

Chapter 2 Darkness



Of all the disconcerting statements in Veniaminov’s great work on the eastern Aleutians—and there are several—few are more arresting than his assertion that elderly Unangaġ told of famous shamans who, long before the first Russians appeared, said white people would arrive from the sea and afterwards all Unangaġ would come to resemble them and would adopt their customs. These elders also reported that at the time of the Russian arrival the shamans began prophesizing that “in the east, over their islands,” they saw “a brilliant dawn or a great light” inhabited by “many people resembling the newcomers, while in the lower world, of the people whom they had seen there before, very few remained” and “impenetrable darkness set in.”¹

This darkness surrounds the earliest history of Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin.

Nick Galaktionoff joked that when people asked him where Aleuts came from, he would tell them, “Tomorrow I come from Makushin!” By “tomorrow” he meant “yesterday” or “that time before.”

“I was right,” he laughed, “‘cause I was born there.”²

And yet Nick had an older origin story that began when Unangaġ lived on the mainland, a time when ice covered much of the coastline.³ Food became scarce and animals began preying on villages, taking food and attacking people. The chiefs spoke with their people and explained that they would have to go across the ice. They covered the bottoms of their open skin boats with seal skin that still had the fur on it, and this smooth surface allowed the heavily laden boats to be towed. Several thousand people made the journey. As the days went by,

1 Black translated this phrase as “and it had become impenetrably dark there” (Veniaminov, Notes, 219). Here I use the translation Ivan Petroff made for the Tenth Census because of its rhythmic finality.

2 Nick Galaktionoff in *The Beginning of Memory*, 120.

3 Nick Galaktionoff in *The Beginning of Memory*, 119-120.

the people became hungry. Children began crying. One infant tried nursing, but his mother's breasts were empty since she had not eaten for days. They were starving on the ice. The child's mother took a small piece of seal fat, inserted a stick sideways through it, and gave it to her child who sucked on it and quieted down. Some people died on the ice, but being unable to do anything for them, they were left there.

When people were fishing off the ice in their kayaks, when it was clear weather, they sighted these islands. That's how they knew where the islands were on this side.⁴ The ice eventually started melting. This was way long time ago, Nick said, because now berries grow on these islands. The soil is volcanic and things grew up here gradually. Finally people started making themselves grass and mud houses, underground. The people were happy. The babies started growing bigger.

When family members died, they wrapped them in seal and sea lion skins and put them in a cave. As Nick was telling this story, he mentioned the burial caves on Kagamil, one of the Islands of Four Mountains, and this led to an account of a later time when the Four Mountain Islands acted as barriers between the eastern Unangañ and traditional enemies from the central and western Aleutians. A chief from Unalaska called a meeting of Unalaska and Umnak chiefs. He wanted to station lookouts on the Islands of Four Mountains to watch for intruders from the west. "Because the west people," Nick said, "they don't like us. They want to fight the war with us." Eventually, kayaks arrived from the west, but the people from those islands were starving. By positioning their oars straight up, they signaled that they had arrived unarmed. The local Unangañ rowed out and talked with them. They gave the westerners food but told them to leave. The lookout was kept for years.

Among Nick Galaktionoff's most complete accounts are those which center on Beaver Inlet. The numerous small villages in the inlet were dominated by a village at the east end, near Sedanka Pass, at a location that might very well have been *Qakiluñ* (Biorka Village). "The outside people had seals like sheep," Nick said.⁵ The chief of this village controlled hunting within the inlet from his outpost on top of Old Man Rocks, just beyond Sedanka Pass and off Egg Island. The taller of the two prominent rocks is about 100 feet high and flat-topped and would have provided both safety and a platform for keeping an eye on activities.⁶ "These inside villages had a hard time," Nick said.

