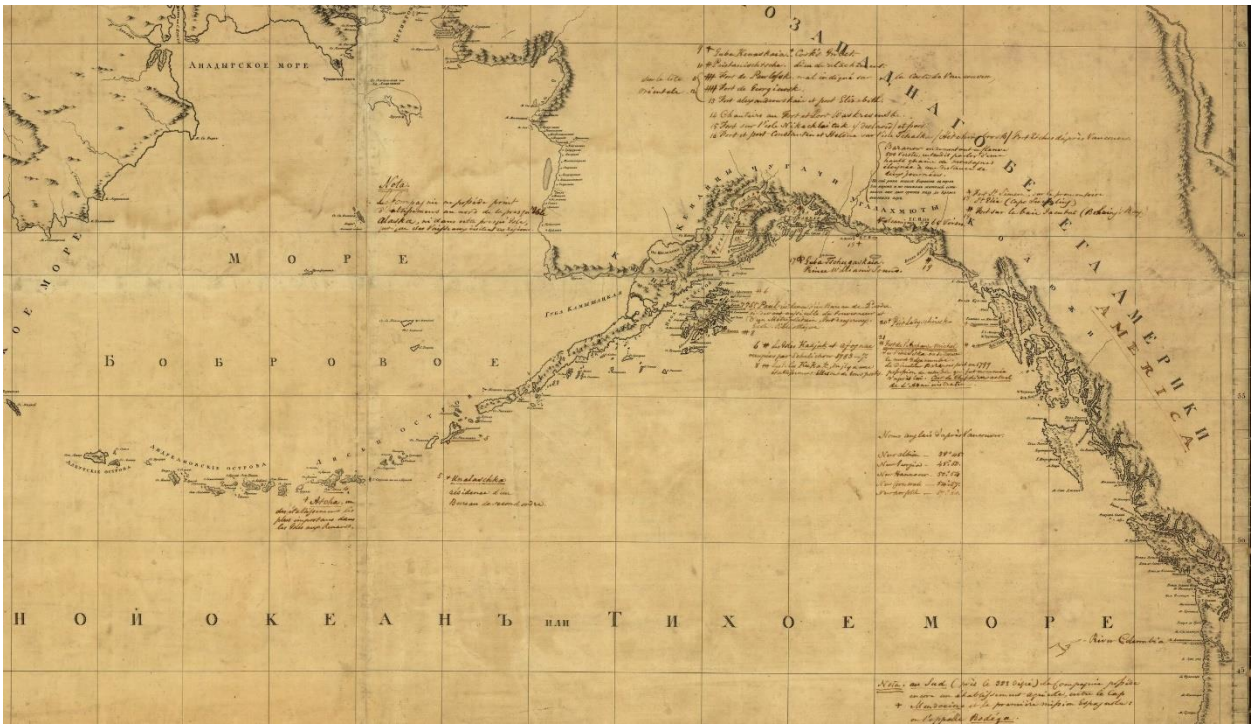

Figure 1. Map Detail of Russian Exploration of Alaskan Islands, 1809.[11] The details are almost exclusively coastal, reflecting the lack of desire, need, and ability to venture inland on the part of the Russians.

While this thesis will also provide several chronological details and mention pivotal events and personages for the benefit of the unfamiliar reader, the provision of a detailed account of the Russian eastward expansion is not the overarching goal of this project and has been more fully accomplished in other works. In contrast to these other works, this thesis simply adds an additional dimension, one which is environmental, and even more specifically zoological in nature, to the existing relatively well-understood timeline of events in Russia's eastern empire. For a detailed account of the social changes and structures both in the imperial center and the colonies produced by the Russian colonial endeavor in the Pacific, Ilya Vinkovetsky's *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* is second to none. For a survey of Russian seafaring in the Pacific with ample details regarding ship design and naval procedure,

[11] "Karta Morskikh Otkrytīĭ Rosīĭskimi Moreplavatel͡iami Na Tikhom i Ledovitom Mori͡akh : V Raznykh Godakh Uchinennykh," image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed April 7, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g9235.mf000027/.

Glynn Barratt's *Russia In Pacific Waters, 1715-1825*: *A Survey of the Origins of Russia's Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific* should be readily consulted. For an impassioned and lively, if somewhat rose-colored investigation into the lives of the men who led the Russian American Company (RAC) during the first half of the nineteenth century Hector Chevigny's *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture, 1741-1867* has no peers among popular literature on the subject, and contains work drawn from commissioned translations of documents with few, if any, citations elsewhere. The lack of footnotes, however, will almost certainly leave any reader looking to follow up on sources in a state of frustration. Yuri Slezkine's *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* provides the best available narrative of the Russian presence in Siberia to be found anywhere and remains widely citied for its depth and breadth of documentary evidence. Ryan Jones' *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Great Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* provides, in addition to providing an in-depth overview of the significance of the Steller's sea cow, contextualizes the Russian imperial project in the story of the global imperial project through its relationship with nature. Finally, the three-volume set *To Siberia and Russian America: Three Centuries of Russian Eastward Expansion* edited and compiled by Basil Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughn, and Vaughn, provides hundreds of translated primary source documents with the express purpose of making scholarship on Russia's eastern empire more accessible to the English-speaking world. More relevantly, each volume contains a well-considered and concise summary of the events of their respective purviews, divided into the conquest of Siberia, Russian penetration into Pacific waters, and the Russian American Colonies. This thesis does not intend to match any of these works in coverage of major political, ideological, or social events in the history of the Russian eastern imperial project, but instead adds color to these accounts by asking the question Mark Fiege suggests to historians

in his *Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*, "how did nature matter?"[12] This thesis, is in pursuit of an answer to that question in regard to the history of Siberia.

This thesis uses the Library of Congress transliteration standards for the Russian language words and phrases. Exceptions to this include names commonly known in English, such as "Vasily" or "Yuri". An additional exception is made for the word "ясак", whose transliteration guidelines require the rendering of a character not available in many word processing systems, and for which the spelling *iasak* is already a widely accepted spelling within the field of Siberian studies.

[12] Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2014) 403.

PART I: THE WOOLLY MAMMOTH

The role of the woolly mammoth in the human narrative of the past is a carnal one. Not that it is about sex, but that it is about flesh. It is a story of flesh, bone, hair, and ivory: the constituent components of a mammoth's physical form. Mammoths appear often in history, particularly in the history of Siberia, but while the mammoths themselves have not changed over time other than to come steadily closer to total decomposition, the human view of these creatures has. By examining how humans have viewed the bodies of these animals, and how the values which have been assigned to this special type of flesh have been expressed, we can gain perspective on the carnal nature of the past we share with other creatures of flesh and blood.

In the subsequent pages an account is detailed in which a mammoth corpse, buried in permafrost for 40,000 years, was suddenly exposed. Human beings immediately began to flock around this great mass of ancient, contextless meat and began placing definitions, meanings, and interpretations onto the flesh of a corpse which had likely never encountered the human gaze. This human gaze immediately filled the flesh with meaning, placed it in a narrative, and made it more than just the remains of another dead animal. The mammoth corpse is merely an extreme example of this phenomena of the projection of meaning onto animal bodies, alive or dead. The same phenomena will play out again and again in each subsequent section, with fur, blubber, and baleen all imbued with human meaning by the same mechanisms as the ancient mammoth corpse.

At first glance the woolly mammoth seems a remote and irrelevant figure in human history. Their existence began to dwindle nearly forty thousand years ago[13], a deep past to which

[13] Rebekah L. Rogers, and Montgomery Slatkin. 2017. "Excess of genomic defects in a woolly mammoth on Wrangel island." Plos Genetics 13, no. 3: 1-16.

historians are rarely called. However, in Siberia the legacy of the woolly mammoth is much closer to the surface than the declension of the last Ice Age. The final known specimens of the woolly mammoth died out on Wrangel Island on the north-east coast of Siberia only about four thousand years ago, putting this ancient creature much closer to the story of humanity than usually thought.[14] Regardless of its extinction before the arrival of a written historical tradition in the region, the woolly mammoth has played a clear role in human history right up to the present. This is in part because the long duration of animal's existence in Siberia left the region littered with ivory tusks that have been valued as trade goods for centuries and have even been cited as one of the goods which motivated Russians to head east into Siberia in the first place[15]. Today is it estimated that there are still ten million woolly mammoth tusks buried in Siberia, which elephant conservationists say are still routinely exploited in the global ivory trade.[16]

Even beyond their function as economic goods, mammoth bodies, preserved in the permafrost of Siberia, have offered humanity a strange window into the past through two kinds of sources. We can access the documents left by the people who went to the effort to dig up and study the frozen creatures, and through these documents seek out what motivated them and how they felt about the sometimes harrowing and often bizarre process of digging ancient creatures out of the frozen soil. Such documents give us insight into how certain people viewed the physical environment around them. We can view the flesh itself as a primary source, as a carnal document which creates an unprecedent bridge to a time so far removed from us that our imaginations struggle to conceive of it. Yet, the realities of this carnal document confirm to us the fundamental biological ties we share with these distant creatures who like us ate, breathed,

[14] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013) 28.
[15] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Introduction.", xlii.
[16] A. Aryal, Morley, C.G. & McLean, I.G. "Conserving elephants depend on a total ban of ivory trade globally", Biodiversity and Conservation 27, no 10 (2018): 2767-2775.

suffered from excessive cold or heat, and died. The scientific evidence such documents of the flesh yield is invaluable to constructing history before the written word.

Among the most notable available documents which provide insight into the minds and feelings of the scientists who first began digging mammoths out of the Siberian permafrost is the 1902 expedition report of archeologist Otto F. Herz, which provides a particularly striking portrait of the constructed views humanity can take of the natural world. The report, now available in translation thanks to Russian Academy of Sciences Paleontologist Valentine Ukraintseva, chronicles the European scientific community's first extraction of a preserved mammoth carcass from the permafrost, and contains many of Herz's reflections on the process of digging so deeply into the past. Ukraintseva notes in the introduction to her translation that she hopes the account might someday be adapted into a popular science film.

In August of 1900, an Evenk man by the name of Semyon Tarabykin reported finding the exposed body of a woolly mammoth on a river in what is today the Sakha Republic in eastern Siberia. Herz uses the antiquated term "Lamut", rather than Evenk, to describe Tarabykin's heritage, but the term has since been fallen into disuse with as it stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Evenk word, "lamu", which meant "sea".[17] This find was reported to the regional governor and the news eventually made it back to St. Petersburg via a port on the sea of Okhost which was connected to the Pacific Ocean. The scientific community in European Russia hastily assembled an expedition and funds were allocated to finance the journey across Siberia. The difficulty of the journey, which took nearly three months to complete by horseback, reindeer sledge, and train, contains its own environmental story of hardship, adaptation, and the great difficulty the Russian Empire encountered in asserting its claims to vast areas of territory.

[17] M.G, Levin and B.A. Vasil'yev, "The Evens" in *The People of Siberia* eds. M.G. Levin and L.P. Potapov, trans. Steven Dunn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 670-671.

However, the importance of Herz's account to the history of the woolly mammoth and its complementary intersections with the human story did not become apparent until Herz arrived at the site of the mammoth's grave.

Once he arrived at the site of the corpse, Herz's relationship with the ancient creature began to stand out in contrast to the other people and animals surrounding him. To illustrate these important differences, I will first detail the nature of Herz's relationship to the mammoth, and then contrast these with the existing local views of the creature. Finally, I will contrast these human views of the ancient corpse with those views illustrated by the actions of the other denizens of the natural world whose relationships with the mammoth's ancient flesh serve as reminders of the stark realities in which all human observations must be contextualized.

Herz viewed the mammoth scientifically. Despite the great physical hardship of undertaking an archeological dig in the midst of the frozen taiga he was meticulous in his excavation and study of the creature. His report is filled with the exact methods by which he dug out the creature, the form and smell of its flesh, and the various states of decay of its parts. His reports are by and large a somewhat removed view of the corpse and pretend at those of a detached observer. Herz writes:

> "A layer of subcutaneous fat is 9 cm thick; it is white in color and has no smell; it is spongy and porous in consistency and readily cut. The flesh between the ribs and skin, along with the subcostal film, could be stripped into separate layers without requiring any great effort."[18]

This segment is largely indicative of the tone of the report and reflects Herz's general attempts at detachment from the creature he was dissecting. He describes in great detail the

[18] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66.

methodical dissection, dismemberment, and examination of the mammoth as he prepared it for transport back to St. Petersburg. Still, there were moments when this pretense of otherness from the flesh Herz was excavating drops, and he appears to have been somewhat awestruck by the nature of his task. Upon extracting some plant materials from between the mammoth's newly uncovered teeth he comments: "the most careful mother cannot carry her child in her arms with more solicitude than I carried these remains of antediluvian fauna to our winter hut."[19] Incidentally, this is also Herz's only mention of women at any point in his report, but it also illustrates a streak of reverence for the creature he was excavating, and perhaps the deeper motivations which underlay the mechanical performance of detached observation. Here it is necessary to ask, what motivated Herz and his companions to undertake the perilous, dangerous 10-month journey? What motivated them to endure the lack of food, the cold, the infamous swarms of mosquitoes which dominate the taiga during the summer months, and the various other hardships Siberia presents to those accustomed to a European style of living and interfacing with the physical environment? One might offer the simple possibility of the pursuit of scientific understanding in which knowing is an end in and of itself. Yet, Herz's more emotive occasions suggest a more complex relationship with the natural world. Despite his many detached observations, Herz appeared to have been driven by a degree of reverence and a sense of wonder for what he was seeing. To him, the few tons of forty-thousand-year-old flesh and bone was clearly more than so much rotting meat. While he viewed it as, above all, an object for scientific study, the mammoth also represented to Herz, and many other scientists who would pondered over it: an emotionally charged window to an unknown past, a carnal link through fragile flesh

[19] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

to a distant period which made itself known to the shivering, mosquito-bitten bodies of a few curious human beings far from their home.

This view of the mammoth was not universal, though. Herz's writing also reveals some of aspects of local reaction to the mammoth, although some of the accounts are contradictory. Of the mammoth, Herz comments that the local Even viewed the mammoth with superstition, evident in a passage about Semyon Tarabykin, the discoverer of the mammoth:

"Tarabykin, because of the superstitious fear of the Lamuts that a mammoth corpse, if dissected, can supposedly cause illness, went to his yurt, about 20km away, and told Lamuts Mikhail Tapchin and Vasily Detkov of his discovery."[20]

There are several points to be gleaned from this excerpt in regard to human relationships with mammoths before the arrival of Russians and other Europeans in Siberia. The first, and perhaps the most important, is that while Herz's 1901 expedition to excavate and study the mammoth marked the first such examination of a mammoth by a European scientific community, it was far from the first human encounter with the corpse of a species with whom hundreds of generations of human ancestors interacted regularly. Knowledge of dead mammoths was relatively common, and that the discovery of mammoth corpses in the taiga and tundra was commonplace enough to warrant systems of knowledge transmission to form around them.

Herz's assessment of this system of knowledge, though, appears to have been somewhat incomplete. When he encountered the mammoth, he was able to confirm an earlier report that one of the mammoth's tusks was missing, having been sold to a police officer in the town of Kolymsk, one Nikolai Leopoldovich Gorn. This implies that, for at least one person, such a superstition was not powerful enough to have stopped them from harvesting one of the tusks for

[20] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 48.

a profit. Further, Herz notes that the river banks were littered with the bones of mammoths, reindeer, rhinoceros, and horses, from many of which he even acquired samples as detailed in the expedition's manifest. Yet, among these many and varied remains he reported finding no mammoth tusks, and only the one acquired at the site appears in the final manifest under the simple entry "one tusk".[21] The initial harvesting and sale of the tusk and the absence of tusks from the other remains both indicate that the economic value of tusks was known to local people.

These opposing views of the mammoth as an economic asset and object requiring respect due to the potential biological hazards posed by decomposing flesh, contrast with Herz's underlying emotional view of the mammoth as a window to the past. These differing views of the mammoth, a piece of the physical environment, and the differences in human action which resulted from these views, makes a clear case for the importance of studying human views of animals when examining the past. For the local Even and Russian observers, for whom encounters with mammoth body parts were simply part of life, the mammoth corpse warranted little special attention, merely the harvesting of a tusk. Herz's competing view of the corpse, being different from the local observers, warranted ten total months of trekking, the death of one of his traveling companions, and the expenditure of hundreds of rubles in supplies to keep the expedition going, as well as the deaths of several of their horses which his party ate to stave off starvation during their journey. This incident also demonstrates just how little had changed in Siberia since the Russian expansion had begun. Nearly 175 years earlier another well-funded expedition led by Vitus Bering and blessed by Peter the Great himself with all the majesty of the Russian Empire behind it, had similarly been forced to eat dead horseflesh to survive a journey across the continent.[22]

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[21] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 72.
[22] Glynn Barratt, *Russia in Pacific Waters 1715-1825* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981), 19.