They had to have permission from the main village to get their food. These villages would get together and talk about hunting. The chiefs would go to the main village and ask for food or for permission to hunt

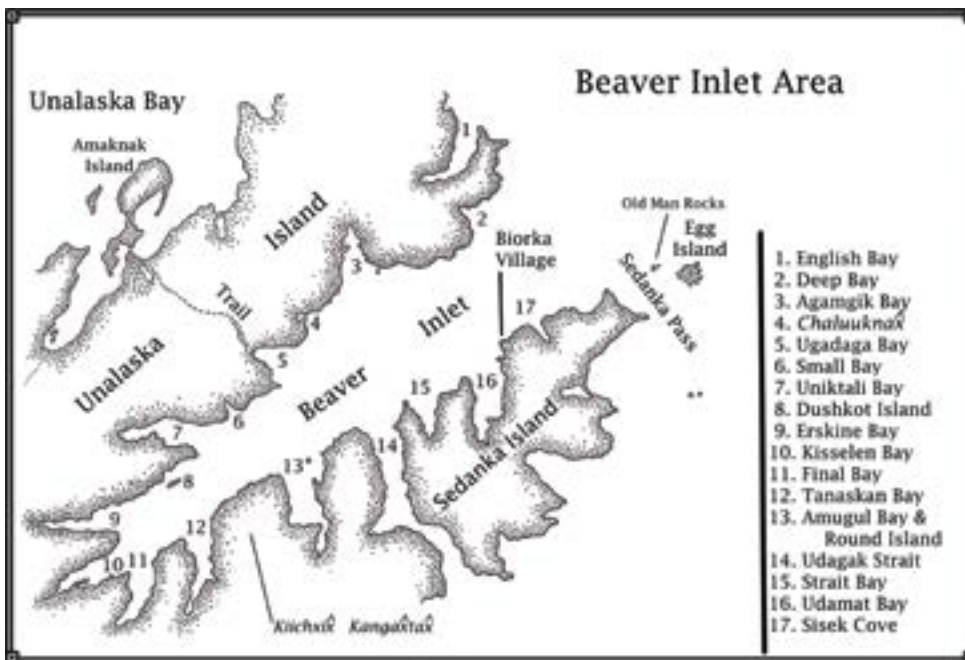
4 That is, this is how people who later lived in more westward islands had knowledge about islands that were to the east. The first Russians to arrive in the Fox Islands were told, with some detail, about islands in the east.

5 Nick Galaktionoff, interview with Ray Hudson, April 2, 1976.

6 "Stories from Andrew Makarin, related by him to Nick Galaktionoff," Hudson, ed., *Cuttlefish Two*, 54-55.

sea lion or whale. Sometimes they would get permission and sometimes they wouldn't. They would request a particular number of whales or seals. Then the leading chief would set a day when they would be allowed into the bay for hunting.⁷

Adding to the chief's power, according to Nick, was the fact that hunters traveled from as far away as Kashega to secure whales. "Whales stayed to the east," he said.⁸ Hunting for either whale or sea lion inside Beaver Inlet involved the preparation of a rope with magical powers. Once permission had been secured, the people—presumably women since making thread and cordage was a task men did not do—began braiding grass into a rope that stretched twice from the beach to the top of a mountain and back down. This mountain, between Amugul and Tanaskan bays, was called *Kiichxī Kangāxtāx̄* [has a rope on top].⁹ When finished, the rope was sufficiently long to stretch across the inlet.¹⁰



Beaver Inlet Area. Map by Ray Hudson.

When the grass rope was ready, two baidarkas [kayaks] would load up and get ready, and they would set a watch. As soon as they saw something, a sea lion or a whale, come into the bay, the two men in the baidarkas would take off and block that pass with the rope. The grass would rest on the water and nothing could pass under it.

7 "Stories from Andrew Makarin," Hudson, ed., *Cuttlefish Two*, 54-55. Note that this is an edited account and not a literal transcript.
 8 Nick Galaktionoff, interview with Ray Hudson, April 2, 1976.
 9 Bergsland, *Aleut Dictionary*, 603.
 10 See Black's discussion of this "ritual" rope in "Whaling in the Aleutians," 16-17, 21.

Nick said that he did not know where the “poisoned” grass was gathered. Bergsland, from additional information supplied by Nick, suggests that female hair was incorporated into the braid.¹¹ This would correspond to the prohibition of a woman approaching the sea during menses or during the mourning period following her husband’s death. If a woman inserted a strand of her hair into the seam of a skin boat covering, it repulsed animals and condemned the hunter to failure.

Nick described a communal whale hunt that relied on the skills of select individuals who practiced ritualistic behavior. “After the pass was blocked, the chiefs would go around and find the best hunters because they couldn’t afford to miss getting the animal,” he said.

“Aleuts planting glass, obsidian, and jade darts in school of humpback whales at Akoon Island, Bering Sea, Alaska.”
H. W. Elliott, 1883.
[National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).
(Hereafter credited as NOAA.)



It might take them two or three days to finish the hunt. The hunter who speared the whale would have to cut the spear out of the animal and leave some of the meat still on the spear. He would cook the meat and fat over an open fire. The hunter would have to eat the meat first. Nobody would touch the whale until the next day to see if that guy was still all right. The reason nobody would touch it until the next day was because the people used poisoned tips for hunting the whale. You couldn’t tell who was using it or what was being used, so they let the hunter eat it first.

These small villages were like families, I think. They would come in and the chiefs would sit down and give orders for dividing the meat.... After butchering the whale, two or three days of partying followed. The second chief would take several men and return to the main chief and

11 Bergsland, Aleut Dictionary, 237.

tell him what had happened—if they got the whale or what. If they didn't get the whale, they would have to report that also. Sometimes if they failed to get the whale they would have to tell what special poisons or weapons they had used.

In Nick's account of the Russian arrival, several events are compressed into a single narrative. A chief told the people that "a different people from somewhere else" would arrive someday. And so the watch in the Islands of Four Mountains continued until, on a clear morning, a ship was sighted coming from the west. The chief sent kayaks to villages across Unalaska Island and east as far as the Peninsula, warning people. Pretty soon, people from Biorka, Akutan, Chernofski, Kashega, Makushin, and other villages arrived.

As the Russian boat approached shore, the chief sent four men to the beach, including one of the second chiefs, while other men hid. The Russian ship dropped anchor. Unangaġ had no word for anchor, so they used the word for a retrieving hook, *qayuġtan achisix*. Four Russians lowered a skiff and as it approached, one of the Unangaġ waved. There was no response. "*Tayaġ kusutuungin*," the Unangaġ said to the second chief, "Angry people." He waved again. This time a Russian, holding a rifle, waved back. After the strangers had landed, misunderstanding led to gunfire. The second chief gave the prearranged signal and the Russians were surrounded. Three were killed and one was brought to the first chief who was pleased, hoping to learn the stranger's language from him. Meanwhile, Unangaġ overpowered the sailors on board the ship, taking a large knife from one of them, but finding nothing on the ship except food. The chief told them to not eat any of the food, but to save the containers and remove the sails, ropes, guns and knives. Then the ship was filled with rocks and sunk.

That Makushin and Kashega played pivotal roles when Russians arrived in the eastern Aleutians is clear from existing reports. With Ivan Solov'ev as his foreman, Stepan Glotov brought the *Julian* to the southern tip of Umnak Island on September 1, 1759, where the vessel was greeted by spears hurled from atlatls. Two of the crew were killed, while Savin Ponomarev, the government representative aboard, and the skipper Glotov were wounded.¹² Nevertheless, Glotov exercised restraint. With the dogged persistence of the early skippers, he began hunting and exploring around Umnak and the southern end of Unalaska Island while cautiously extending friendship. "And through this kindness and friendliness and comradely attitude towards the natives," Ponomarev's 1762 report recorded, "the Russians succeeded, on the two designated islands they had explored, in bringing those natives together with all their companions under the rule of Her Most Powerful Majesty and inducing them to pay the tribute in

12 Umnak oral tradition held that Sasiman was the "name of one of two old men who killed the first Russians who came and anchored inside the reef (outside present Nikolski)." Bergsland, *Aleut Dictionary*, 342, citing field notes of Gordon H. Marsh from Afinogen K. Ermeloff and Anton Bezekoff and "Ethnological Notes on the Aleuts" by Charles I. Shade. See also Laughlin, *Aleuts*, 121, for Sasiman as one of the key participants in the attack against the Medvedev party.

furs.”¹³ When Glotov left the islands in late 1762, with over a thousand fox pelts in addition to a healthy cargo of sea otter skins, he had established temporary friendships with two chiefs on Umnak and three on Unalaska.¹⁴ Three Unalaska chiefs were named in the report, two of whom can be identified by village. Umakush was a chief of *Ikalga* (or Chernofski). Siidaḡ [Sedak or Sedan] was chief of the village at *Umsalux* or *Sedankin*, a village just south of Kashega at Sedanka Point. Ponomarev and Glotov understood that Unangaḡ were willing to become Russian citizens, to pay the tribute in furs, and to welcome Russian vessels to their shores. How little they actually understood became clear on Glotov’s next voyage.