All of these differences though, it must be stressed, existed solely within the minds of those humans who came across the corpse of the mammoth, all of whom placed imagined value of differing kinds upon the corpse. To the other denizens of the physical environment, there was very little that was special about the corpse. According to Herz's report, there was evidence that bears and wolves had eaten a significant portion of the unburied parts of the mammoth. To these other animals, the mammoth was simply so much preserved meat. The ramifications of this observation were not lost upon Herz and his companions. He notes about the carnality of the mammoth:

> "The flesh from under the shoulder, sinewy and intergrown with fat, is dark red and looks fresh as newly frozen beef or horse meat. It took us a long time to talk over whether or not we should taste the meat. It looked very appetizing, but nobody could bring himself to touch it and everybody preferred horseflesh. We threw some of the mammoth's flesh to the dogs, and it was eaten very readily by them."[23]

Herz was not unaware of the flesh and blood nature of the mammoth, nor was his understanding entirely divorced from his understanding of his own carnal form. He was aware that his body hungered to eat the flesh of the creature, even though he also had an emotional view of the creature as a link to the past. Further, it was impossible for him to forget the carnal nature of his find due to the smell: "Although the mammoth's corpse is frozen at present, the stink produced by it is very unpleasant, and it enters our winter hut even from a distance of 1.5km"[24] None of these thoughts, though, stopped other animals, the dogs, wolves, and bears, from seeing the mammoth for what it truly was: a few tons of edible meat.

[23] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66.
[24] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 61.

Even as he contemplated eating the mammoth with his companions, Herz successfully recovered numerous samples of what the mammoth had eaten, both from its stomach and from between its teeth. When he had finally completed the long process of dismembering and packing the mammoth, he waited for the river to freeze and hired a team of reindeer to pull the carcass, slowly and steadily, back to the regional hub of Irkutsk where the railroad returned it to St. Petersburg. This journey back suffered a near miss, as a package containing, "the remains of food we had found between the mammoth's teeth, its tongue, hair, and many other valuable parts" fell off of a sledge only to be recovered by Herz who had trailed behind to prevent just such an accident from happening.[25] These samples have proven to be the foundation modern scientific understanding of the causes of the rapid extinction of the woolly mammoth in the late Pleistocene, which have moved the scientific community and historians towards a more complete view of the history of the planet.[26] Using methods established with samples from Herz's Berezovka mammoth, modern paleontologists have been able to trace the final generations of mammoths as they began to decline in population, and pin the cause of their ultimate extinction on the rapidly oscillating cycles of heat and cold with which mammoths, more readily adapted to cold than warmth, could not keep evolutionary pace.[27] Today, the preserved body of the Berezovka mammoth is on display in the Zoological Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, its special flesh now re-preserved in a new way, to have new meaning projected onto it for years to come by any observer who passes by.

[25] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 76.
[26] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 316.
[27] Valentina V. Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 313.

The story of Herz and the mammoth illustrates two concepts as stated at the outset: the value of animal flesh as a document, and the value of data gathered about animals as documents. As has been demonstrated, the flesh itself never had any value beyond the fact it could be consumed as calories to fuel hungry people and animals during Siberia's bitter winter months. Yet it was possible for multiple human beings to create value for the flesh and project those values onto it, transforming those projected values into informed actions which diverged according to the meaning people saw in the rotting corpse before them. This subjective projection of value on to animals, alive as well as dead, serves as the crux of every section which follows.

The second concept, central to the practice of environmental history, is the use of scientific data to clarify the historical record. While the Berezovka mammoth only entered the written historical record when Herz dug it out of the permafrost, it had already existed there for nearly 40,000 years, a period which deserves inclusion in the historical narrative and about which the results of scientific studies can tell a great deal. At its peak the woolly mammoth had a range that covered most of the northern hemisphere. Paleontologists have worked painstakingly to reconstruct its existence and the peaks and valleys of its population throughout its range, producing a reasonable canon of sources for historians to work from to construct a narrative of the deep past. [28][29] By encouraging the use of modern scientific data as historical sources the mammoth reaches out from the geologic past to demonstrate to us that the stage upon which our human drama is set has seen many stories before our own, and that these dramas of

[28] Diego J. Álvarez-Lao et al., "The Padul Mammoth Finds — On the Southernmost Record of Mammuthus Primigenius in Europe and Its Southern Spread during the Late Pleistocene," *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 278, no. 1–4 (July 2009): 57–70, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palaeo.2009.04.011.
[29]Janken Myrdal, "On Source Criticism in World History," in *Methods in Word History: A Critical Approach*, ed. Arne Jarrick, Janken Myrdal, and Maria Wallenberg Bondesson (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2016).

the distant past do not form a narrative separate from the one we inhabit, but the crucial preceding chapter to our own time.

PART II: RAVEN

"This is the way it's told. My grandmother, my mother, my father, were very old when they died. This is why I don't deviate when I tell it; I tell it exactly right." --A. Marvin, *Glacier Bay History*[30]

Raven is an animal like the others represented in this thesis, and represent a significant departure from the subsequent sections, each of which demonstrates how an animal has meaning projected onto it and how that projected meaning shaped the following course of human events. This projection is predicated on the idea that human beings and animals are somehow separated from one another. Raven's story complicates that dichotomy by highlighting the subjective nature of looking at animals in the past and of examining the act of looking at animals as historians.

Raven is both animal and cultural hero to the Tlingit civilization, anthropomorphic in some ways and entirely animal in others, but in all cases blurring the firm borders between dichotomies of human and animal, society and nature. This projection rests on a premise of Cartesian dualism which dictates in the western tradition that human beings and nature are of separate and opposite entities.[31] Raven's story, among its other properties, demonstrates that this view of animals as somehow other, somehow outside of ourselves and part of an environment not of us, is in and of itself a projection of another value onto an animal. In subjectivity, the layers know no bounds, and the complexity of unraveling the exchanges which inform the systems of meaning between human and animal can quickly spiral to the point of paralysis, in

[30] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 267.
[31] John Creese, "Algonquian Rock Art and the Landscape of Power," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11, no. 1 (2011): 4.

which the investigator may simply wish to label the whole entangled mess as a "complex nexus" and call it a day rather than trace the lines, or act as Alexander with the Gordian knot and cut through the whole business with a kind of crude determinism, stating that it was either entirely nature or entirely human agency which dictated the outcome of events. The path I have chosen out of this knot is to attempt a synthesis of the narratives of these distinct views, of the animal as a separate entity and part of the whole of the universe in order to demonstrate that they need not be mutually exclusive. Presented alongside one another they can illuminate the whole of the human experience with animals and the broader physical environment more fully than either could in isolation.

Both of these world views, the animal as the "other" held by the Russians and the animal as a part of a whole on the part of Tlingit people, require documentation. For the Russian view, written documentation is extensive. Before the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867 over half a century of dynamic and often bitter exchanges took place between the Russian imperialists and Tlingit people whose territory they begrudgingly occupied a tiny portion of. The Russians were few, numbering not more than a few hundred at the peak of their power in Alaska. They were almost overwhelmingly male, and few had any intention of staying in Alaska long term. A small handful were possessed of religious convictions, but these convictions did not define the majority of the Russian in the Alaskan outposts, nor the leadership of the outpost which a letter of complaint about Baranov's threats to missionaries on the island details.[32] Some had personal fortunes tied up in their ventures, but most had no fortunes to speak of and were in Alaska for exactly that reason: they sought to improve their personal economic standing. The imperial project, such as it was, existed in a constant state of miscarriage. Policies from the top fluctuated

[32] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report to the Holy Governing Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church from Missionaries in Russian America Detailing Complaints against Aleksandr A. Baranov.", 63.

wildly, the funding on which the outposts relied was inconsistent, and leadership was harsh and personal, not ideological or even fully bound by law. All this is known from the relatively extensive documentation the Russian colonists left behind when they abandoned their outpost in Sitka following the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867.

To gain the Tlingit perspective it is necessary to seek other documents, since Tlingit language was not a written language until recent years. Written records of oral histories form the backbone of available insights into the Tlingit worldview, both of animals and the physical environment, as well as accounts of the Russian arrival.

In recent decades several frantic but valuable projects have been undertaken to transcribe the Tlingit oral histories of the Russian outpost. These projects, such as *Haa Shuká, Our Ancestors* by Nora Marks Dauenhauer, a native Tlingit speaker and poet, and Richard Dauenhauer, the former poet laureate of Alaska adds to a range of efforts by missionaries, anthropologists, and above all Tlingit community members to preserve records of the early and pre-colonial period of Tlingit America. These projects have been of the utmost importance to scholars of the region as there are only about five hundred speakers of Tlingit left among a population numbering nearly ten thousand.[33]

Before the work of Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, the work of Franz Boas, who himself worked closely with at least one Tlingit scholar[34] both in Alaska and years later in Pennsylvania, wrote the most complete available collection of Tlingit oratory, placing them in the category of myths and legends. Boas spent several intermittent periods in the Pacific Northwest transcribing oral accounts and attempting to learn languages. He focused on the stories he could classify as myth and confessed that he felt his patience was tested. He largely disregarded such subjects as

[33] "Tlingit | Alaska Native Language Center," accessed March 6, 2019, https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/tl/.
[34] Andrew Hope III, ed., *Raven's Bones* (Sitka: Sitka Community Association, 1982), 1-7.

the histories of the foundings of towns and lineages.[35] Published in 1895, his work *Indianishe Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen Küste Amerikas,* featured a compilation of all of his findings from the Pacific Northwest, including his full account of the Tlingit material he gathered. However, the text was not translated into English until 2002. Boas's work contains many shortcomings, not the least of which is that he rarely recorded the names of his interlocuters,[36] yet it also stands as the earliest compendium of Tlingit history available, and its value for its temporal proximity to the source material is inestimable despite the need for the reader to temper his or her understanding of the text with the knowledge of how the material was gathered, by who, and what was likely omitted.

In his landmark book, *Shared Authority*, Michael Frisch makes the key distinction between "oral history" and "oral tradition". Oral history is usually conducted with the intent to create change in a grass-roots spirit of popularizing previously unheard voices, whereas oral traditions are usually the opposite, designed to *resist* change.[37] Oral histories and the western conception of written histories are decidedly at odds. Eric Hobsbawm comments that the unreliability of memory makes history derived from these sources nearly unusable.[38] The Malian griot Mamadou Kouate commented to African historian D.T. Niane, "other peoples use writing to record the past, but this invention has killed the faculty of memory among them. They do not feel the past anymore, for writing lacks the warmth of the human voice…What paltry learning is that which is congealed in dumb books!"[39]. While these two schools may be at odds in their mediums, they need not be at odds in their content. Written history can effectively draw upon

[35] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 25.
[36] Ibid.
[37]Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 2.
[38] Hobsbawm, Eric, *On History* (New York: The New Press 1997).
[39] D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G.D. Pickett (Edinburgh Gate: Longman Group Ltd, 2002).

oral sources, but to do while simultaneously adhering to the requisite rigor required by written history requires an explicit framework of analysis in which to place the understanding of oral traditions that properly addresses the initially glaring contradictions between the competing sources of differing historical traditions.

Oral traditions, such as those documented in the collection *Haa Shuká, Our Ancestors,* should be understood as an entirely different medium from oral history. Oral traditions are far more static than memory, and it should be clarified that not all memory from people in cultures with oral tradition is synonymous with oral tradition. Oral tradition is characterized by rules and systems which govern the retelling of stories, including who may recount stories, to whom, and when. The specifics of these traditions vary widely across cultures, and any historian wishing to utilize oral traditions in their work must necessarily gain an understanding of these rules in order to accurately utilize the sources. Oral history, by comparison, operates in a self-referential, individual basis. Oral tradition is defined by an external cultural framework whose resistance to change is equal to the relative strength of the culture in which it operates.

The western tradition of written history often seeks to explain, as Hayden White so succinctly put it, "what was *really* happening".[40] However, all historians must inevitably accept the fact that, according to all available evidence, what "really" happened never stops changing and evolving. As Ramsey MacMullen, an able historian of ancient Rome described the situation, "at least on topics that deserve abiding interest, no one is likely to say the last word. One can only hope to influence the next book on the subject, by someone else, which will be better but

[40] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1973), x.

still not quite right."[41] Our understanding of what "really" happened is subject to change, often as a result of new evidence, new questions, and new perspectives.

Ultimately, a full understanding of what "really" happened must accept the existence of plural realities at the level of community collectives such as the Russian outpost at Novo Arkhangel'sk or the particular Tlingit moieties and clans, all the way down to the particular authors of letters from the Russian outpost and the Tlingit storytellers. In seeking the reality of what happened at Novo Arkhangel'sk between 1741 and 1867, we must accept that it is not a single reality we are looking for, but several.

Why bother with what any supposedly rational, academically trained mind clearly sees as myth? Why tell Raven's story? Raven left no diary. The thaw of the Cold War did not reopen archives that might shed light on Raven's motivation for transforming himself into a pine needle. There are no stacks of letters written in illegible-yet-elegant cursive script between Raven and his closest compatriots to give us some insight into how his initial failures to create humankind from stone, earth, and wood harmed his sense of self. What he did leave were stories. These stories no doubt changed, but also retained critical details. However, the accuracy of these stories is not the issue at hand. The importance of the factual accuracy of these stories pales in comparison to the importance of the fact they were *believed to be true*. The story of Raven was *reality*. This reality was just as real as the reality of the providence of his governorship of Novo Arkhangel'sk was to Baranov in his later years when he became convinced that God himself had placed him on the island that now bears his name. Without this understanding many of the actions of the Russians and the Tlingit at Sitka might seem illogical, contradictory, or without

[41] Ramsey MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

reason. What such assessments fail to account for is the internal logic within the constituent realities which composed the overarching circumstances of these coexisting worlds.

It is with an understanding of the irony of the proposal that I suggest that, in order to obtain a "logical" understanding in any reasonable sense, it is of primary importance to find a place for the apparently illogical, for the belief without evidence, for the unsubstantiated story that founds a movement or starts a riot, for the spiritual and the otherworldly themes that permeate every human culture. An understanding of the past that does not account for these facets is, ironically, ultimately inadequate to explain what "really" happened. In order to begin to understand deeper historical questions surrounding motivations and causality, what "really" happened matters little by comparison to what was *perceived* to have happened. What I propose as a solution is an integrated narrative that blends the supernatural with the mundane, the physically documented with the oral. I propose an integrated narrative that treats Baranov's vision of his own divine providence with the same respect as Raven's story, and the Tlingit vision of the North Pacific as a land of plenty with the same gravity as the Russian vision of the North Pacific as a hellish wasteland.

Before such an integrated narrative can be presented, it is necessary to set the stage and introduce the *dramatis personae* for ease of reading and matters of convention which generally scorn allusory tangents into uncontextualized names or places. It is in this spirit that profiles of the major figures are presented below outside the flow of time in the narrative to come so that when their names surface the spark of recognition from them may inspire the reader to a sense of contextual familiarity within the broader narrative milieu of the North Pacific in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The island of Sitka, sometimes also called Baronov Island, situated off the coast of southeast Alaska among an archipelago of mountainous islands of which it is the outermost. It was on this island that the Russian American Company built its most successful fort in 1799, only to have it captured in 1802 by an estimated 800 Tlingit who then used the cannons and firearms to fight Russian reinforcements in 1804. After several days of skirmishing, the Russians settled on the tactic of simply shelling the Tlingit fort until they withdrew from it, which the Russians appear to have interpreted as a signal of surrender. The fort that the Russians would build on Sitka, would come to be called Novo Arkhangel'sk, and would serve as the capital of the Russian North American enterprise until 1867 with the sale of Alaska to the United States.

Lituya Bay, some one hundred miles north of the island of Sitka, is associated with the first arrival of the Russians and so merits mention for the purpose of orientation.

Aleksei Chirikov was the second in command in Vitus Bering's second expedition into the North Pacific, and in 1741 a ship under Chirikov's command was the first European ship to reach Tlingit America somewhere near the island of Sitka.

Jean-François de Galaup was a French explorer who visited Lituya Bay in 1786, and it is thought that the motifs of his encounter may have blended with the initial encounters with the Russians.[42]

Alexander Baranov was the chief administrator of the Russian American company until shortly before his death in 1819. He was, by all accounts, a strange and mercurial man prone to fits of range and hard drinking. He oversaw many of strangest developments in the Russian Pacific experiment, including jailing a number of orthodox missionaries out of fear that they

[42] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 435-436.

would incite Tlingit rebellion, trying to smooth over a botched attempt by some of his agents to conquer Hawaii from King Kamehameha, and an attempt by a secret society within the Sitka colony to, in the spirit of the French Revolution, kill Baranov for his keeping of slaves, and flee to Easter Island where they would establish a republic.[43] All the while, Baranov continued to fortify his position on Sitka to attempt to ward off intermittent raids from the majority of Tlingit people who had never submitted to his authority. He went years at a time without news from Russia as to what he ought to be doing and how he was supposed to handle the growing number of European and American ships he was encountering. Later in his life, Baranov became convinced, despite his previous jailing of priests, that his purpose on the island of Sitka was somehow divinely inspired and became dedicated to the building and outfitting of a church.[44] After he was forced out of office and died in route to St. Petersburg in 1819 he was briefly replaced by his son-in-law who oversaw the transfer of the colony to the administration of the Russian Navy, whose personnel would administrate the colony until its sale and dissolution in 1867.[45]

Raven had a reputation as a trickster, a liar, and a hero. He is responsible for a great number of phenomena, including the fact that fish have bones which make them hard to eat, whales becoming beached (an event which marked the arrival of a bounty of food for Tlingit people), the existence of sunlight, the creation of human kind, and the tide coming in and out. Importantly, he used to be white like a seagull, but during an ill-fatted ploy in which Raven disguised himself as a woman to go among the seals and was caught eating the corpse of his dead

[43] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 116-118.
[44] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 145.
[45] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 153.

husband while pretending to cry, he was caught and roasted over a fire, which turned him black.[46]

The Tlingit civilization occupies the southeast portion of Alaska and Northwest portion of British Columbia. The oldest Tlingit story, thought to be more ancient than even the creation story, is the story of the origin of the mosquito, and one version describes the Tlingit migration to the coast. More specifically, it describes conditions in the interior, which by contrast cast the sea as an area of plenty. "It was very hard to live in the interior. It was so hard the people ate each other. There were cannibals in that time. That was what we would tell about when we migrated to the coast."[47] The story goes on to describe the story of a young man whose brothers went missing in the forest, the victims of a cannibal. When he encountered the cannibal, he was so terrified that it was able to capture him. The young man later escaped from the cannibal's clutches and beat it to death with its own club. Wanting to make the cannibal suffer even more thoroughly for the deaths of his two brothers, he burnt the body. When the body was burned, he wished to make if suffer even more so he blew on the ashes, which flew up and became mosquitoes, which is why mosquitoes still want to drink blood: they are still that cannibal.[48]

What I will attempt to do here is not to simply talk about how such histories might be reconciled or incorporated into one another but attempt a history which places equal weight on both written and oral traditions. This portion is not an attempt at "mythstory", nor an attempt at establishing the objective facts of the matter. It is instead an attempt to tell the story as it might have been experienced by giving equal weight to oral histories without discounting elements that

[46] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 623.
[47] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987).
[48] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 179.

have long been eschewed by more linear narratives. A full theoretical framework for this endeavor, or a critical response to it, is beyond the scope of this section. Here, the effort is to show rather than to tell.