Promyshlenniks of the Yeniseysk Governorate, Siberia collecting yasak (tribute—likely sable pelts) from the indigenous people. Painter unknown, 19th century, [The Krasnoyarsk Krai Museum](https://www.krasnoyarsk-museum.ru/).

Promyshlenniks soon arrived in the Fox Islands, creating a notoriety that became the stereotype for all Russian fur hunters: brutal, bestial, selfish, with voracious appetites for women and furs. They showed few if any of those traits that ultimately resulted in friendships and alliances in the Central and Western Aleutians a few years later. Perhaps the most brutal voyage was that of men

- 13 Andreyev, *Russian Discoveries*, 21. Originally, the iasak was a tribute or tax in furs paid to the sovereign by Siberian tribesmen. This duty was laid on Aleuts as they submitted to Russian authority and, in a sense, the success of the collection of the iasak was a reflection of the success of colonization. In 1788 Catherine II abolished iasak collection in the Aleutians and gradually the practice ceased.
- 14 For the names of the chiefs, see Andreyev, *Russian Discoveries*, 21. Makarova wrote that there were 400 Umnak people under the two chiefs and about 300 on Unalaska under the three chiefs. (Makarova, *Russians on the Pacific*, 82, note 128.)

aboard the *Gavriil* from 1760 to 1762 under the merchant Ivan Bechevin and the seaman Gavriil Pushkarev. Even though forty of the promyshlenniks from this vessel were convicted of crimes and sentenced to forced labor, their atrocities produced a prolonged and coordinated offensive attack by Unangă.

Four ill-starred vessels sailed into the eastern Aleutians the next year. Between 1763 and 1764 approximately 166 promyshlenniks died at the hands of outraged Unangă. The best known of these encounters were those involving Petr Druzhinin and his men aboard the *Sv. Zakharii i Elisaveta* at Igunok Bay, known today as Captains Bay, and Denis Medvedev and his crew on the *St. Ioann* at the southern tip of Umnak Island. The slow demise of men aboard the *Sv. Nikolai*, commanded by Luka Nasedkin in Isanotski Strait near the eastern end of Unimak Island, is less documented. The story of the fourth ship, the *Sv. Zhivotvoriashchaia Troitsa* under Ivan Korovin, provides insights into the roles played by Makushin, Chernofski, and possibly Kashega in this coordinated and pivotal encounter between Unangă and Russians.

Korovin had arrived in Makushin Bay by mid-August 1763. Until December he had surveyed the area, divided his men into hunting parties (one for Volcano Bay and one for Konets Head at the extreme southwest tip of the island), taken aboard the interpreter Kaschmak [Qasmax] who had worked earlier with Glotov, and exchanged letters with Druzhinin and Medvedev. On December 8 an Unangă woman warned of an impending attack. On the same day three men from Druzhinin's ship arrived over the mountains with news of their defeat. Soon seventy armed warriors affirmed both stories.

Unangă attacks at Captains Bay and Umnak employed similar tactics. Several bundles of choice furs, bound with tightly knotted cords, were carried to the Russian camps. Either while the Russians struggled to untie the knots or after they had set aside the knives used to loosen the bindings, Unangă struck. At Captains Bay two local men were killed before all the Russians were annihilated near the small stream where they had hoped to winter. Among the details that Alex Ermeloff told Nick Galaktionoff were these: after the Russians were killed, Unangă stormed the ship, poured flour and other provisions overboard while saving the emptied sacks, wooden boxes, knives, axes and anything made from iron. One man attempted to salvage the ship's anchor, but it wouldn't budge. Six baidarkas were used to tow the vessel into deeper water where it was destroyed.¹⁵