In the beginning, Raven stole sunlight from a great chief who had been keeping it locked in a box. He transformed himself into a pine needle and was ingested by the chief's daughter. The chief's daughter then gave birth to Raven, who cried out to his grandfather to show him the box that held daylight. When Raven's complaining finally became too much, he was given the box with daylight to play with, and revealed his true self, flying out the window and bringing light to the world. Once, in a time before the tides, Raven was thirsty. He had flown all over the world and had found no fresh water to drink. He knew that Petrel, the water keeper, was hoarding it in a trough on his island not far from modern Sitka. Raven arrived and noticed that that water was too high for him to catch and eat sea urchins, so he tricked Petrel, who kept his eyes open when he was asleep and closed them when he was awake, into stretching his legs. When Petrel finally stretched his legs, the water went out, and Raven was able to eat as many sea urchins as he wanted. Still, he wanted water, and had to wait until Petrel's eyes were wide open to take the lid off of the trough and drink his fill. Petrel woke up right away and gave chase, leaving a trail of broken rocks and trees that can still be seen today.[49]

People came to be when Raven wanted to create them. He first tried to make them out of clay and attempted to breathe life into them. They lived for a little while, but soon died again. Raven tried again with earth, and then with stones, and finally with wood, but the same thing

[49] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 615.

happened. Finally, Raven tried with grass and the people he created became the ancestors of mankind. This is men come and go like grass.[50]

Raven, or Yētl, in Tlingit, accomplishes these any many other fantastic exploits as he brings about the familiar world of the south-east Alaskan coast. The physical environment is full of bounty for the clever, and full of mischief for those caught unawares. Raven, for example, took advantage of the tides to eat his fill of sea urchins. He also filled the herring of the sea with pine needles to spite some fishermen who did not believe he possessed the power of daylight. Before this, herring had no bones.

Raven's world was brimming with natural bounty for those who knew how to get it, and stories of him are filled with many instances of his clever resourcefulness that demonstrate a clear path towards surviving and thriving in the biome of south-eastern Alaska.

Meanwhile, two rickety ships were nearing the midpoint of a treacherous journey from Okhost as part of Vitus Bering's disastrous expedition to the American continent. One ship, captained by Aleksei I. Chirikov, arrived near modern-day Sitka Alaska on September 9th, 1741. First, Chirikov dispatched a longboat of servitors well-equipped with rifles, supplies, and even a bronze cannon to conduct an exploration. He also sent the away party with two rockets and instructions to fire them to signal their intent to depart. Once the team was dispatched he waited in vain for their signal, which never came. Chirirkov comments that the crew of the ship discussed among themselves and determined that the boat must not have returned because it had been damaged and could not. He then dispatched a second boat with a carpenter and repair materials to assist the first. After waiting for a tense day, neither boat returned. Then, out of the dense fog emerged two boats which, after initial elation, Chirikov was disappointed to discover

[50] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 623.

were not Russian. They communicated briefly with the boats using hand signals, but the encounter ended quickly when the boats departed. At that point, Chirikov determined that the away parties had been killed or captured. A brief assessment of their remaining water supplies told him that he needed to depart immediately. The ships of the second Bering expedition limped back to Russia through a severe headwind and stormy seas. They quickly ran out of water after discovering seven of their forty barrels to be missing and were reduced to gathering rain in buckets normally used to store pitch. Chirikov comments that the sailors did not mind the taste of pitch in their rainwater because it was believed to stave off scurvy.[51] Unfortunately, it did not, and many members of the ships' crews, including Vitus Bering himself, died with scurvy, a disease of deprivation, on their return from Raven's land of plenty.

Around this time ten boats, laden with animal furs, overturned in rough waters of Lituya Bay. All of the people on the boats died as night was falling quickly, despite a few attempts to sit atop the overturned boats. In the words of the elder who recounted the tale, "Darkness now covered them…daylight came without them".[52] This was their end, but the furs they had loaded into the boats were kept in halibut skin bags, which didn't leak and kept the furs dry. They were furs of all kinds of animals, marten, sea otter, and fox. These furs were swept out to sea by the tide and carried all the way to Russia. When the Russians found these furs they journeyed to Lituya Bay, to the mainland, to find the source of the furs.[53]

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[51] Basil Dmytryshyn, E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan, and Thomas Vaughan, eds., "A Report from Captain Aleksei I. Chirikov to the Admiralty College Concerning His Observations and Explorations along the Coast of America," in *Russian Penetration of the Pacific Ocean, 1700-1797: A Documentary Record*, vol. 2, 3 vols., To Siberia and Russian America: Three Centuries of Russian Eastward Expansion (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1988), 149.

[52] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 297.

[53] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 297.

When the Russians came searching for the source of the furs they had found, there was some confusion among the Tlingits when they arrived. An elder recounts the reaction,

> "And so the Tlingits didn't tell it as it really was. It was the Raven boat, was what they told one another, the Raven boat. That's what they were saying about the Russians. If you looked directly at it you would turn to stone. Even today the Tlingits are like that…That's how things happened in the beginning."[54]

As the Russians approached, the Tlingit observers at first mistook the billowing white sails for Raven's wings from the time before Raven had become black, and took numerous precautions against the new arrival, fearing that to look upon it directly would turn them to stone. However, the incorrectness of this view became readily apparent.

During an encounter with one of these ships, which was mistaken for Raven in his white guise, several Tlingit observers were brought aboard and fed new foods, including rice, pilot bread, and alcohol. They encountered a mirror for the first time and went back to the shore to tell about the things they had seen aboard the ship. They had been given some of the food to take with them, but it is a mystery as to how it was cooked, since "people didn't have pots then...There was no cooking pot for it."[55]

This meeting in 1741 began a tumultuous process of botched imperialism that would eventually leave the Tlingit under the bewildered and largely theoretical authority of the United States government in 1867 with the sale of Alaska from one power with minimal ability to exert authority in the region to one with even less.

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[54] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 301.
[55] Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 309.

Later, when Nānak (Baranov) came to Sitka (Novo Arkhangel'sk) with Aleut slaves to build a fort. After some time disagreements arose between the Tlingit and the son of Nānak. They went to war, and the Tlingit burned the fort to the ground. Nānak's son found his wife slain, and when he did so he walked around dejected for a time before throwing himself into the fire of the fort. Nānak returned and tried to retake the fort but was fought off. Nānak then set off on a voyage to find his son. Nānak had a book that he talked with for advice, and this book told him that he must take all of his men with him to sea to find his son, but they could not take their wives with them. One young man who was in love with his wife smuggled her on board, and the voyage experienced all manner of strange wanderings, including landing on an unknown coast where there were very many women whom the Russians wanted to marry, before discovering that they were married to a piece of driftwood on the beach whose branches were covered with teeth. Eventually the man's wife was caught, her head was chopped off, and they were both thrown into the sea. Following this development, Nānak arrived at a place with a deep whirlpool, where by means of lowering a bucket full of fresh water into the whirlpool and pulling it up full of money he was able to trade with the people of the lower world. This all took a very long time and Nānak was old and grey when he returned.[56]

Meanwhile, while the promyshlenniki plied their trades in their offshore fortress and struggled to adapt to the realities of their isolation from the wider Russian Empire on the other side of the Pacific, the Tlingit adapted to the new realities of the presence of the outpost. The immediate availability of particular trade goods began to alter the economies of the Tlingit civilization. As a policy of "pacification" the naval administration that took control of the colony from Baranov began giving large quantities of trade goods, including addictive goods like

[56] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 631-633.

tobacco and alcohol, to Tlingit people in exchange for furs, a process that slowly warmed Russian-Tlingit relations and escalated the amount of fur hunting that took place in the region by commodifying an animal and leading to the near extinction of the sea otter in Tlingit territory in the later 1820's.[57]

The Russians and the Tlingit perceived remarkably different natural environments in the North Pacific. For the Tlingit, this was Raven's world. In story after story, animals and heroes encounter challenges in the natural world that they outmaneuver through strength, wit, and the occasional dash of providence. Tlingit oral traditions recount the lives of ancestors as they lived in a Raven-like relationship with the world around them. Ingold theorizes that in human societies, the "lifeworld", constructed by myth, religion, and ceremony, is connected with the way people interact with the resources in their environment to obtain a livelihood.[58] Raven's story is emblematic of a lifeworld tied to interaction with the resources of the environment that was largely positive and beneficial in the eyes and minds of Tlingit observers by contrast to the Russian relationship with the environment which produced largely negative experiences of starvation, disease, and deprivation.

The Russians of the RAC and the other Europeans—Germans, Finns, and Danes—that they brought with them, often found the natural environment of the Northern Pacific to be harsh and unforgiving. They attempted to transplant their centuries-old imperial techniques, learned through the bloody and arduous conquest of Siberia, to Alaska, but were often forced to adapt to the differing conditions they encountered in attempting to establish an overseas colony.[59]

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[57] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126.
[58] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 10.
[59] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

Accepting the story of Raven as a source for historical understanding offers a litany of research questions. What role did these imagined landscapes play in the history of Novo Arkhangel'sk? How did these imagined worlds change the way the Europeans and the Tlingit developed their often violent relationships? What role did Russian perceptions of the natural world play in the ongoing struggle of the colony for subsistence? How did this contrast with the Tlingit view of the natural world, which seemed able to sustain between 5,000 and 10,000 Tlingit since time immemorial? What did the Tlingit imagine lay behind the fog that Chirikov emerged from in 1741, earning the later Russian arrivals the name Gutsk·nkoan, the cloud outside-of people?[60] What horrors did Chirikov imagine lay behind the obscuring fog of the land that Raven made? By examining Raven, rather than taking the somewhat dismissive path of classifying his story as mythology, or even "mythstory"[61], one can approach an understanding of how differing conceptions of the physical environment shaped the course of history in Alaska in ways as concrete as causing miserable, scurvy-ridden deaths aboard a rickety ship or confined within the protective yet imprisoning walls of a perpetually damp fort. Raven's story also offers a final reminder that animals are what we make of them, and even so apparently a basic a distinction as the line between humanity and animals is informed by our own predispositions towards the past.

[60] Franz Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*, ed. Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, trans. Dietrich Bertz (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2002), 633.
[61] Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

PART III: THE REINDEER

The reindeer has been an indispensable animal throughout the human history of Siberia. Like the woolly mammoth, its origins reach out to us from the deep past, but the reindeer is still a living species which has played a role in human history beyond the use of its body after death. Anthropologists such as Piers Vitebsky at Cambridge's Scott Polar Research Institute have brought into academic knowledge what was already well known among many diverse indigenous Siberian groups: that people and reindeer enjoyed a special synergistic relationship for thousands of years.[6263] This synergistic relationship and the societies which evolved in the context of that relationship serve as an example of one possible way for human societies to relate to animals. That way contrasts sharply with the way another human society, the Russians, came to interface with the sable.

The sources available for examining the histories of most reindeer herding cultures before writing are few. However, by asking environmental questions of anthropological and archeological data, it is possible to examine a small part of the histories of these cultures in the absence of written records. Such sources will not yield detailed socio-political histories but can examine the history of looking at and interacting with the physical environment.

Projecting anthropological interpretations of indigenous cultures into the past is difficult, and the limitations should be clearly stated. By this it is meant that modern examinations of the way indigenous cultures were living when anthropologists began studying them cannot be

[62] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living With Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 2005), 18.
[63] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living With Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 2005), 25-31.

projected wholesale into the past with the assumption that the cultures existed in a kind of stasis in the pre-imperial world.

In-depth studies of indigenous histories across North America from the work of Elizabeth Boone on Mesoamerica to the work of Kathleen DuVal on the Midwest have shown what enormous complexity exists in the indigenous story if documents are carefully examined for the indigenous voice, and thereby provide an illustrative example of the kinds of stories and complexities that are missed when pre-imperial stasis is assumed.[64][65] It is therefore important to actively push against the notion of a static indigenous world suggested by the standard narratives of colonization. It may be difficult to see the dynamics at play in the pre-conquest world, but we must assume that they were present, as no human society has ever functioned in the state of perfect, unchanging static harmony. That said, there are some features which a combination of archeological evidence and oral traditions have been able to draw out from the past before the advent of written technology. These features usually concern material conditions, such as migration patterns, strategies for caring for and raising animals, and technologies such as sledges and clothing styles which have been created as responses to the physical environment. It is therefore appropriate to make general statements such as, "Chukchi people have herded reindeer for hundreds of years", based on ethnographic data collected in modern or early modern times, but only with the knowledge that there are large swaths of history that are unknowable from such data and that the continuation of some parts does not imply a continuation of all parts. One wouldn't say, for example, that people in England have gone unchanged for centuries by merit of their having farmed wheat for all that time.

[64] Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).
[65] Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

While all reindeer herding cultures are unique, many share traits in common with one another, and in all cases are more similar to one-another than they are to whichever imperial power they fell under in early-modern or modern times. This section therefore draws upon the histories of reindeer herding cultures from the Kola peninsula in the west to the Chukotka peninsula in the east, not to suggest that all of these people were the same by having established relationships with reindeer herds, (one might just as easily say that Incan and Irish cultures were the same by merit of their shared relationship with the potato) but to demonstrate that in all of these diverse cultures, the relationship with the reindeer is both long-term and recursive. However, each party influenced the other with differing outcomes according to local social and cultural conditions. This concept of a recursive relationship between the physical environment and human society is drawn from the work of Tara Carter concerning the formation of the early Icelandic state and is applicable here.[66] Put another way, cultural and environmental factors both affect and are affected by their complex interactions through time and space.[67] Still, this recursive relationship stems from people maintaining a certain view of reindeer and their relationship to them. It is this view of reindeer as an animal with which human beings can have a relationship, which defines the potential limits of any kind of reciprocity. Evenk, Chukchi, and Sámi reindeer herding cultures are hereby examined, all with a common eye towards understanding how people viewed reindeer.

Before understanding how human beings viewed reindeer, it is important to understand the reindeer themselves. Reindeer exist in both domesticated and wild varieties, both of which are associated with nomadic cultures that either follow or move their herds in

[66] Tara Carter, *Iceland's Networked Society: Revealing How the Global Affairs of the Viking Age Created New Forms of Social Complexity* (Leiden: Bril, 2015) 109.
[67] John Creese, "Algonquian Rock Art and the Landscape of Power," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11, no. 1 (2011): 3–20.

accordance with seasonably available food sources. In both cases, the movements and needs of the reindeer influenced the conditions of human life. While reindeer provided food, clothing, shelter, and spiritual fulfillment to the cultures that grew around them, their own needs informed the lifestyles of the people who herded them. Reindeer are believed to have been domesticated approximately 3,000 years ago, although the precise timeline and geography of domestication remains a matter of debate.[68] Hunting of reindeer likely goes back even further, in parts of Ukraine as much as 20,000 years ago. The development of reindeer hunting and herding left great quantities of bones scattered in Upper Paleolithic sites led some anthropologists in France to dub this, "The Age of the Reindeer." That assertion has subsequently been complicated by the revelation that other animals were also hunted in similarly large quantities at the time.[69] Reindeer have existed both as means of survival and significant cultural symbol since that time. Tombs as far south as Mongolia saw horse burials in which the animal was adorned with ceremonial antlers. The mummified remains of a woman, unearthed in southern Siberia and believed to be 2,500 years old, is adorned with intricate tattoos depicting the animal.[70] All this is with good reason: reindeer are exceptionally well adapted to the cold environments in which they live. Their fur is hollow to improve the insulation from the brutal arctic winters, and their noses contain a complex network of passages to warm freezing air before it reaches the animal's lungs, further reducing heat loss. A specialized tuft of hair grows between the animal's cloven hoof to prevent it from slipping on ice as it runs, and it is capable of running for long periods at

[68] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 18.
[69] Ariane Burke and Anne Pike-Tay, "Reconstructing 'L'Age Du Renne,'" in *Caribou and Reindeer Hunters of the Northern Hemisphere*, ed. Lawrence J. Jackson and Paul T. Thacker (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997).
[70] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 9.

20-30 miles per hour and can travel in bursts at nearly double this speed.[71] It is a marvelously well-adapted animal, and in partnership with it human beings have been able to lead rich lives in Asia's arctic and sub-arctic regions for thousands of years.

Evenk people are among the most populous Arctic people and possess one of the most widespread reindeer herding cultures in the world. Alternately called "Eveny", the Russian plural form of Even, sometimes translated into English as "Evenks", were and are widespread over northern Asia, having settled or migrated regularly from the Ob River to the island of Sakhalin in the Pacific Ocean. Soviet ethnographers estimated that at the turn of the 20th century there were some 31,500 Evenk people engaged in reindeer herding and hunting and 45,500 engaging in "pastoralism."[72] However, those whom these ethnographers described as "Eveny" practicing pastoralism are today identified as "Evenki", although debates over grouping remains somewhat contentious.[73] Evenk culture has given us several useful origin stories which illustrate the nature of human relationships with reindeer. These stories give accounts of the significance of the relationship between reindeer and Evenk people and demonstrate a particular way of viewing the animal. Both are also drawn from the fieldwork of Piers Vitebsky, citied at the end of the accounts.

In the first story of how reindeer and humanity came together, a woman noticed that reindeer had become attracted to a spot where she had urinated, sensing the salt. She continued to urinate in the same spot, and the reindeer continued to come and became used to her. Eventually, she was able to taste some of the reindeer's milk and found it to be delicious.

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[71] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 23.
[72] G.M. Vasilevich and A.V. Smolyak, "The Evenks," in *The Peoples of Siberia*, ed. M.G. Levin and L.P. Potapov, trans. Stephen P. Dunn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 620.
[73] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 27-32.

In the second story, the first reindeer was born from a larch tree, but became stuck in the birthing process. A hunter who happened to be nearby helped the reindeer to exit the tree's birth canal. Years later, when the first reindeer had calves, the reindeer family was attacked by wolves. The reindeer parents balked in fear and called out to the god Hövki for help. Their children, however, fought and killed the wolves with their antlers. Later, Hövki asked what the parents intended to do to survive if they could not fend off the wolves themselves. A parent replied that, years ago, they had been helped out of a tree by a human, and so would go with humans and serve them in exchange for protection from wolves. The children, by contrast, opted to remain free to face the dangers of a wild existence.[74] Vitebsky describes this relationship as a "social contract" between human kind and reindeer, and this is largely an accurate assessment. In this reindeer herding culture, people view their relationships with the animals in terms of exchange: receiving meat, milk, clothing, transportation, and even spiritual fulfilment from the animal, and in exchange providing the animal with protection from rapacious predators. All this the human view brought to the equation, creating a symbiosis out of what, with any other group of animals, might have become a simple predator-prey relationship.

In the first story a view of the reciprocity of the human-reindeer relationship is seen in which both parties gain from the interaction: the reindeer gets salt and the woman, milk. In the second story, the arrangement reached between humans and reindeer is similarly reciprocal, with each party receiving something from the relationship. Evenk people were and are well aware of this relationship. An Evenk song ends in this verse:

If the reindeer do not come,

If the herd turns away,

[74] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 26-27.

If the reindeer do not come,

There will be no Eveny![75]

The remarkability of this view of the human-reindeer relationship only comes into focus when compared with the Russian view of the reindeer, outlined at the end of this section but summed up as viewing the reindeer as a tool rather than a partner.

Chukchi people also herded reindeer, and also established reciprocal relationships with the animal. There is also clear evidence of the Chukchi view of reindeer shaping human life in return.

Chukchi people live predominantly on the Chukotka peninsula in the far north-eastern corner of Siberia. Soviet ethnographers divided them into two groups according to the types of economic activity they conducted, either sea-mammal hunting or reindeer herding. Although the word Chukchi is commonly used today to describe anyone of the ethnic group, Chukchi language refers to those who hunted sea mammals, mostly whales and walruses on the coasts, as *An'kalyn*, and those who practiced reindeer herding as *Chavchu.* Both groups in turn referred to all Chukchi as *Lyg''oravetlyan*, or "real man".[76] Certainly some of this preoccupation with classification of economic activity can be attributed to the specific motivations of Soviet ethnography, but residing in these observations is an example of the reciprocity of a human relationship with reindeer. Reindeer were an enabling factor in allowing people to survive in the tundra interior of the Chukotka peninsula. Observations from Soviet ethnographers described Chukchi who lost their reindeer herds, either because they were stolen or had wandered away and could not be found, moving to the coast to hunt whales and walruses. Without reindeer, it

[75] Piers Vitebsky, *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 395.
[76] V.V. Antropova and V.G. Kuznetsova, "The Chukchi," in *The Peoples of Siberia,* ed. M.G. Levin and L.P. Potapov, trans. Stephen P. Dunn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 799.

appears that life in the interior of the peninsula was untenable enough to force a drastic change. In this case the relationship with reindeer had a reciprocal effect on the human beings involved: rather than protecting reindeer from wolves, it is humanity that was protected from the dangers of cold and starvation on the tundra. This relationship would not have been possible without a view of the reindeer as a partner rather than a tool. The human view of the reindeer, therefore, enabled the relationship to form, but does not preclude the relationship's ability to shape both parties.

Sámi reindeer herding is a well-studied tradition in Western scholarship, in because a large proportion of Sámi people reside in northern Scandinavia, which has traditionally been more accessible to the West than the Sámi residing on the other side of the Russian border. The modern transnational nature of Sámi populations serves as a reminder of the lingering effects of imperialism in the Arctic, but also the legacy of imperial thought in the study of the Arctic.

Traditionally, the study of Sámi culture has been largely segregated into the realm of Scandinavian history by simple merit of present-day political boundaries and the borders of earlier imperial eras, beginning in approximately 1200 AD with the process of Swedish colonization.[77] However, this relatively recent history obscures the fact that Sámi people had been herding and hunting reindeer and involving them in religious practices since as early as 2000 BC, and early rock art suggests the human relationship with reindeer may go back thousands of years further still.[78] The choice to include the Sámi reindeer herding culture in a broader discussion of the role played by reindeer in the human narrative of the natural world is a conscious flaunting of the borders of historical empire on the basis of pre-existing, pre-imperial

[77] Noah D. Broadbent, *Lapps and Labyrinths: Sámi Prehistory, Colonization, and Cultural Resistance* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2010), 219.
[78] Noah D. Broadbent, *Lapps and Labyrinths: Sámi Prehistory, Colonization, and Cultural Resistance* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2010), 176.

modes of thought regarding reindeer which were pervasive on the northern tundra and immediate sub-arctic regions in the pre-imperial period. This is not to suggest a broad homogeny of reindeer herding cultures in the circumpolar world. Indeed, modern genetic analysis suggests that there were three points of genesis for reindeer herding based on high-level differences in gene pools between modern herds: one in Fennoscandia, one in western Russia, and one in eastern Russia, suggesting that three branches of reindeer herding cultures likely developed and diverged separately from one-another in these regions.[79] Further still, an almost innumerable diversity exists in religion, culture, and language between the three reindeer herding cultures discussed in this section. Even within Sámi cultures there are pronounced differences in reindeer herding practices with western populations favoring long-range migrations and eastern populations favoring shorter transitions.[80] What each of these cultures share in common, though, is a pre-imperial, non-utilitarian view of the function of reindeer in human life, and so constitute parts of a distinct cultural region insofar as reindeer are concerned. When the Russian imperial project began, they were entering a reindeer region that stretched beyond the boundaries of the empire their project would eventually establish, and the inclusion of the Sámi story in the history of reindeer interactions is in recognition of this fact.

More relevant to the task at hand though, is the Sámi conception of cyclical time and the relationship between this model of time and act of herding reindeer in seasonal patterns. For people in the Sámi culture, the act of being in the world is based on cyclical temporality which emphasized the recurring and holistic nature of existence, both in terms of natural resources and

[79] Knut H. Røed et al., "Genetic Analyses Reveal Independent Domestication Origins of Eurasian Reindeer," *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 275, no. 1645 (2008): 1849–55.
[80] Pertti J. Pelto, The Snowmobile Revolution: Technology and Social Change in the Arctic (Menlo Park: Cummings Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), 31-32.

the life cycle of humans.[81] This model of time is based on the seasonal needs of reindeer herds, which go into the mountains in the summer and the forests in autumn according to available food sources. This model allows the reindeer to follow their natural rhythm, and in doing so both reindeer and human beings have their needs fulfilled.

The existence of a cyclical model of time has been linked in existing scholarship to a model of relating to the natural world on a basis of sustainability rather than exploitation.[82] The basic premise of this idea is that, if one envisions time as a line there is implication of destination, of a need to arrive at an end (whatever that might be) through perpetual growth or change. By contrast, cyclical models of time emphasize a need for balancing the movement though time to ensure that a cycle repeats itself again. The full ramifications of cyclical and linear models of time are beyond the scope of this project, but what is of concern is the influence of human views of reindeer upon this conception of time.

The implicit tie between an indigenous mode of thought and the modern concepts of ecology and conservation echo the rhetorical construct of the "ecological indian", a mythic stereotype which emerged during the initial years of the environmentalist movement in the United States.[83] The invocation of cyclical time and the ties of that temporal conception with the physical world is in no way intended to perpetuate this myth, and the applicability of a study in North American indigeneity should only be applied to the Eurasian context with caution. As has already been stated, cyclicality is commonly observed in societies which practice sedentary agriculture just as readily as those which herd reindeer. Instead, the presence of cyclical time is

[81] Pietari Käpää, "Cyclical Conceptualizations of Time: Ecocritical Perspectives on Sámi Film Culture," in *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos*, ed. Salma Monani and Joni Adamson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 137.
[82] Käpää, "Cyclical Conceptualizations of Time: Ecocritical Perspectives on Sámi Film Culture.", 137.
[83] Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

invoked to examine how the projection of a certain value, of a certain relationship, onto reindeer has influenced human action. Without an understanding of a reindeer as an animal that could be partnered with rather than just another wild animal, such as an elk or a moose, the Sámi cycle would have significantly different features.

It is not useful to debate whether the Sámi cyclical model of time existed previous to the relationship with reindeer or the other way around, but it is useful to discuss the influence the Sámi relationship with reindeer has upon the cycle. Like Chukchi and Evenk reindeer herders, Sámi also have partnership relationship with reindeer, although it has taken a decisively different direction in modern times. In the early imperial period with which this project is concerned, it is the *features* of the cycle of time that most concerns the discussion of the human-reindeer relationship, not the cyclical nature of the time onto which the relationship is mapped.

The Sámi cyclical year, which involved herding reindeer between feeding grounds according to the changing seasons, presents a synthesis of the observations of the Evenk and Chukchi relationships, as it demonstrates both the intensity of the view of the human-reindeer relationship as one of partnership while also demonstrating reciprocal effect of the relationship on human life. That the relationship was one of partnership rather than, for example, as a tool or as a prey animal, is demonstrated by the pervasive presence of reindeer remains in Sámi religious sites, which are based on the duality between the domestic and the wild.[84]

The reciprocity of the relationship is evidenced by the mapping of the Sámi year onto patterns of reindeer migration. Conceptions of the passage of time can and are based on any number of things according to human perception, and so it is a matter of significance that Sámi time was so closely related to reindeer. This is an example of the reciprocity of the relationship:

[84] Noah D. Broadbent, *Lapps and Labyrinths: Sámi Prehistory, Colonization, and Cultural Resistance* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2010), 176.

while humanity influences the reindeer, the reindeer also influence the human story. This is because the human story is necessarily grounded in the passage of time the shape of that time, and how we perceive the shape, can be informed by the animals that share the physical environment we inhabit.

The examples so far, of the Evenk, the Chukchi, and the Sámi conceptions, have all demonstrated one way of viewing reindeer: as an animal with which a partnership was formed. In this conception, reindeer are both spiritual animals and exist on relatively equal footing with human beings. In these views, the human reindeer relationship is reciprocal, with each affecting the other in ways both subtle and obvious. In the Evenk case, reindeer provided the basis for a rich tradition of spirituality. In the Chukchi tradition, reindeer shared a similar spiritual dimension, but also clearly altered human life by contrast to the costal Chukchi who did not herd reindeer. In the Sámi conception, an understanding of time itself is influenced by the cycles of reindeer migrations. In each of these cases, the relationship with reindeer also provided the material means of survival, with reindeer meat, bones, and hides providing the physical necessities for hairless, hoof-less, antler-less humanity to survive in the Siberian Arctic and subarctic. Each of these human relationships with reindeer result from a subjective view of what reindeer are for, and how they should be related to by humans. Tim Ingold, in his essay, "From trust to domination: an alternative history of human and animal relations" characterizes such a relationships (although in a global rather than specifically Siberian context) as, "a highly successful attempt to draw the animals in the hunters' environment into the familiar ambit of social being, and establish a working basis for mutuality and coexistence."[85]

[85] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69.

By sharp contrast, the Russian expansion into Siberia brought a new vision of reindeer, what they were for, and how they were meant to used. Reindeer appear in documents about the Russian expansion, but always as implements, tools meant to be used for a purpose. In a word, this conception can be described as utilitarian. Opposite to "trust" in Ingold's dichotomy of human animal relationships is "dominance", however it is difficult to apply such a concept to the history of Siberia without further consideration as Ingold's thesis is predicated on a study of the "West" and "Western" ideas, concepts which are notoriously nebulous in the case of Russia, and considerations of which are well beyond the scope of the task at hand. Absent from the written texts are any indications of the reindeer as a spiritual animal, and the Russian attitude towards the reindeer is uniformly unyielding to being shaped by the animal. Often, reindeer are mentioned as replacements or substitutes for horses in the context of providing transit. One example, again from Herz's report on his mammoth-hunting expedition, describes a relationship with reindeer that is at once most familiar to the mind of a denizen of a society of industrialized sedentary agriculturalists and radically different from the kind of human reindeer partnerships demonstrated thus far:

> "…we harnessed reindeer only; thus we moved much more quickly than with horses, though sometimes we used to tire our wasted deer, which dragged themselves with difficulty from one feeding place to the next."[86]

In this passage we do not see a sense of reciprocity or partnership. Instead, reindeer are presented as tools to be used in service on an ends, in Herz's case moving a woolly mammoth. Similar mentions of reindeer appear throughout the documentation surrounding the Russian expansion into Siberia, always as tools, but never as partners.

[86] Ukraintseva, *Mammoths and the Environment*, 74.

This is not to say that Chukchi, Evenk, or Sámi herders did not use the reindeer for transportation, etc. The difference lies in the absence of reciprocity from the Russian conception of human relationships with reindeer. From the Russian perspective, the reindeer did not require anything to be given back: they were simply there to be used. There was no need to herd reindeer or follow them, only to harness them for immediate use. This difference in envisioned relationships with reindeer stems from the different subjective points of view these four cultures took of the same animal. None of these views changed the fact that reindeer preferred to migrate, ate lichens in the winter and mushrooms in the summer, had four hooves and specialized insular fur, or any of the other objective aspects of reindeer existence. The only differences stemmed from human perception.

By considering the role of the reindeer in herding cultures we can see a situation in which the rhythm of human history is synchronized with a feature of the physical environment. The past is generally narrated linearly, moving from one point to another in a line with an implied destination. However, by considering human relationships with animals or other aspects of the natural world, it is possible to complicate the idea of a linear past with the possibility of a cyclical one. This is not at all to unnecessarily exoticize reindeer herding cultures or to propose a crude environmental determinism. Indeed, cycles of human life in relation to the natural world are relatively obvious in countless other contexts, including any society built on agriculture as Mark Fiege point out in his chapter, "King Cotton", examining multitude of effects the lifecycle of the cotton plant had on the slave plantations in the American south.[87] It should, however, serve as an example of how the consideration of animals, such as the reindeer, in the human story can inform the shapes of our narratives of the past.

[87] Mark Fiege, "King Cotton: The Cotton Plant and Southern Slavery," in *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press 2012)* 100-138.

The cycles of the reindeer herding story have persisted for thousands of years. However, beginning in about 1582 these cycles began to enter a prolonged period of decay as the Russian Empire began its long push to the Pacific.

PART IV: THE SABLE

A sable is a small weasel-like creature whose range extends over much of northern Eurasia. The desire in Europe for the fur of the sable, more than any other animal, or even any other single factor, drove the agents of the tsar eastward. Letters and reports to the Tsar are dominated by the logistics and pitfalls of collecting the fur of sables and returning it to Europe for sale. By tracing the quest of the Tsar's agents for sable fur, it is possible to examine the immense process of conquering Siberia. At the heart of this conquest was a conception of the natural world that sharply contrasts either Herz's view of the mammoth or Evenk views of reindeer. The conquest of Siberia, and also its subsequent exploitation by a succession of Russian regimes, was based on a conception of the natural world as a source of wealth.