Druzhinin died in the first skirmish at Captains Bay. His men who were camping in small groups in nearby villages and coves were hunted out and killed. From among the men camped in Beaver Inlet, six escaped and made their way to Kalekta Bay only to discover the signs of another rout. For several months these Russians lived a precarious existence above the hills of Captains Bay, assisted by an Unangă. Eventually launching a crude baidar, Druzhinin's men skirted the

15 Nick Galaktionoff, personal conversation with Ray Hudson, August 27, 1991.

northern shore of the island and took refuge in a cave near Makushin Bay until the end of March 1764, when they were united with their countrymen aboard Korovin's vessel.

"Scene of the Conflict between Promyshlenik & Natives on the Island of Umnak & Unalaska from 1763-1765" *History of Alaska, 1730-1885* by Hubert Howe Bancroft. Repository: Loussac Library, Anchorage.



From December 1763 to the end of April, Korovin and his men rebuffed occasional attacks that confined them to the Makushin Bay area where their vessel had been beached. In late April, with the vessel now in the water, they fled under strong winds that turned on them and two days later drove the *Troitsa* ashore on the northeast side of Umnak. Torn by harsh winds and facing incessant attacks, they made their slow way south, hoping to join Medvedev's party. They arrived in late July and found all of their compatriots dead.

The Unanga attacks had been successful. People might have expected to return to lives centered on the sea. Summer had arrived with incoming salmon. There would be sea lions, seals, and sea otters to hunt. A shaman might discern through dreams the location of a beached whale. The women would harvest the long luxuriant stalks of beach grass for mats and baskets. Salmonberries and blueberries and that true berry, the moss berry, would ripen again.¹⁶ The year would provide time for women to repair or replace the intricately sewn and embroidered clothing of the village. Driftwood could again be bent into bowls and shaped into the hats that were lavishly painted. Stone, bone and ivory could

16 Referring to the mossberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Veniaminov noted, "The Aleuts pick and preserve only these berries for the winter." Notes, 25. Because the berry does not tear on picking, it can be preserved by immersion in water or oil. See also Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian-American Company*, 499, note 21.

be carved into lamps, spear points, needles, bushings for the wooden frames of the skin boats, amulets, images of the deity. Enemies would certainly come once more: Koniags from the east, marauding bands of disaffected Unangaꝯ.

Yet who should arrive again but Stepan Glotov. In July 1764 he returned to the Fox Islands on the *Sv. Andreian i Natal'ia* after having spent a difficult time at Kodiak Island. At Umnak he rescued Korovin and other surviving Russians. Then in September Ivan Solov'ev appeared at Unalaska on his own vessel, the *Sv. Petr i Pavel*. The two skippers learned first hand of the effective assaults. Previous friendships proved transient when Chief Siidaꝯ from Umsalux was apprehended by Solov'ev in late September 1764 after a brief skirmish in which four Unangaꝯ were killed. This chief had been among those whom Glotov had counted as submissive to Russia in 1762. A few days later, upon the arrival of Korovin and fearing his revenge, the chief's men unsuccessfully attempted to free him and six of them were killed. In October Solov'ev released him on the condition that he leave his son as hostage.

Near the beginning of November 1764, Solov'ev reconnoitered the shores of Makushin Bay in the vicinity where Itꝯaadaꝯ, also identified as a chief of Chernofski, and Qagumaga, the chief of Makushin, along with one hundred eighty villagers were hunting migrating fur seals.¹⁷ Winter was approaching and seal migrations were practically over. Having left their breeding grounds on northern islands (the Pribilof Islands) known to Unangaꝯ but so far hidden by fog and distance from the foreign hunters, the seals would supply villagers with food, oil, and material for clothing and tools. In late spring or early summer the fur seals would once again seek out Aleutian passes as they swam north from warmer waters. In decades to come, government officials would attempt to curb or halt the hunting of fur seals by men from Chernofski, Kashega, Makushin, and Biorka.