Siberian sable (*Martes zibellina*) occupy a nearly 7 million square kilometer stretch of Siberia. They are fiercely territorial animals, but the size of territory they require varies. In richer pine forests up to 1.5 animals can dwell in a 1 square kilometer area, but in the more predominant larch forests of the eastern taiga a single animal may require as much as 25 square kilometers. This wide range meant that a hunter would have to travel a great distance, checking regularly for animal sign, to acquire furs in any quantity.[88]

Before continuing the story of the conquest of Siberia, it is important to discuss the terminology used to refer to the agents of the imperial center. The word "Russians" does not neatly apply to those who set about the conquest, particularly at the outset of the conquest in the mid 16th century. The late 17th century Croatian Jesuit Yuri Krizhanich described those who

[88] John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 534.

initially undertook the conquest as "Muscovites and Cossacks"[89]. It is only in an ahistorical sense that we could look backwards to this time and call those who began the conquest, "Russians", although this term does begin to appear in with frequency in reports back to Moscow by the mid-17th century.[90] For ease of comprehension , "Russians" will be used to depict the general advance of Europeans into Siberia, while the term "Cossack" will be used in more specific cases to denote the agents of that advance. Unfortunately, this word "Cossack" itself is difficult to pin down. Basil Dymitryshin's definition is perhaps the most temporally appropriate: "Cossack: A word of Tatar origin which denotes a free frontiersman…in the period of Russian expansion to the Pacific, the term was applied to a military man or a hired worker."[91] This definition is functional, but incomplete. Cossacks have slowly morphed from a legal status to a profession to a military society to an ethnicity, and have few, if any, analogous counterparts that makes an external understanding of cossackdom easier. Perhaps the best, if somewhat fanciful, analogy would be to say that if, in three hundred years, "cowboy" came to denote an ethnicity in the United States, it might approximate the status of Cossacks in the course of Russian history. A full accounting of the Cossacks, who they were, and where they came from, is beyond the scope of a study of the sable in Russian history. What is important to know about them is that they were exclusively male and were the only means the Tsars had of exerting their will in the most remote areas of Siberia.

[89] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Excerpts from 'A History of Siberia, or, Information about the Tsardoms of Siberia, the Coast of the Arctic and Eastern Oceans; the Nomadic Kalmyks; and Accounts of Certain Deceptions Practiced by Jewelers, Smelters, and Alchemists...' by the Croatian Jesuit Iurii Krizhanich." 432.
[90] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Voevodas of Iakutsk, Vasilii Pushkin and Kiril Suponev, to Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich Concerning the Number of Servitors in Iakutsk Ostrog and in the Zimov'es, and Concerning Ivan Erastov's Discovery of the Anadyr (Pogycha) River.", 220.
[91] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Introduction.", lxxvi.

Around 1582 when the Cossack Yermak Timofeevich successfully caused the collapse of the Khanate of Sibir[92] the sable quickly rose in importance as a means of paying tribute to the Tsar. The Khanate, which had been a network of alliances and tribute agreements descended from the Mongol Golden Hoard, saw its power fade quickly following the conquest, thereby removing almost all centralized opposition to Russian incursion into Siberia with a few notable exceptions: the Chukchi of the Chukotka peninsula in the Russian far east, who have already been discussed, and the Chinese Empire which opposed incursion into its northern territory. [93] [94] This lack of centralized opposition allowed small bands of Cossacks to begin carrying out the orders of the Tsar to extract a fur tax, dubbed the *iasak*, from the newly subjugated indigenous population of Siberia. This was accomplished though the establishment of forts known as *ostrogi* (singular, *ostrog*) progressively further eastward.[95] One letter from a pair of Cossack commanders, Vasily Pushkin and Kiril Suponev, in the Siberian ostrog of Irkutsk in 1646 provides an illustrative instance of Cossack expansion into Siberia.

> "Many natives of various tribes live along the Pogycha and its tributaries, and they do not pay iasak to anyone…Russians have never before been on this river, Sire…the sables are very dark and fine. Sire, the servitors ask that you give them money and provisions…and that you grant them the right to go for two years to that river, to those people who do not pay iasak, and collect iasak from them and bring them under your Tsarist mighty hand."[96]

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[92] Paul Bushkovitch, *A Concise History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) 37-53.
[93] Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1994) 17.
[94] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Instructions from Tsar Peter Alekseevich (The Great) to the Voevoda of Eniseisk, Bogdan Danilovich Glebov, Prohibiting Merchants and All Other Persons from Traveling to or Privately Trading with China.", 13-15.
[95] Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 13.
[96] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Voevodas of Iakutsk, Vasilii Pushkin and Kiril Suponev, to Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich Concerning the Number of Servitors in Iakutsk Ostrog and in the Zimov'es, and Concerning Ivan Erastov's Discovery of the Anadyr (Pogycha) River.", 220.

The scale of the operation should not be overestimated. In that same letter, the author bemoaned that he had only fifty servitors in the ostrog, and he warns repeatedly that the ostrog was in constant danger of being overwhelmed. This was an island of foreigners in a vast sea of dense yet long-inhabited forest, doing whatever they could to acquire sable fur. From time to time a servitor from the ostrog would strike off to bring back reports of other people who were not currently paying iasak to the Tsar. A letter would travel to Moscow and, if the Tsar of the time was amenable, trade supplies and monies would be sent so that a new ostrog could be established from which the process would be completed, as it played out in Vasily Pushkin and Kiril Suponev's request. This process produced a far-flung network of poorly connected, highly isolated ostrogi across a large area of northern Asia, all of which existed for the sole purpose of extracting additional sable furs.

The tactics used to compel the delivery of the iasak were brutal.[97] A common tactic was to kidnap members of subjugated groups to hold for ransoms which were then returned to European Russia as tribute. In another report from the Irkutsk ostrog in 1652, Yerofey Khabarov wrote, "the Daur people of Princes Turoncha, Omutei, and Koourei came to us, but they halted at some distance from us in the field and refused to come near. Through their leaders they brought iasak for the sovereign, amounting to 100 sables to ensure the safety of the hostages who are with us."[98] This incident is illustrative of general practice, and allusions to hostages and hostage taking dominate reports on the state of the sable trade. After the furs were delivered, the cossacks continued to negotiate with the indigenous people, attempting to persuade them to act

[97] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Instructions from Tsar Peter Alekseevich (The Great) to the Voevoda of Eniseisk, Bogdan Danilovich Glebov, Prohibiting Merchants and All Other Persons from Traveling to or Privately Trading with China.", 18-27.
[98] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Erofei Khabarov to the Voevoda of Iakutsk Dmitrii Frantsbekov, Concerning His Expedition on the Amur River.", 277.

as guides and submit to the Tsar. Unsurprisingly, they were disinclined to acquiesce to such a request, and informed the kidnappers that they did not trust their intentions and would not assist them. What became of the hostages is not noted, but the letter ends on a desperate note. The cossacks describe that they were unable to provision themselves for the winter, having pillaged and alienated all nearby people. They had also been informed that an army from China numbering ten thousand and armed with cannons and firearms was marching northwards to avenge a raid they had previously conducted on the Amur River. Further still, a party of twenty people they had requested to set up another ostrog to which they could have potentially retreated had failed to materialize, leaving them in dire straits. The report concluded that twenty men had been killed, and fifty-eight wounded in the misadventure.[99] All of this death, destruction, deprivation and pain yielded the furs of five hundred and sixty sables, two garments made of thirty sables each, and some assorted fox furs. It is again important not to overestimate the scale of the Russian operation in Siberia, while also acknowledging its effectiveness in regard to its goals. The Russian operations in the ostrogi were never more than a few dozen men here and there, scattered across a vast landscape in the early centuries of the conquest. They exercised a modicum of control over the scattered populations of Siberia by taking hostages and holding them in exchange for ransom, which they returned to Moscow as a "tax". It is a telling linguistic detail that in modern Russian language, the word ostrog communicates the concept of a prison.

However, even the most brutal coercive tactics could not make more sable where they had all been killed. As sables were hunted with greater and greater intensity they became harder and harder to find. In a 1664 petition to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich from Iakut iasak payers says, amid pleas to be relieved of the burden of the tax, "We travel to faroff places now, in every

[99] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Erofei Khabarov to the Voevoda of Iakutsk Dmitrii Frantsbekov, Concerning His Expedition on the Amur River.", 278.

direction, because all the animals have been killed or driven away, and it is only with great difficulty and great hardship that we can trap."[100] This scarcity prompted larger and more frequent excursions further and further east, driving the rapid expansion of the Russian Empire across northern Asia largely unopposed.

While the indigenous method of hunting sable was usually to shoot the animal with an arrow, the high demand for furs by Russian agents introduced trapping to the hunt. Hunters would build dozens of trap pits throughout the sable's range and trap check them regularly. These trap pits would keep the animals alive until the hunter arrived at the pit and bludgeoned it to death, ensuring the fur would not spoil. The animal was then skinned, and its pelt smoked to preserve it.[101] These spread of these new methods proved unprecedentedly devastating to Siberian sable populations, driving down populations to the point where hunters found it difficult to find more.

While Russian agents encountered relatively little organized resistance to their fur-extraction operations, they also faced a chronic, existential threat of rebellion from tribes that began to doubt their promises of ever releasing hostages safely. A report from Fedor Pushkin, a commander at the Okhotsk ostrog in 1666, wrote a horrified missive to the sovereign describing a rebellion that was taking place. Having heard that a rebellion was brewing among the iasak-paying people around the ostrog, he sent fifty of the roughly eighty servitors out to demand payment. Fedor heard later from a native informant that all fifty had been killed, and that a leader had taken up the cause of driving the Russians away and planned to free the nearly sixty prisoners who were being held at the ostrog under the guard of only thirty servitors, who were

[100] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Three Petitions to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich from Iakut Natives Protesting Inequitable and Ruinous Iasak Impositions.", 350-351.
[101] John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 535.

described as being "sick and scurrvied".[102] Presumably, these had been the servitors too sick or weak to undertake the expedition outside the ostrog.

The Russian fur-extraction operation, then, was fragile and opportunistic. Whenever it encountered any degree of organized resistance, it failed, and no Tsar seemed to have either the strength or the will to dispatch a Russian army to such far-flung locals throughout the period. Those native people who steered clear of the ostrogi were likely able to continue living as they had with relatively little interference from Russians. This practice of using distance to avoid imperialism became steadily more difficult over time as ostrogi continued to spread, largely along Siberia's abundant riverways.

[102] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Fedor Pushkin Concerning a Tungus Uprising near Okhotsk.", 382-383.

Figure 2. Map of the Russian Claims to the North Pacific, 1844.[103] Even into the 19th century, cartographic knowledge of large areas in Alaska and Siberia was limited to the coasts and rivers, shown by the large blank spaces on the map.

One of the regions in which these roving cossacks found organized resistance to their efforts was in northern China. A full description of the internal dynamics of China during the mid-17th century is beyond the scope of this study, but an account of the Chinese interaction with cossacks is relevant. The components which matter to the story of the cossack quest for sable fur was the somewhat predictable result when the cossacks began behaving just as they had done in every other region between the Ob' and the Amur. When a band of cossacks attempted to cross the Amur River in 1650 in search of more populations from which they could extract iasak, they

[103] "Karta Ledovitago Moria i Vostochnago Okeana," image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed April 7, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g9780.mf000026/.

first began by attempting to take hostages from anyone they could find. However, they lamented that they had been identified as threats, and that all of the areas they came to had been fortified against them.[104] Even as they commented on the many riches they observed, their report still listed sable fur among the most valuable items in the region. The conclusions of the report stated that, if the tsar would send six-thousand soldiers, they might be able to conquer the region. The tsar did no such thing, and the following year a band of around one-hundred and fifty cossacks and volunteers set off with an unknown, but substantial, number of indigenous allies to begin a campaign of conquest. They killed hundreds, sacked towns, and looted sable furs from the wreckage.

Yerofey Khabarov, the voevoda of the ostrog which led the attack, then reported that he tortured an informant with hot irons, who confirmed to him that they did not intend to pay iasak to the Tsar, and that an army of ten-thousand was marking northward to counteract the incursion. What follows in the report is among the best exercises in controlling a narrative to minimize the appearance of failure ever recorded. The cossacks beat a bloody retreat but managed to carry a large number of furs with them by hand, despite being perilously close to starvation and having to subsist on "mushrooms, grass, berries, and roots"[105] before they finally returned to Russian territory and delivered the furs to be returned to the Tsar in late 1657. The misadventure led to years of diplomacy between the Chinese Empire and the Tsar, who eventually struck an agreement to prevent further cossack incursion into northern China. The entire murderous incident was fueled from start to finish by a desire for the shimmering furs of a weasel-like creature of which it ultimately yielded around 720. Assuming Khabarov's report of six-hundred

[104] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Voevoda of Iakutsk, Dmitrii Frantsbekov, to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich Concerning Erofei Khabarov's Expeditions to the Amur River.", 251.
[105] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "The Report of the Military Ataman Artemii Filipov Concerning a Chinese Attack against a Russian Detatchment on the Amur River.", 347.

and sixty-one indigenous allied men and forty-five Cossacks being killed in the encounter is accurate, then the cossacks ultimately managed a transaction which traded approximately one human life for every sable fur extracted, at least during this particular expedition.[106]

Cossacks encountered a second firm pocket of resistance on the Chukotka peninsula, where the Chukchi remained steadfast in their resistance to Russian incursion. Early Cossacks traded firearms to Chukchi, which enabled them to more effectively resist subsequent incursion. Certain embittered Russian agents would take this lesson with them to Alaska and deny the sale of firearms to the subsequent authorities they encountered to avoid creating further resistance.[107] Had the Chukotka peninsula been rich in sable, Cossacks may have forced the issue of Chukchi resistance more readily, but by all accounts the available sable was depleted quickly on the peninsula, leaving Cossacks with little motivation to continue to press the Chukchi when there were easier targets to be found elsewhere. In 1655 two Russian servitors, Semen Dezhnev and Nikita Semenov, wrote concerning their explorations on the Chukotka peninsula: "The Anadyr River is not forested, so there are few sables there…everything else is tundra and rock." In this same missive, there is yet another account of badly outnumbered Russians engaging in hostile activity while seeking sable: "they are populous and have large yurts. Up to ten families live in one yurt. We were very few; there were only twelve of us in all. In the attack Pavel was wounded by an arrow but he shot a man in the head with his gun." Without sables, there was little motivation to keep the Russians at war with the powerful Chukchi, and furthermore it seems unlikely that the empire would have possessed the ability to launch a successful war on the peninsula, so far from the imperial center, even if it had possessed the motivation to do so.

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[106] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Erofei Khabarov to the Voevoda of Iakutsk Dmitrii Frantsbekov, Concerning His Expedition on the Amur River.", 262.
[107] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 70.

Much later, Soviet ethnographers would describe the attempts to tax the Chukchi after this point with laughable euphemism:

> "the tax was paid on a voluntary basis, and its payment was encouraged by presents. The treasury assigned certain sums to the local authorities every year for the purchase of various goods (tobacco, kettles, knives). These were brought to the fair and distributed to Chukchi who voluntarily paid tribute in furs."[108]

Of course, since "voluntary taxation" in exchange for "presents" is, in fewer words, "trade", it is readily apparent that Chukchi resistance to Russian forces seeking sable was ultimately effective.

A further human toll of the quest for sables is apparent in several cossack reports concerning the taking of native women into slavery. A business record from Prikaz of one such sale contains evidence that the practice was widespread. The report tells the story of Lavruk, a woman who, after her master died during a trip to another ostrog turned herself over to the authorities. She reported a story of how she had been sold for a price of ten sables and ten fox pelts.[109] The writer of the document, who referred to himself as Kevani, then purchased her for a price of seven sables, four sable backs, and ten fox pelts. He also paid two sable pelts for an interpreter. The document is short and contains no commentary that would suggest that this practice was in any way out of the ordinary. It appears that, in the cultures of exchange which grew around the ostrogi, human life was measured in sable fur. The conditions of such slavery are not well documented, but Lavruk is reported to have said that she had children, and according to the document turned herself in to the fort. It seems likely that she was without any other

[108] V.V. Antropova and V.G. Kuznetsova, "The Chukchi," in *The Peoples of Siberia*, ed. M.G. Levin and L.P. Potapov, trans. Stephen P. Dunn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 804.
[109] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Testimony Regarding the Sale of Native Women into Slavery.", 429.

options for survival, and so was forced to seek a new arrangement as a slave to another in order to guarantee herself the means of existence. There is no mention in the exchange of what became of the children she mentioned.

There exists an entire genre of documents from the ostrogi which consists of pleas from iasak-payers across Siberia begging for a reprieve from the burdens of paying the tax. The hunters of the tax reported having to sell wives and children to afford payment of the tax, and Lavruk's story provides a degree of illustration of how this might have occurred, with furs exchanged for slaves, some of which might have been immediately returned to pay iasak. Indeed, sable pelts functioned as a currency, and also as a medium to extract nearly all other wealth from the region. On 1652 petition read,

> "We are assessed for both ourselves and our dead father. This added burdensome iasak obligation for our dead father's past arrears has been imposed on us, your orphans…Our father was assigned to pay your Great Sovereign's iasak of eighteen sable pelts per year, but he could not pay all of that because he was so poor. Now we, your orphans have no way to pay this enormous extra iasak for you Great Sovereign, because, Sovereign, we, your orphans, do not have any livestock. All the livestock we had, Sovereign, we sold in order to pay your iasak."[110]

From this plea we can see that the practices used to extract *iasak* did not limit themselves to extracting furs, but also turned sable fur into a means of exchange by which Russians were able to draw many forms of wealth from the communities they settled in. Wealth was also extracted in the form of livestock and slaves, and so it should not be imagined that the ostrogi were simple fur-trading camps. Rather, they became centers of economic activity in which the

[110] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Three Petitions to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich from Iakut Natives Protesting Inequitable and Ruinous Iasak Impositions.", 348.

full scope of the humanity in the regions in which they were established was crushed, contorted, and bled for a trickle of sable fur that found its way back to the European market.

The profit that entered the budding Russian state from its sale of Siberian furs to the European market was critical. During the heyday of the fur trade in the mid-17th century nearly 100,000 rubles per year entered the state's coffers, constituting between 7 and 10 percent of the state's income until the 1680's when the revenues began a decline.[111]

Still, all of the coercion, violence, and hostages in the world could not create more sable where they had all been killed. Exact numbers of sables trapped, skinned, and exported from Siberia are not available, and a reconstruction of that number would be a great advantage to research on the fur trade in early-modern Siberia. However, even without this number, or an estimate of what proportion of sables were killed as part of the hunt, documents from the period make it clear that the large-scale killing of sables was making it difficult to find more. As early as 1681 an ostrog on the Olenek River reported that "the iasak collection has received a severe setback because there are no animals to be hunted. The Zhigansk Iakuts found themselves in this predicament about a year ago, because the animals will not cross the Olenek."[112] Hunting sable to extinction was quickly becoming a problem, and the disinclination of the imperial center to reduce the iasak led to the further extortion of the people over whom the ostrogi were able to exercise authority. In this way, a weasel-like animal became the driver of both enormous imperial expansion and mercantile wealth extraction, but also incalculable human suffering, slavery, starvation, and death.

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[111] John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 530-531.

[112] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Syn Boiarskii Zakhar Shikeev to the Voevoda of Iakutsk, Ivan Prikonskii, Concerning Famine on the Olenek River, Extinction of Fur-Bearning Animals, and the Difficulty of Collecting Iasak.", 448.

The valuable fur of the sable, as well as the less valuable fur of other animals such as bear and ermine, drove the expansion of the Russian Empire across northern Asia, highlighting a theme in the history of the Russian Empire in Siberia: the conception of the natural world as a source of wealth. By considering how the view of the sable as a source of wealth by the Russians differed from the Evenk conception of the reindeer, we can see that differing conceptions of animals undergird the imperial process in northern Asia. Understanding differences in past human conceptions of animals and other aspects natural world can reveal new degrees of nuance to important historical processes, such as the rise of imperialism.

PART V: THE BOWHEAD WHALE

The bowhead whale is among the largest and longest-living mammals in existence and was heavily harvested from the northern Pacific and western Arctic Oceans throughout the 19th century.[113] Whales were a valuable resource for the many indigenous groups that inhabit the northern Pacific rim and a lucrative global commodity at the time of the Russian Empire's attempt to expand into the Pacific. However, the Russian whaling operations remained largely stunted and never succeeded in achieving the commercial success Russian traders were able to find with sable fur and, later, sea otter pelts. Only in the late 1850s with the total dissolution of the Russian Empire in North America nearly at hand, did the Russian America Company begin to list barrels of whale oil and whiskers (baleen) among its products in its annual reports.[114]

During the period of Russian expansion at the onset of the 19th century when a global market for whale products was thriving, it was English and American whaling crews (some of them flying a Russian flag under a scheme apparently masterminded by Peter Ivanovich Rikord for a share of profits[115]), not Russian, that extracted whales from the sea in large numbers despite their late arrivals in the region in 1848 when Russian operations had existed in the Pacific for over a century. This points to an important question: why, when so many other animals were successfully commoditized by the Russian Empire, were whales not turned into a product in the same fashion as sable pelts? Finding the answers to this question can shed light on the limitations of the empire.

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[113] John R. Bockstoce, *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1986), 21.
[114] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Information on Russian American Company Shipping, Coal Mining and Whaling, from the Company's 1858 Report.", 505-513.
[115] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Dispatch from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Chief Administrator Matvei I. Muravev, Regarding Whaling.", 329-330.

In this section I argue that, of the four factors which contributed to the success of the Russian fur trade, three were either absent or ineffective in the Pacific and so influenced the failure of the Russian Pacific enterprise to commodify whales. The four factors which contributed to Russian success in the fur trade were the availability of indigenous knowledge and labor to extract resources; an unimpeded, if laborious, means to transport extracted wealth back to the imperial center; the absence of competition and large-scale resistance; and a willing cadre fortune-seeking Russians with conceptions of fur-bearing animals as sources of wealth to conduct the operations. While indigenous knowledge concerning whaling was plentiful and Russia enjoyed nearly a century and a half between 1715 and 1848 in which it had no European competition in whaling, it faced significant indigenous resistance to its operations in the Pacific. This problem was exacerbated by an ineffective maritime apparatus, the incompatibility of the wealth-seeking fur traders with the enterprise of whaling and an overall lack of conception of whales as a potential source of wealth. This led to the ultimate failure of the Russian Empire to exploit the animal. Each of these factors, and how they applied to Russian whaling or lack thereof from 1715 until the dissolution of the North American colonies in 1867 are discussed below in turn.

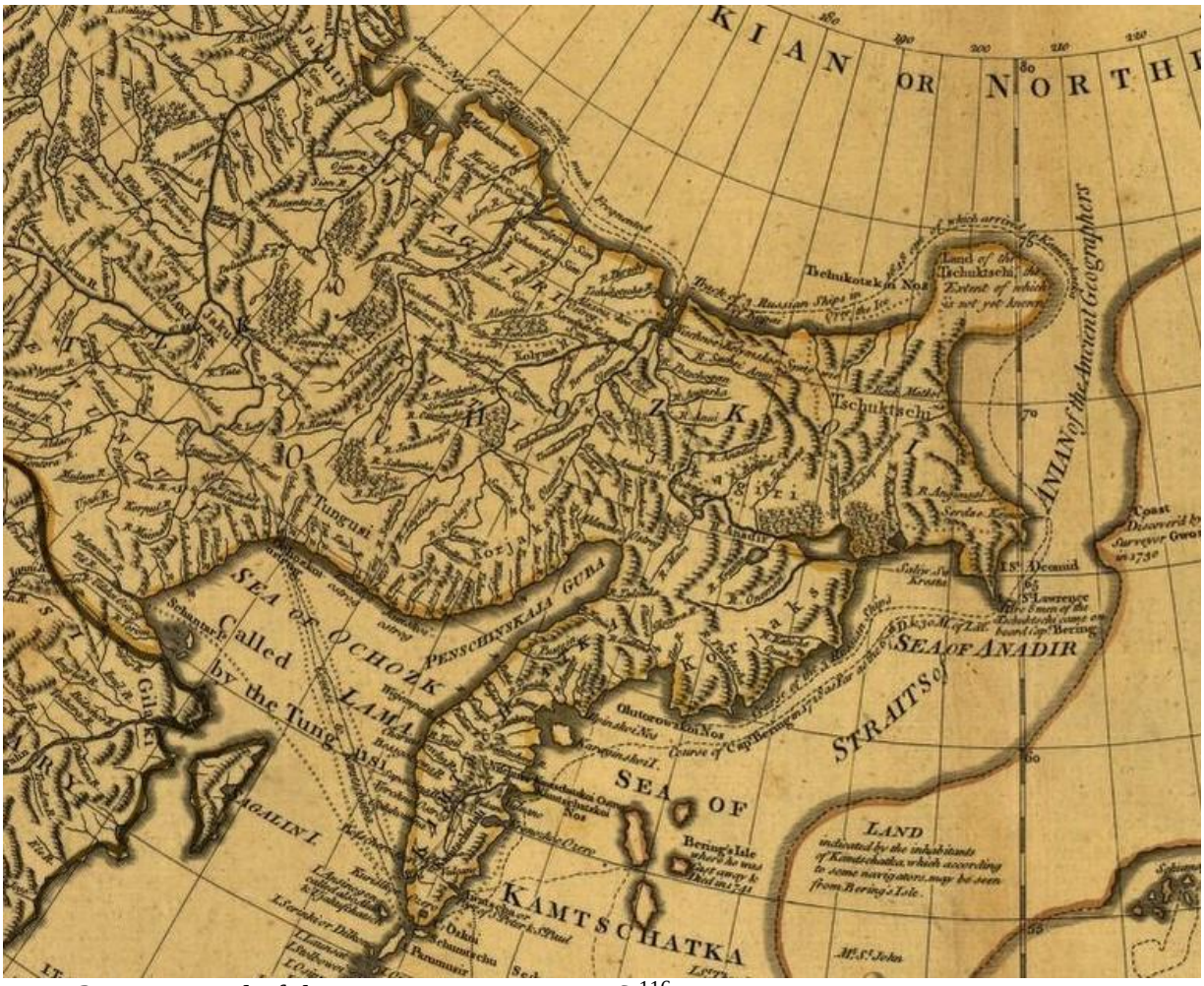

Figure 3. Map Detail of the Russian Far East, 1776.[116]

In order to understand whaling practices, it is first necessary to understand the Bowhead whale itself. Bowhead whales are large, but slow-moving and timid creatures that can reach up to one hundred metric tons in weight and up to 17 meters in length. Stocks of Bowhead whales were common around the global Arctic, and it was the stock in eastern Arctic Ocean that became the target for industrial whaling. By 1530, numerous Basque ships from the Bay of Biscay were making the voyage into Arctic waters to harvest Bowheads. The reason lay in the thick layer of blubber hidden in the flesh of these enormous animals, and in the tough yet flexible baleen the

[116] "The Russian Discoveries from the Map Published by the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg.," image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed April 7, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7321s.mf000006/.

animals used to feed on plankton swarms. While whales had been harvested in small numbers for food for thousands of years, the advent of industrial whaling for blubber which could be reduced into fuel oil ignited a harvest of unprecedented size. This harvest eventually drove the eastern-Arctic stock of Bowhead whales to extinction.[117]

There are at least two major schools of indigenous whaling practices in the northern Pacific and Western arctic, and there exists among those two schools a great deal of variety between the many diverse people living in these regions. Only a few can reasonably be handled here, but they will stand to make the point that there existed amply available indigenous whaling knowledge which could have been exploited by Russians had they sought to do so. The two major schools of indigenous whaling were poison dart whaling and open-boat harpoon whaling, and each of these necessitated its own social structures around the practice.[118] Whalers in this new industry often discarded the meat of the whales they caught, demonstrating an important transition in the way whale flesh was viewed: it went from being viewed as a source of food, to a source of profit.

In open-boat harpoon whaling large groups were needed to undertake the dangerous tasks of harpooning whales with float devices, such as inflated bladders, to stop the whale from diving. This style of whaling was practiced widely around the northern Pacific rim from Siberia to southern Alaska, and large specialized whaling villages sprang up in these areas between 800 and 1400 AD located around the predictable routes of bowhead whale migration. Hunting of this kind required a large amount of communal effort to both chase and kill the animal as well as to recover and butcher it. [119]

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[117] Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*, 576-585.
[118] Aron Crowell, "Koniag Eskimo Poisoned-Dart Whaling," in *Anthropology of the North Pacific Rim*, ed. William Fitzhugh and Valerie Chaussonnet (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 217.
[119] Crowell, "Koniag Eskimo Poisoned-Dart Whaling.", 219.

By contrast, on Kodiak Island in the Aleutian island chain practiced poison dart whaling, which required only a few whalers in kayaks to approach an animal and spear it before allowing it to die and drift to shore, sometimes days later. Due to the small number of people needed to execute this task, Koniag whalers were specialists, and belonged to a secretive cult that was not otherwise part of the island power structure. The poison used to hunt such whales was aconitum, made from the root of the monkshood plant, and as it was not potent enough to kill a whale outright it was often sufficient to paralyze a tail or a flipper so that the animal would die of drowning or exhaustion, unable to right itself without the use of these appendages.[120]

Similar to reindeer in the Siberian interior, whales and whaling also had a spiritual nature, and there was a deeply important religious element to the Koniag whale hunt. Black's assessment of Koniag whaling hats and regional oral testimonies led her to the conclusion that the whale hunt was not simply a hunt, but a war act.[121] Koniag hunters would don hats and masks which evoked killer whales as a specific symbol of the ability to kill whales before going on the hunt, and the tradition of using human fat to accompany the poison on spears pervaded the archipelago. These spiritual whale battles, coupled with the use of human corpses in the whaling process made whalers unclean, and they were often shunned as outcasts during the whaling season.[122]

These examples demonstrate that there was an ample amount of indigenous knowledge which Russian traders could have drawn upon if they had desired. It is easy to imagine a small number of armed Russians setting up a fort on the Pacific coast, taking prisoners, and demanding that whales be brought in large quantities as was done with sables. Yet, this did not happen, and

[120] Crowell, "Koniag Eskimo Poisoned-Dart Whaling.", 223.
[121] Lydia T. Black, "Deciphering Aleut/Koniag Iconography," in *Anthropology of the North Pacific Rim*, ed. William Fitzhugh and Valerie Chaussonnet (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 139.
[122] Crowell, "Koniag Eskimo Poisoned-Dart Whaling.", 234.

the indigenous knowledge of whaling was not immediately coopted. The reasons for Russian failure in the whaling industry must then have had some other cause.

While human resistance was also major factor in preventing Russian success in whaling, the challenges posed by physical barriers were also significant. The second factor which figured in Russian success in Siberia was largely absent in the Russian endeavors in the Pacific: a regular means of transit. Although arduous and time-consuming, the overland journey across Siberia was manageable for anyone with the will and time to attempt the journey, and it allowed extracted goods such as furs and walrus ivory to flow slowly but steadily back to European Russia. When this enterprise reached eastern seas, it ran into a problem that gunpower proved unable to solve or coerce. From the start Russian attempts to sail into the Pacific were fraught with farce and folly. From the shabby seaport of Okhost, located on the Sea of Okhost adjacent to the Pacific Ocean and shielded from it by the imposing arm of the Kamchatka peninsula Russians struggled to build ships that were seaworthy enough to handle the notoriously rough seas of the North Pacific. Describing the reputation of the conditions of navigation of the nearby sea, a contemporary commentator wrote, "the risk of trade is very great, as shipwrecks are common in the sea of Kamchatka, which is full of rocks and very tempestuous."[123] Nevertheless, an ongoing and increasingly apparent dearth of furs from mainland Siberia drove an increasingly desperate number of fur traders to seek new avenues for acquisition and new people from whom they could coerce furs. There were always just enough to crew the perilous, uninformed journeys in the Pacific.

Further still, the vast ambitions of Peter the Great entered the stage and money and orders, if not the necessary means, soon began flowing to the eastern port. Peter was, among his

[123] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 10.

many other ambitions, an amateur geographer, and sought to understand the scope and shape of Russia's eastern holdings. To pursue these interests, he issued orders seeking knowledgeable people from outside Russia to lead a series of expeditions, writing "If such navigators cannot be found in the [Russian] Navy, then immediately write to Holland via the Admiralty Post and immediately request two men who are familiar with the sea north towards Japan".[124]

The first result of such request was a motley crew of builders who set out for Okhost in 1714 to build a boat and attempt to solve the problem of access to the Kamchatka peninsula, from which Russian traders had been cut off from land routes by Chukchi resistance to their expansion into the region. The small party of ship builders were unable to launch a ship until 1716, but did manage to sail across the sea of Okhost to Kamchatka. However, they encountered rough water and reportedly barely survived the ordeal.[125] Later, Peter's requests yelded the tempestuous Danish sailor Vitus Bering, whose name now identifies the strait between Chukotka and Alaska. Bering undertook two expeditions, one in 1725 and a second in 1733, and while both accomplished a number of Peter's goals in learning about the contours of Kamchatka and the islands east of the peninsula, they were also both fraught with hardship. Scurvy was rampant, and eventually Bering died of the hardships.[126] Later voyages were not exempt from these difficulties. A 1762 account of a voyage to the Fox Islands also describes a scarcity of provisions and scurvy.[127] Ultimately, although the Russian Empire continually improved its naval and maritime capacity in the Pacific over the course of its time there from 1715-1867, the

[124] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Instructions from Tsar Peter Alekseevich to the Admiralty College Regarding the Selection of Officers for the First Kamchatka [First Bering] Expedition, 1725-1730.", 66-67.

[125] Glynn Barratt, *Russia in Pacific Waters 1715-1825* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981), 4-7.

[126] L.H. Neatby, *Discovery in Russian and Siberian Waters* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1973), 85-88.

[127] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 95.

ability to successfully transport goods to and from colonies and encampments in North America remained stunted. So, while even transit struggled to develop, the complexity of European-style whaling expeditions remained well outside the reach of the Russian Empire in the Pacific until it once again sought foreign assistance and established a joint venture with Finnish sailors in the early 1850s.

The third factor the Russians relied on to exploit Siberia was a lack of organized resistance, and the readiness of the imperial will to cave to any opposition as soon as it was encountered has already been demonstrated. Truly, this was an empire of least resistance. By contrast the Russians encountered a great deal of resistance to their presence almost as soon as they arrived on most of the North Pacific islands.