At the approach of winter, green had gone from all but the most protected valleys and snow had started its uneven descent down the mountains surrounding Makushin Bay. The landscape was acquiring the starkness of rock and crushed grass as Itꝯaadaꝯ and Qagumaga escorted the Russians to Makushin Village (Magusiꝯ) which had a “hot spring below the sea mark, which is only to be seen at ebb tide.”¹⁸ Later Qagumaga led Solov'ev to another village at Reese Bay, most of whose people fled at their approach. The Russians summarily appropriated this settlement, set up camp, destroyed three hundred hunting spears and ten rare bows and arrows used in war, and seemed surprised when that brave man Inghluuguzaꝯ leading over two hundred villagers returned and attacked. Nineteen Unangaꝯ were killed, including Inghluuguzaꝯ himself—“one of their

17 Whenever possible the spelling of Unangaꝯ names has been coordinated with the spelling in Bergsland's *Ancient Aleut Personal Names*.

18 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 137. Also, J. L. S., *Neue Nachrichten*, 37. Information on the 1763-1766 conflicts was also provided by Lydia T. Black in a series of lectures at Unalaska in 1985.

leaders, and the most inveterate fomentor of hostilities against the Russians.”¹⁹ In this skirmish the secondary chief Agaladok was captured and his release made conditional on surrendering his son as a hostage. And then Solov’ev had urged Agaladok to be cooperative. To be cooperative and submissive were not attributes It̄xadāx cherished, but by the end of January he had agreed with Qagumaga to increase the tribute in furs paid to Solov’ev. Shortly after that Qagumaga and other Unalaska chiefs “with a great number of their relatives” made further overtures of cooperation and friendship.

Russians called these early chiefs *toions*, extending a Kamchatkan term to cover a position known as *tukux* by the people themselves. The best description of their positions dates from the 1830s—almost sixty years later. Veniaminov characterized early Unangāx villages as generally small collections of related individuals led by paternal figures whose main duty was to keep the boundaries of the villages inviolate. As Nick Galaktionoff suggested, these small villages were like families. The chiefs were expected to work like other men, were not given dictatorial powers nor extended overt honors. Nevertheless, to insult or injure them was to invite retribution from villagers. The chief was assisted by a secondary chief and backed by elders of the village; indeed, early observers noted that whereas little deference was paid to chiefs the elders were always held in high esteem. A loose confederacy of villages sharing familial ties was headed by a paramount chief with powers analogous to village chiefs but whose leadership was essential for wars and major hunting expeditions. He received tribute from his subordinate villages and was the only leader who accumulated riches from his position. From the scant historical records it is impossible to accurately categorize leaders like It̄xadāx within this hierarchy of chiefs.

We do not know the name of the chief from Kashega. He may have been among those who made peace with the Russians. One argument for this is the fact that Solov’ev soon established his headquarters at this location. It̄xadāx, unlike other chiefs, refused to reconcile with the intruders and all winter eschewed contact with the Russians. The confederacy that had eliminated one hundred sixty Russians and destroyed their vessels was coming apart. Siidāx and Inghluuguzāx had attacked, but Inghluuguzāx was dead and Siidāx, with his son as hostage, was wavering. Qagumaga and others were attempting reconciliation with the Russians.

Winter in the Chain intensifies after January. During the months when nothing grew, the months called Earlier and Later Famine,²⁰ scurvy decimated the Russians camped at Kashega Bay. Between the middle of March and the end of May twenty men died and so many others were debilitated that only a dozen could defend themselves. From off shore, It̄xadāx surveyed the camp from his

19 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 139. J. L. S., *Neue Nachrichten*, 139. Solov’ev said Inghluuguza (was responsible for the attacks on Druzhinin and Korovin (Black lecture).