In 1762, a Russian expedition of roughly thirty men set out for the island of Unalaska. When they arrived they divided into three groups, two parties never returned, and the third, comprised of only four men, was attacked and driven to hide first in a hut for three days and then in a cave for five weeks before assembling a small boat and rowing for ten days to a neighboring island.[128] In another vicious battle on Unalaska the following year, a party of Russians numbering roughly thirty-eight was attacked and besieged for over a month. An account of the battle reads:

> "Four days and nights they never ceased annoying the Russians with their darts; two of the later were killed, and the survivors were nearly exhausted by continuous fatigue. Upon the fifth day the islanders took post in a neighboring cavern, where they continued to watch the Russians closely the whole month, that none of the later durst venture fifty

[128] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 80-88.

paces from the dwelling…during which time they suffered greatly from want of provision, and still more from scurvy."[129]

The Russians responded to this show of resistance with uncharacteristic conviction and launched a brutal, systemic attack on the island, burning eighteen villages and inflicting gruesome punishments on those they caught, with one trader experimenting to see how many bodies lined up it would take to stop a musket ball.[130] Russians continued to meet resistance as they island-hopped across the Pacific, but did not falter in their quest for furs, and indeed still managed to acquire many. An account from the Fox Islands in 1763 reads, "From that time until their departure a daily intercourse was carried on with the islanders, who brought all sorts of fox and sea-otter skins, and received in exchange a stipulated number of beads. Some were even persuaded to pay a tribute of skins, for which receipts were given."[131]

In 1771 the journal of Captain Petr Kuzmich Krenitsyn reported that fifteen men had been killed on an undisclosed island because they had been hunting in groups that were too small. This concern demonstrates that the Russian fur traders knew that they were unpopular, and that traveling outside of a large group in the region was dangerous. Thanks to a passage in the same journal, we can get an idea as to the origin of the Russian's reputation: "When they reach these [more distant] islands, they put into bays where they can spend the winter. They beach their vessels and try to take hostages, children from the island or nearby islands. If they cannot do this peacefully, they will use force."[132] How it was possible to take hostages

[129] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 80-88.
[130] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 32-33.
[131] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 114.
[132] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "An Extract from the Journals of Captain Petr Kuzmich and Captain Lieutenant Mikhail Dmitrievich Levashev Describing Russian Hunting Techniques and Natives Encountered in the Aleutian Islands during Their Voyages Commencing in 1764.", 245.

"peacefully" can only be guessed at, but it is likely that the murderous intent the Russians encountered wherever they ventured in the North Pacific was at least in part due to their reputation for kidnapping children. While the act of taking hostages is rarely explicitly described in accounts from the Aleutian Islands, hostages are frequently mentioned after they had been taken, suggesting that the cossacks and fur traders had simply continued the same tactics they had pursued so successfully in Siberia. Since we know the people of the Aleutians traveled and communicated between islands frequently, it is also likely that this reputation preceded them, leading the indigenous inhabitants to respond reasonably to the arrival of well-known kidnappers and murderers in their homelands.

These accounts demonstrate two points in regard to indigenous resistance to the Russians. First, that it was a factor in limiting the extent to which Russian agents could extract wealth from the environment. It also demonstrates that, although Russians were among whaling cultures, the desire for furs, although now of fox and sea otter rather than sable, remained intact despite the resistance they met, and so we cannot place resistance as the primary factor which prevented Russian agents from successfully commodifying whales. Further still, it appears that the Russians had a difficult time in coercing the residents of the Aleutian Islands to trap for them during the initial decades of contact, suggesting that they would have had an equally difficult time coercing them to deliver whales.

While maritime inexperience and indigenous resistance were certainly factors in the failure to exploit the whales of the North Pacific and western Arctic, they were not the definitive factors. As has already been mentioned, there were many capable indigenous whalers whom Russian agents could have exploited if they truly desired whale products, and with many casualties and large amounts of bloodshed, they were eventually able to extract furs from the

North Pacific. The biggest factor appears to have been a discrepancy in how whales were viewed. Whales and whale products show up relatively little in Russian documents of the Pacific. Although naturalists who accompanied many of these seafaring expeditions often made observations of the various "great beasts of the sea"[133] they observed, they barely seem to register as anything other than natural curiosity or food for starving sailors. While there is little evidence of Russian servitors of any kind eating whale, there is ample evidence that they harvested and ate "sea cow" a variety of now extinct large North Pacific manatee.[134] None of the references to eating sea cow give any hint that the eaters thought of selling it. Perhaps the taste was not satisfactory.

The view Russians had of whales in the North Pacific was a significant factor in their failure to commodify the animal. Therefore, it is important to be more specific about who was doing this viewing rather than to rely on the generic term "Russians". The furs collected from the Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific were largely extracted through trade by independent bands of *promyshlenniki* (singular, *promyshlennik*), Russian fur traders. These traders often worked in close contact to cossacks, those still working in the official employ of the Empire and so also submitting regular reports to the large regional ostrogi. These traders appear to have either founded their own companies or joined as servitors or hired labors to expeditions launched by cossacks.[135] Private trade was praised, by government officials and seen as the vanguard by which Russian exploration and conquest had happened in the past and would continue into the future. In 1758 Fedor I. Soimonov, the Governor of Siberia, wrote glowingly of his endorsement

[133] Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-10.
[134] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report by Cossack Savin T. Ponomarev and the Promyshlennik Stepan G. Glotov Concerning Their Discovery of New Islands in the Aleutian Chain.", 215.
[135] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report by Cossack Savin T. Ponomarev and the Promyshlennik Stepan G. Glotov Concerning Their Discovery of New Islands in the Aleutian Chain.", 214.

of a proposed private hunting expedition into the Pacific: "It is very encouraging that merchants and promyshlenniki themselves are looking for routes to remote places, without any government loss, just as merchants and promyshlenniki sought Kamchatka and other previously unknown places."[136]

How these traders profited from these ventures varied. For example, during a 1732 expedition around Kamchatka a servitor revealed that the money from their sale of a haul of walrus teeth to a local monk was divided evenly among the members of the expedition.[137] By contrast, a voyage in the early 1760s reported that they were bringing local people under the suzerainty of the Russian Empire and paying wages to members of the expedition.[138] A 1780 account described that, after one tenth of the collected skins had been delivered to a customs official, the remaining skins were split among participants for sale as they would. For the cited expedition, this amounted to "twenty sea otters, fifteen black and brown foxes, ten red foxes, three sea otter tails, and such a portion was sold upon the spot from 800-1000 rubles."[139] Still, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, there was ample trading in furs occurring off the record, which posed an ongoing problem for trading companies which sought to operate within the realms of official commerce. The reports from these expeditions describe an almost single-minded focus on fur-bearing animals, and whales are not even mentioned in mid-eighteenth century reports of the wealth to be found among the Aleutian Islands. A 1758 expedition report from the cossack Savin T. Ponomarev and the *promyshlennik* Stepan G. Glotov

[136] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Fedor I, Soimonov, Governor of Siberia, to the Governing Senate, Concerning Preparations for an Expedition to the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, under the Command of Ivan Bechevin, a Merchant from Irkutsk.", 202.
[137] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Statement from the Cossack Ilia Shurikhin Concerning the Voyage of the SV. Gavriil to the Shores of Bolshaia Zemlia [America] in 1732.", 132.
[138] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report by Cossack Savin T. Ponomarev and the Promyshlennik Stepan G. Glotov Concerning Their Discovery of New Islands in the Aleutian Chain.", 220.
[139] William Coxe, *Account of Russian Discoveries*, March of America Facsimile Series 40 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 11.

reported the animals they found all along the 29 islands they visited and surveyed, listing fox, bear, sea lion, sea otter, reindeer, marten, wild boar, and seals, but no whales.[140] Whales were simply not seen as a source of wealth. Bowhead whales continued to only be harvested in small numbers by indigenous populations until the arrival of American whalers in 1848.

The *promyshlenniki* who set off into Pacific and committed atrocities did so to acquire furs for which they had ready buyers and from which they could hope to become wealthy. The mechanisms and metaphysics of such a phrase as "market forces" is well beyond the scope of this project but is offered here only as an explanation for why the *promyshlenniki* remained so driven by acquiring furs and not whales: they could sell furs to become personally enriched, but they could not do so with whales. According to a dispatch from the main administration of the Russian American Company as late as 1820, "You may also note that whaling is not profitable now because if the oil is destined only for the people of Kamchatka or Okhotsk, the population is so small that a very small amount of oil is needed and the cost is so great that the price will be higher than anywhere else in the world, and there is nowhere else it can be sold."[141] With no markets in which to sell whale products, there was no desire to harvest them.

In a strange juxtaposition to the two schools of indigenous whaling, killing large whales was a job for a large number of people, and yielded benefits for a large community. This was not in line with the means or motivations of the *promyshlenniki,* whose boats were flimsy and likely too small to be able to transport so much whale, and who tended to sell their wares as individuals, rather than as one large haul as a whale would have necessitated. As for the school

[140] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report by Cossack Savin T. Ponomarev and the Promyshlennik Stepan G. Glotov Concerning Their Discovery of New Islands in the Aleutian Chain.", 220-222.
[141] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Grigorii I. Shelikhov to Ivan V. Iakobii, Governor General of Irkutsk, Requesting Government Aid to Stabilize and Expand the Alaskan Settlements and Enterprises.", 329.

of whaling in which a small group did the hunting with poison and human fat, the whales this school hunted were small and lacked baleen, and so were of little commercial value. The value of a commodity was in the eye of the *promyshlennik*, and in this case the value of whale barely registered when placed against the possibility of furs.

Four factors allowed the Russian Empire to extract wealth from Siberia: the availability of indigenous knowledge; lack of competition and large-scale resistance; a means of transporting that wealth from the point of extraction to the imperial center via an overland network; and a willing cadre fortune-seeking Russians to conduct the operations. As has been demonstrated, there was ample indigenous knowledge available regarding the harvest of whales, so the failure to extract whales as wealth must lie in the remaining three factors. Although the Russian Empire promptly caved to European competition in the North Pacific as soon as it arrived, it had a period in which it was the only European power in the North Pacific. However, the Russians agents had great difficulty overcoming indigenous resistance in part due to their insistence on kidnapping and hostage-taking to support their activities. Even as this resistance was slowly crushed, the empire dithered in regard to the whole oceanic endeavor and neglected to target whaling as an industry. In terms of effective means of transit, the Russian Empire chronically struggled to navigate the Pacific effectively during the entire course of its overseas project, and did so in part because its imperial model, which had so far functioned well with minimal changes for centuries, found itself at a loss when it reached the shores of the Pacific. Finally, the *promyshlenniki* who served as the empire's agents in the region simply did not view whales as a valuable commodity, and so did not act on their harvest.

It should not be forgotten that eventually successful whaling operations by the United States, Britain, Japan, and others eventually did devastate the populations of whales in the North

Pacific with 6,400 harvested and 1,200 mortally wounded but unrecovered during the year 1850 alone.[142] By the time commercial harvests ended in 1921, fewer than 3,000 Bowhead whales are estimated to have survived the commodification process.[143] However, of greater concern here is the Russian Empire's early failure to commodify whales. Indeed, the whale is nearly absent from the Russian aspects of the story, and only surfaces (or breaches, if one prefers it) in the narrative among the people indigenous to the area who harvested whales for food, among maritime competitors with the Russian Empire, and in the final, desperate stages of Russia's North American colonies in which all manner of industries from salt fish to coal to ice were attempted to keep the colonies stable and afloat. However, this absence of an obviously valuable animal from the story of an empire built on the extraction of wealth from the physical environment deserves some attention, despite its status as negative space.

By considering the story of the bowhead whale in contrast to the story of the sable, an unsuccessfully commodified animal alongside a commodified one, we can see how the dynamics of the history of a human process, such as imperialism, cause clear echoes in natural history. We can also see yet another example of how the human view of an animal, a purely subjective experience, can have objective consequences for human and animal alike. A final note regarding the consequences for the whales themselves bears mentioning. Bowheads whales are now expected to have a lifespan that can extend over 200 years,[144] meaning that whales which "came of age" at around 25 during the peak of commercial whaling in the North Pacific in the mid nineteenth century would only now be entering their twilight decades. Ryan Jones has suggested

[142] John R. Bockstoce, *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 9.
[143] NOAA Fisheries, "Bowhead Whale | NOAA Fisheries," January 23, 2019, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/bowhead-whale.
[144] NOAA Fisheries, "Bowhead Whale | NOAA Fisheries," January 23, 2019, https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/bowhead-whale.

that whale histories can contribute to our understanding of oceanic history[145], and in some strange way these animals with centuries of scars etched in their flesh may someday reveal their secrets to the historian and serve as a window into a previously unseen corner of the past.

[145] Ryan Tucker Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 349–77, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.2.349.

PART VI: THE SEA OTTER

When the Russian Empire reached the Pacific Ocean it began a truncated, mishap-prone process of attempting to colonize what is today Alaska. Indeed, to call the Russian presence in the Pacific an "empire" is more a matter of convention than a reflection of reality, as even at the peak of the project fewer than 900 Russians resided in the largest of the colonies and only a handful of the other colonies, which were more akin to glorified trading posts, existed at all. Of these Russians, few ever intended to remain in the colonies permanently and most intended to make a fortune in fur trading to repay their debts before returning to mainland Siberia. From roughly the beginning of the 19th century Russian fur traders and aspiring businesspeople attempted to establish stable colonies along the northwest coast of North America. They suffered from disease and famine[146], and their small encampments, the largest of which never housed more than 900 Russians according Russian American Company reports[147], existed at the mercy of the established civilizations of the area: the Tlingit, the Haida, and their neighbors. So unable was the Russian Empire to provide for these far-flung colonies that King Kamehameha of Hawaii had to donate shipments of food to the colony of Novo Arkhangel'sk during its early winters.[148] All of these hardships coupled with a wavering imperial will to maintain such colonies prompts us to ask: why did so many Russians volunteer for such an endeavor? The answer lies in the sea otter.

[146] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Confidential Report from Nikolai P. Rezanov to Minister of Commerce Nikolai P. Rumiantsev, Concerning Trade and Other Relations between Russian America, Spanish California, and Hawaii.", 112-148.

[147] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Information on Russian American Company Shipping, Coal Mining and Whaling, from the Company's 1858 Report.", 505-513.

[148] Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture, 1741-1867* (London : Cresset Press, 1966), 99.

This section establishes thematic continuity between the imperial mechanisms and techniques used by Russian agents to extract sable fur from Siberia and those used to extract sea otter furs from the Alaskan colonies. The most important point of thematic continuity was the close adherence to a biome in which a valued fur-bearing animal was available.

There has been considerable debate concerning whether or not the Russian American colonies constituted a separate or a distinct project from the conquest and colonization of Siberia. Vinkovetsky, in his book *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire 1804-1876*, argues that there were more differences than similarities between the Russian American cases. Specifically, that the sporadic voyages from St. Petersburg to the Alaskan colonies paradoxically put these far-flung outposts closer to St. Petersburg in terms of travel time than some of the empire's terrestrial holdings in eastern Siberia, and that these voyages were instrumental in redefining both the way the colony thought of itself and the way the imperial center viewed its empire to be increasingly modern.[149] By contrast, Jones has argued that the changes to "imperial consciousness" occurred much earlier during the empire's initial forays into the Pacific.[150] Both of these theses reflect a focus on the effect of the Pacific colonies on the imperial center in St. Petersburg. By contrast, this section is not concerned with how the imperial center viewed the colonies, in part because this view was mercurial and as inconsistent as the whims of the monarchs at the head of the center who were in most cases largely incapable or enforcing their wills in the colonies anyway. Instead, this section will focus on the colonies themselves as they existed on the ground or, perhaps more accurately, on the sea, and how closely these realities mirror those experienced during the fur trade in Siberia. Regardless of

[149] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.
[150] Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

how the imperial center might have viewed these colonies, the reality was that they were sustained only by the availability of fur-bearing sea otters, and the contours of the empire tightly hugged the contours of the sea otter's range. Apart from the aspirations of some colony administrators, the realities of everyday life were governed by the processes of acquiring sea otter fur. The story of the sea-otter harvest by Russian fur traders united the pieces of two continents around the ecology of one animal.

The extraction of sea otter furs and products from the North Pacific was the *raison d'être* for the continued Russian presence in the North Pacific. While there were numerous floundering attempts to make the colonies produce all manner of goods, furs proved to be the only product they were able to extract in any profitable capacity. It is therefore important to understand some basic features of sea otter ecology in order to understand the Russian project to exploit its fur.

The northern sea otter was the variety most widely harvested by the Russian fur traders. It is in fact a large, aquatic weasel, hailing from the same family, *musteloidea*, as the sable. Sea otters are the smallest marine mammals, but the largest specimens can weight up to one hundred pounds and measure up to six feet in length. By comparison to the diminutive sable, sea otters offered a large amount of fur for each animal. Unlike most other sea mammals, sea otters lack a thick layer of blubber to insulate them from the cold, a fact compensated for by a specially adapted pelt. This fur is especially dense, having more hair follicles per square inch than any other mammal, making it an ideal material for keeping relatively hairless human beings warm in the chilly North Pacific waters. The Russian harvest of sea otters proved to be ruthlessly efficient, eradicating sea otters almost as thoroughly as it had eradicated the sable from large swathes of Siberia. The pre-harvest population is estimated at 150,000-300,000 animals. While

the exact population of the animals that survived the harvest is unknown, it is thought that only few hundred survived in isolated pockets.[151]

Sea otters are not animals prone to traveling in the open ocean and tend to inhabit shallow coastal waters where they can forage for food on the seabed, such as clams, crabs, sea urchins and octopuses. Their dives are limited to a depth of only about 250 feet, preventing them from venturing too far from the shores of the islands they congregate around.[152] The limitation of their range to coastal waters produced a decisive impact on the Russians, who also stuck close to the shores, both for reasons of poor navigational skills and the desire for the fur of an animals which also seldom ventured far out to sea. Before the advent of the Russian American Company in 1799 which brought a few slightly more seaworthy vessels to bear, the fur traders in the North Pacific used *shitiki*, or "sewn vessels" to traverse the ocean. These crafts were made of green timber and lashed together with whatever material was at hand. Essentially, these were inland rivercraft adapted roughly for seafaring with the addition of a higher bow and sides.[153] Perhaps unsurprisingly those sailing them were hesitant to take them into the open ocean and so, like the otters, they stuck close to shore.