20 Bergsland, *Aleut Dictionary*, 574. Several variations exist for the names of months.

iqyaġ [kayak], always staying far enough away to avoid a direct confrontation until May 27, 1765, when he was intercepted by armed Russians and escorted to Solov'ev's presence. Although Solov'ev deduced that the chief had planned to surprise his guards and burn his vessel, he nevertheless set him free in a week with the exhortation "to desist from hostilities."²¹ To assure that the people did not attack, Solov'ev again destroyed all spears, bows and arrows, and skin boats he could find. Solov'ev saved one bow to send to St. Petersburg in 1766 as part of an ethnographic collection. This may be the only Unangaġ bow in Russian collections and one of very few in existence.²²

That summer Itġaadaġ watched the Russians regain their strength. By mid-July enough were back on their feet to enable the skipper to pilot two open boats around the northern end of the island. He entered the large complex body of water later known as Unalaska Bay. On his way, he continued his preemptive destruction of weapons and boats. Among groups of people fishing for salmon in the various streams flowing into Unalaska Bay he found the villagers from Uknadax (Hog Island) and from a village belonging to Chief Imaginak (*Umġasingan*, later Imaginee, at Morris Cove). Solov'ev continued along the shore in a northeasterly direction, passing two wide bays, until he reached the deep north-facing Kalekta Bay. Here where a stream flows across abundant clam beds on one of the few sandy beaches on Unalaska Island he was greeted by sixty men and one hundred seventy women and children.²³ Encouraged by this favorable reception, reassured by his extensive destruction of weapons, Solov'ev returned to his headquarters at Kashega and outfitted a hunting party under his foreman Gregorii Korenev. Leaving for Kalekta Bay on September 19, 1765, the Russians distributed fox traps to Itġaadaġ and Qagumaga in Makushin Bay. Itġaadaġ accepted them, perhaps knowing that those who had appeared so friendly a short time ago would now meet the Russians with hostilities. Indeed, on November 1, twenty-six Unangaġ were killed in an attack against the Russians at Kalekta.²⁴

On January 19, 1766, Chief Itġaadaġ summoned a band of warriors and launched a raid against Solov'ev. The chief and fourteen of his men were killed.²⁵ Solov'ev's response was systematic and brutal. He continued to destroy weapons and boats in villages on Unalaska and thus extinguished the people's abilities to defend or feed themselves.²⁶ It is alleged that following the burning of one fortified village he had two hundred bodies tossed into the sea and that he sank two large open boats of people traveling to visit relatives. One of the most notorious attacks conducted under Solov'ev involved people living in Beaver Inlet, very probably residents of Biorka Village. Several villages had escaped to Egg Island,

21 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 142.

22 Black, *Aleut Art*, 132.

23 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 143.

24 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 144. J. L. S., *Neue Nachrichten*, 145.

25 Coxe, *Account of the Russian Discoveries*, 145. J. L. S., *Neue Nachrichten*, 145, refers to "the perfidious Itchadak."

26 Black, "Early History," 94-95.

off Sedanka Island. Twice the Russians attacked and on their second assault they broke through. The slaughter that followed was general: men, women and children. This accusation, however, is suspect because Solov'ev left no record of traveling that far east. He sent his foreman Gregorii Korenev to Beaver Inlet and the deeds of this man may have devolved upon his skipper. Veniaminov wrote that oral tradition maintained that "Solov'ev himself did not cause as many Aleuts to perish as his companions who were on neighboring islands."²⁷ It was in the Krenitzen Islands that a promyshlennik, displeased that a girl had eaten his piece of whale meat, cut open her stomach. Another Russian, according to Veniaminov, "threw from cliffs, slashed with a knife (which he always carried with him) and used an axe handle on some unfortunate Aleuts for no other reason than for having dared to look at his mistress (who died only in 1838)."²⁸ Berkh, who attempted to clear Solov'ev's name of the horror associated with it, wrote in 1823:

Most of those guilty of murdering the Russians paid with their lives. The avengers hearing later on that the islanders, afraid of a surprise attack, had gathered three hundred strong in a fortified dwelling went there at once. The islanders began to shoot arrows from apertures, but receiving bullets in return, they decided to barricade all the openings and wait quietly for their fate. Solov'ev, seeing that this building could not be breached easily, put intestines filled with powder under it and blew these unlucky children of nature into the air. Many escaped after the explosion, but were cut down with guns and sabers.²⁹