While sable fur had been normally shipped back to European Russia for sale, Russian operators in the Pacific world found ready markets for both sea otter pelts and other goods in Chinese ports with the lifting of Imperial trade restrictions.[154] The Russian trade with China had a rough start, in large part due to the bandit-like tactics employed by the cossacks in the Amur region provoking large-scale military retaliation as highlighted in the section concerning sables.

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[151] "Wildlife Biologue: Northern Sea Otter in Alaska" (United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 2014), https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/pdf/factsheet_wildlife_biologue.pdf.
[152] "Wildlife Biologue: Northern Sea Otter in Alaska" (United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 2014), https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/pdf/factsheet_wildlife_biologue.pdf.
[153] Glynn Barratt, *Russia in Pacific Waters 1715-1825* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981), 45.
[154] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "The Renewal of the Charter of the Russian American Company for Twenty Years: Rights and Privileges.", 450-451.

In 1706 Peter the Great responded to the incursion of fur traders into Chinese territory and the resulting skirmishes by issuing an edict forbidding all trade between the empires. "Anyone who [disobeys this order and]" he wrote, "goes to China with trade goods shall be condemned to death without mercy."[155] This tension was not resolved for almost a quarter of a century until the "Illyrian" Count Ambassador Sava Vladislavich succeeded in negotiating the Treaty of Kiakhta in 1727 in the name of Catherine I. This treaty provided that, "following the establishment of peace, it was resolved with the Russian Ambassador, the Illyrian Count Sava Vladislavich, that trade between the two Empires will be free and the number of merchants, as in the past, is not to exceed 200. These merchants may travel to Peking once every three years."[156] While this development opened terrestrial trade with China, traders in the Pacific needed to seek further arrangements from the imperial center in order to allow them to put into port in China, a process which took years due to the slow logistics of sending messages across the expanse of Siberia. By 1787 traders were becoming anxious that initial British explorations into the North Pacific were going to capture profits from them. The notable merchant Grigory Shelikhov wrote a frantic letter to the Governor of Siberia in Irkutsk on the shores of Lake Baikal to allow him to begin sending boats of furs to China for trade:

> "I make bold to suggest that in reference to the stalemate in trade in Kiakhta, it might be a good thing if Your Excellency were to send one or two ships to under some appropriate flags, carrying Kamchatka natives and furs from Okhotsk or Kamchatka to trade in Chinese ports. I have evidence that the English are moving around Kamchatka, and along the coast of America in the North Pacific, and that they anticipate considerable

[155] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Instructions from Tsar Peter Alekseevich (the Great) to the Voevoda of Eniseisk, Bogdan Danilovich Glebov, Prohibiting Merchants and All Other Persons from Traveling or Privatly Trading with China.", 13.
[156] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "The Treaty of Kiakhta.", 72.

profits…This is evidence that benefits due to the Russian throne and its subjects are being siphoned off by people from other nations who are in no way proximate to those lands, and have not the slightest right in those seas."[157]

The governor must have granted this request, because in 1787 his report to Catherine the Great proclaimed, "The profits Russian merchants make in trading in those places with the Chinese is evident from the enrichment of the traders whose revenues the Treasury has acquired. The goods they obtain from the Chinese have become necessities, almost indispensable to Your Empire. In return, they give the Chinese superfluous [Russian] goods."[158] The Chinese market became a ready destination for the fur traders in the Pacific as it was significantly closer to the source of extraction than St. Petersburg, and trade in sea otter and other animal pelts to China continued to flourish over the course late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The steady value of sea otters and the close proximity of Chinese markets relative to European Russia kept a small but steady flow of fortune-seeking Russians setting out for the North Pacific islands and Alaska. In 1799 this endeavor was consecrated by the formation of the Russian American Company, the first such company of its kind in Russia.[159] Shortly after its incorporation, it began to ship furs in large quantities beginning in 1801. However, the lack of sufficient navigational prowess continued to depress the operation, and of the first two shipments one sank with a cargo of furs valued at 22,000 rubles and five traders and the other was lost at sea. In the same report which communicated these losses to Alexander I, it was noted that Baranov, the chief administrator of the Russian American Company in Alaska, was sitting on

[157] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from Grigorii I. Shelikhov to Ivan V. Iakobii, Governor General of Irkutsk, Requesting Government Aid to Stabilize and Expand the Alaskan Settlements and Enterprises.", 331-332.
[158] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "Report From Governor General Ivan V. Iakobii to Empress Catherine II Concerning Activities of the Golikov-Shelikhov on Islands in the North Pacific.", 348.
[159] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

494,634 rubles worth of furs that he had no means to ship to market that year.[160] Indeed, even several years later in 1804 an Imperial Russian Navy Lieutenant reported that there were only three seaworthy ships in the whole Pacific, the *Mariia,* the *Elizaveta,* and the *Aleksandr Nevskii*.[161] With the navy in such a state and such a prevalent history of shipwrecks, it is surprising that so many continued to volunteer for the voyages.

By 1813, the Company was still struggling to turn a profit, and a pleading letter from the Company's main administration to the Russian Minister of Internal affairs offered a litany of excuses. Among these, that a frigate laden with 90 promyshlenniki, and half a million rubles worth of supplies intended to strengthen the colonies had been wrecked. Further, the company's flagship colony at Sitka had been attacked and burnt to the ground by the Tlingit on whose land it had been built, and in the process lost 4,000 sea otter pelts, valued at nearly 400,000 rubles.[162] For the next five years, the Russians were unable to successfully harvest any otters, and so turned to fur seals instead. Unfortunately, they apparently had no idea how to harvest fur seals, and ended up killing almost 900,000 and ruining almost all of them to the extent that they could not be sold at any price.[163] There was a reason these Russian company men struggled to produce much fur on their own, and it was the same reason few cossacks in the early years of the Siberian conquest gathered their own sable: they relied heavily on indigenous labor to complete the task.

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[160] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company in Irkutsk to the Emperor Alexander I Concerning The Fur Trade in the North Pacific Ocean.", 24.
[161] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report by Imperial Russian Navy Lieutenant Nikoli A. Khvostov Concerning the Condition of the Ships of the Russian American Company.", 48.
[162] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Osip P. Kozodavlev, Minister of Internal Affairs, Concerning Losses Due to Shipwreck and Ruined Peltry.", 209-210.
[163] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Report from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Osip P. Kozodavlev, Minister of Internal Affairs, Concerning Losses Due to Shipwreck and Ruined Peltry.", 209-210.

In the case of sea otters, the Russians relied primarily on indigenous knowledge to extract them, as sea otters are notoriously difficult to catch. For the most part, the Company relied on Aleut prisoners to perform the labor.[164] These laborers came from previous Russian conquests in the Aleutian Islands and would become fixtures of the North American colonies in later documents. It should be noted, however, that these Aleut workers were not allowed to leave. The main administration of the Russian American Company wrote regarding these requests that the elderly should be allowed to return, but the young must stay unless they were able to secure replacements. In the words of the administration, "who will be their replacements? Are there not healthy young Aleuts in the Fox Island group? Explain to them that they have an obligation to serve the Company because they are Russian subjects, and the work of the work of the company is inseparable from the work of the Fatherland."[165]

The labor of these specialized hunters was indispensable, and as had been done all across Siberia this specialized labor was extracted by force. In the Siberian experience this had been accomplished through the establishment of ostrogi and the taking of hostages. In the Pacific, the same tactic of taking hostages was applied while operating in the Aleutian Islands, but by the time the Russian operation reached the Alaskan mainland was no longer necessary. Simply having the indigenous labor so far from home that they could not hope to return without assistance proved to be motivation enough to labor. Thematically this imperial tactic united Alaskan experience with that of Itelmen, Yakut, and other iasak paying people of Siberia, including those on the Pacific coast. While there were, of course, considerable differences

[164] Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 84-85.
[165] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "A Dispatch from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Cheif Administrator Matvei I Muravev Regarding Aleutes Who Wish to Be Returned to Their Own Islands from St. Paul and St. George.", 337-338.

between the maritime and continental experiences, the model of labor exploitation of a large indigenous population by a small but ruthless group of Russian traders remained remarkably similar. Further, just as the sable began to diminish wherever the iasak was collected, the sea otter did as well. As early as 1801 Baronov's subordinates were reporting to him that God appeared to have willed the sea otters away, and they doubted that they would return.[166]

Just as the Russian imperial enterprise had always done, when one area became deprived of furs, it began to explore for more. In 1820 instructions from the Main Administration of the Company to the colonies dictated that they should continue with the exploration of Alaska, that the expedition, "may very well discover new sources for hunting furbearing animals, which would relieve the present shortage in all hunting areas."[167] This quest for additional sources of furs would lead to a complex and ongoing conflict between the Russians, who held only a few small forts on offshore islands, and the mainland empire of the Tlingit, by whom the Russians had already been soundly defeated in 1802, which saw their largest regional fort burned to the ground. The Tlingit had, up to that point, remained fiercely independent and highly wary of the Russian arrivals, and two years later when a Russian navy ship, the *Neva* arrived at Sitka the captain, Yuri F. Lisiansky summed up the situation: "To my dismay I learned that the inhabitants of Sitka had congregated in one place and had resolved to do everything in their power to prevent the Russians from reoccupying their settlement."[168] The Tlingit had good reason for wariness: they could see what had become the Aleuts under Russian control. Ioann Veniaminov, a leader in the movement to proselytize to the Tlingit, bemoaned of the group,

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[166] Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific's Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 88-89.
[167] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "An Official Report from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Emperor Alexander I.", 322-323.
[168] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "From the Journal of Captain Iurii F. Lisianskii, Aboard the Ship Neva during His 1803-1806 Circumnavigation.", 75.

"they think that with the acceptance of Christianity they will come under the same influence and coercion of the Russians as the Aleuts, whom they consider hardly more than slaves or involuntary servants to the Russians."[169] The driving force behind all of this violence was access to the fur of an animal that had become viewed as a commodity, just as the sable had been during the conquest of Asiatic Siberia. In the same journal in which he recounts the reconquest of Sitka from the Tlingit in 1805, Lisiansky described the value of everything they found not in terms of rubles, but in terms of how many sea otter furs they could be exchanged for, describing a piece of Tlingit copper work as being worth "20-30 sea otter pelts"[170].

The fact that the story of the sea otter so closely mirrors the story of the sable raises the important question of whether the history of Siberia should stop at the Pacific Ocean. The story of the sea otter, which was harvested in much the same fashion along the entirety of the northern Pacific rim, suggests a continuity of themes across the Pacific and onto the shores of Alaska. The extractive and violent quality of the fur trade, the coercion of labor, and the dependency on specialized indigenous labor all tied the regions together thematically. It also prompts us to consider other evidence of continuity between the regions: the similarity of the physical environment, wildlife, including the range of the sea otter from Kamchatka to Alaska, and perhaps most importantly the pre-existing regular exchange of human cultures across the Bering Strait, from the ancient Arctic seafaring civilizations of prehistory through the Cold War[171]. The continuity of the story of the sea otter harvest from Kamchatka to Alaska serves as a reminder that modern political boundaries are often a poor basis for establishing regions for historical

[169] Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132.
[170] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan, and Vaughan, "From the Journal of Captain Iurii F. Lisianskii, Aboard the Ship Neva during His 1803-1806 Circumnavigation.", 79.
[171] John McCannon, *A History of the Arctic: Nature, Exploration and Exploitation* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

scrutiny: the history of Siberia is incomplete without Alaska, and so the history of North America is incomplete without the history of Siberia. By considering animals such as the sea otter, which eschew human boundaries by their very nature, we can be reminded that the continuity of our past also eschews the borders we might seek to draw around them. As Jones puts it, "marine organisms have shown a hitherto unstoppable propensity to violate such boundaries or to shift their limits dramatically".[172] The boundaries and extent of the Russian presence in the Pacific was not determined by any post-facto continental division or visions of a North America that was separate from Siberia. It instead adhered to the boundaries dictated by the range of, and availability of methods to harvest, the sea otter.

The Russian vision of the sea otter as a commodity for trade was a driving factor behind the animal's near extinction in Pacific waters. Like the sable, it was nearly eradicated entirely and driven away from large swaths of its former range to satisfy demands for its fur in Chinese and European markets. The subjective views people take of animals and the values, monetary or otherwise, that are projected onto flesh and bone and fur have objective consequences both for the human beings who perform on the premises set by these values, and for the animals onto which the values are projected.

[172] Ryan Tucker Jones, "Running into Whales: The History of the North Pacific from below the Waves," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 349–77, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.2.349.

CONCLUSION

The process of considering how animals fit into historical narratives can provide a variety of insights into well-studied historical processes. Animals, and our views of animals, inform our concept of value, of nature, and our place in the physiological processes that make up the world we inhabit. They call into question the shapes of the stories we tell about ourselves, be they linear, cyclical, or something stranger. They can complicate our sense of place by transgressing established borders and remind us that the human story is not the first to play out upon this stage. The history of Siberia is rich in animals, of which the implications of only six are briefly considered here. Our pasts are intimately tied to the pasts of the other species with which we share the world in ways we are only beginning to understand, and the consideration of the histories of these other species will serve only to expand our study of our own past.

The story of human and animal interactions in Siberia was shaped by conflicting visions of what animals and their bodies were for. The pre-imperial visions of the examined Siberian animals were incredibly diverse, ranging from a protector/provider relationship with reindeer to a warlike relationship between spiritual combatants in the case of the Bowhead whale. Although these pre-imperial views came from people spanning millions of square kilometers in vastly different physical environments, they differed sharply from the view of animals as commodities that would emerge during the Russian expansion into Siberia. This view of animals as commodities had immediately observable effects wherever it went, driving both the sable and sea otter to the brink of extinction in clear contrasts to pre-imperial hunting practices which, while effective, had never killed animals at such an unprecedented scale. In some cases, such as the that of the Bowhead whale, the absence of a view of the whale as a commodity by Russian seafarers saved it from the global whale hunt for nearly a century before other European powers

arrived in the North Pacific, bringing the conception of the whale as a commodity with them. All of these views of animals existed solely in the minds of those who observed them, but the consequences of these views played out their conflicts in the realities of life in Siberia.

There is a great deal of work left to be done on many of the questions raised within this thesis. To begin with, there are only six animals presented here, of the hundreds which could have been chosen. Foxes and fur seals both had substantial roles to play, as did horses. Bears show up now and again in strange ways as both animals for entertainment and figures in Slavic folklore, and the bones of woolly rhinoceros littered the same rivers in which the cossacks piloted their shallow boats. The seismic shift which took place as the Alaskan colonies were transferred from the control of the Russian navy to the control of the United States government could fill a book unto itself. Work on any of these subjects could all expand this work further. There is more to say on the relationships between animals and their physical environment, animals and the evolution of human ethics, and the extent to which animals were differentiated from the rest of, or integrated into, the physical environment by a variety of human perspectives.

The conception of animals as commodities was not so much negotiated as it was enforced through systemic imperial violence. The ostrogi system and the cruel mechanics of fur-extraction through hostage-taking and murder were the realties of the view of animals as a commodity encoded into the objective material realm. In the long-term history of the Russian state the establishment of ostrogi throughout Siberia would establish the germs of modern cities like Yakutsk, but also held the place of the Russian Empire's claim to the regions of Siberia most remote from the imperial center with only a handful of sickly but ruthless servitors until the twentieth century when the Soviet Union began committing large amounts of material and human resources towards establishing dominance in the region and crushed the last vestiges of

indigenous resistance. By this time fur-bearing animals were a small concern by comparison to the meat bearing potential of reindeer herds and the vast quantities of fossil fuels in the region, ushering in a new era of projecting new values onto aspects of the natural world.

Every work of environmental history must inevitably turn to and address the chronic problem of environmental determinism. The array of contrasts put forward here between two altogether human but exceptionally different generalized views of animals. Here the indigenous and the imperial, shows us clearly that it is not the animals which have shaped the human story, but the human views of these animals, what they are for, and how they should be interacted with which have done so. In the case of the mammoth, several tons of rotting flesh viewed in a particular fashion by a few particular people became a motivator of human activity. In the case of the reindeer, the animal was viewed as a partner and a long-term part of human life and death. By contrast, in the case of the sable, an animal was viewed as a commodity to be exploited, and through its exploitation Russia began to build an empire of fur. In the case of the bowhead whale, unsuccessful early attempts to commodify the animal illustrates the difficulty the Russians had in realizing their vision of a Russian Empire in the Pacific. In the case of the sea otter, yet another animal was viewed as a commodity, and from this view the contours of an imperial process delineated themselves. Finally, in the case of Raven, an entirely different view of the natural world manifested from divergent views of regional fauna.

While it is necessary to place distance between an argument and environmental determinism, it is also important to ensure that any argument concerning the environment does not entirely exclude the role the environment did play in shaping events. The commodification of the sable, for example, would have been impossible without the presence of the sable, and the strange reverence Herz expressed for the mammoth he dug out of the permafrost could not have

existed without the mammoth. Raven's story would make little sense in a world without pine trees and tides and shellfish, and spiritual warfare against whales could not have taken place without the whales themselves. In each of these cases it is important to recall that the animals themselves existed as real flesh, bone, and fur, and that while human action in regard to these animals is predicated on their existence in the environment, the kind or type of human action that is or is not taken is determined by the subjective human experience of those animals' physical reality.

In the case of each animal considered it is apparent that it was the subjective view, the paratext which human agents brought to the objective physical environment, which shaped the course of human history. In our current age of ever-increasing antagonism with the physical environment, perhaps the only lesson to be learned is that environment is shaped by our perceptions of it, and our perceptions are limited only by ourselves.

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