As rival merchants sought to discredit competitors, it was advantageous to portray others as cruel and exploitative of the local population, a stance at odds with the government's policy. Thus the most notorious example of Solov'ev's cruelty—the summary and capricious execution at Kashega of nine Unangañ whom, with three others, he is accused of binding one behind the other to determine the force of a single musket shot—is probably apocryphal. Black wrote that this charge was a favorite one employed by 18th century writers.³⁰ Martin Sauer, writing in 1802, supported this accusation against Gregori Shelikhov at Kodiak.³¹ The charge against Solov'ev predates Sauer's and appears in a complaint made by Unangañ of the Unalaska District on June 7, 1789, but this is still a quarter of a century after the event was said to have happened.³²

By the time the Russian-American Company received its monopoly in 1799, the malfeasance of promyshlenniks was fixed in mythology if not in fact. Perhaps these stories of unmitigated cruelty were of some comfort to people suffering the repression of a domineering commercial firm. Veniaminov, writing over a

27 Veniaminov, Notes, 252. See also Black's footnote in Notes, 96-97, note *.

28 Veniaminov, Notes, 255.

29 Berkh, *A Chronological History*, 41.

30 Black, note *, in Veniaminov, Notes, 252.

31 Sauer, *An Account of a Geographical and Astronomical Expedition*, appendix VII, footnote.

32 Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughn, and Vaughn, *Russian Penetration*, 369.

half-century after the events of the 1760's, referred to "those dreadful times" and to the "cruel acts against the Aleuts."³³ Glotov is accused of destroying the inhabitants of Samalga Island and the Islands of Four Mountains where, on Chuginadak, he reportedly killed the men and left the women to starve or to move to Umnak. He also destroyed the villages on the southern side of Umnak. The people of Carlisle, again according to Veniaminov, were destroyed by Glotov at the request of the people of Umnak. These were undoubtedly years of intense turmoil not only between Russians and Unangaġ but among groups of Unangaġ as well. Not all the people of the Islands of Four Mountains were killed, however. Enough remained to offer resistance to Afanasii Ocheredin in 1766 and to other skippers a bit later.³⁴



During his last voyage to the Aleutians, which began in 1771, Solov'ev set up headquarters, not at Kashega, but at the deep and protected harbor on the north side of Unalaska Island where Druzhinin had camped. Here he established a base for fur hunting operations. Although hostilities continued and Unangaġ boasted, "We will kill all of you too, as we have already killed many Russians in the past,"³⁵ the outpost attracted more Russians and became consolidated. In the autumn of 1774 a vessel commanded by Dmitri Bragin arrived and a period of calm began. In early summer, 1775, Solov'ev readied his vessel for sailing home. He distributed gifts to people who had collected at the harbor and urged them to keep peace with Russian ships.³⁶ In succeeding decades, this first permanent Russian outpost in Alaska became the settlement of Iliuliuk, the village of Unalaska.

"View of Shelekov's Establishment on the Island of Kodiak" by Martin Sauer. From *Expedition to the Northern Parts of Russia*, 1802. Repository: Loussac Library, Anchorage.

The years of overt hostility were over. Starvation and diseases exacerbated the violent conflicts between Russians and Unangaġ. We do not know with any certainty how many Unangaġ perished during the two decades that began with Solov'ev and Glotov's arrival and ended with Solov'ev's departure. When Glotov first hunted near Kashega and Makushin, he found it difficult to estimate of the number of people because "the island was very large and its residents moved from one location to another."³⁷

33 Veniaminov, Notes, 251.

34 Black, Atka, 44.

35 Masterson and Brower, Bering's Successors, 83.

36 Masterson and Brower, Bering's Successors, 84.

37 Smith, J. L., ed., The Russian Discovery of the Aleutian and Kodiak Islands, 62.

Oral traditions had placed twenty-two villages on the island when the Russians arrived.³⁸ Given the number of village sites that even incomplete archaeological surveys have suggested, that number is small unless it refers to self-identifying communities and not to the proliferation of seasonal and shifting locations where they lived. Whatever the magnitude of loss, Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin had survived the conflagration that had consumed so many of their neighbors. For them, for the time being, the shamans who had predicted the absorption of Unanga into another way of life were wrong.

38 Veniaminov, Notes, 90.



"A Woman of Unalaska wearing a tubular cloak and standing on the top of a house." Watercolor by John Webber, July 1778. Courtesy British Library. Reference no: Add.Ms.15514 f.15. Record no.: C3119-0.