Chapter 3: Yup'ik Nations: An Aware World

"The Yupiaq people live in an aware world. Wherever they go they are amongst spirits of their ancestors, as well as those of the animals, plants, hills, winds, lakes, and rivers. Their sense of sacredness is of a practical nature, not given to abstract deities and theological rationalization. Pragmatism is the theme of their sacred ways. The Ellam Yua, or Creative Force, is not given the same ultimate stature as the Biblical God. Because nature is their metaphysic, Yupiaq people are concerned with maintaining harmony in their own environment. The Creative Force is acknowledged and often given gratitude, though it is the immediacy of nature that is most important. The Yupiaq people have many taboos, rituals, and ceremonies to observe and practice that poignantly signify a harmonious ecological orientation. They behave accordingly because of what their culture has taught as well as an abiding belief in what they and others have experienced first-hand. There are mysteries of the world that to Yupiaq are unfathomable, such as the Ellam Yua, but these are accepted. Such mysteries keep them humble and ever mindful of the powers around them." *Angayuqaq* Oscar Kawagly [1]

Y-K Delta

The vast delta area of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers is the homeland of the Yup'ik, literally "real people" in the Yup'ik language. The two rivers flow through a vast flatland, breaking up into tributaries, sloughs, and lakes, rich with wildlife, and a haven for seasonal wildfowl. The rivers and lakes teem with fish, and sea mammals also make their way up the main rivers. In an area of such rich resources, the population is distributed widely across the landscape.

[1] *Angayuqaq* Oscar Kawagly https://uaf.edu/ankn/publications/collective-works-of-angay/Alaska-Native-Educat1819F0.pdf

As explained by the unified tribal council, the Association of Village Council Presidents, "The Region is a vast and beautiful corner of the world. Tucked between two of Southwest Alaska's mightiest rivers – The Yukon and the Kuskokwim – this unique, isolated area is the traditional home of the state's indigenous Yup'ik, Cup'ik and Athabascan people. The region is approximately 58,000 square miles (roughly the size of New York State) and encompasses 56 federally recognized tribes. Residents practice a subsistence-based lifestyle, with hunting, fishing, and gathering providing the vast majority of their food."[2]

I. Yup'ik language

The Yup'ik are the largest ethno-linguistic population in Southwest Alaska, with about 21,000 people. Like the Iñupiat, the Yup'ik all speak the same language with distinct dialects. In Chevak the language is referred to as Cup'ik, and in Nunivak as Cup'ig, words that are also used in place of Yup'ik to denote a person of this group.[3] A majority of residents still speak their traditional language, and the roughly 10,000 Yup'ik speakers are the largest group of Native

[2] www.avcp.org "About Us"
[3] Alaska Native Language Center https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/cy/

speakers in Alaska today. Yup'ik areas have led the state in the development of Native language immersion schools.[4]

Yup'ik ancestors settled along the coast beginning at least 3,000 years ago. By 2,000 years ago they were living in large semi-permanent villages.[5] Most rural communities today originated from traditional hunting, gathering, or fishing camps. Perhaps 15,000 people inhabited the Southwest coastal area in the early 1800s, organized into approximately twelve sociopolitical units, i.e. Nations.[6] "Each Nation viewed itself as socially and territorially distinct." Another figure cites 13,000 in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, 3,000 around Bristol Bay and 500 on Nunivak Island.[7] The ancient settlements and seasonal camps contained small populations, with numerous settlements throughout the region consisting of extended families or small groups of families.

Perhaps a thousand years ago the Yup'ik experienced a growing population. The Yup'ik population expanded in numbers and began to expand geographically. Small groups moved up the Kuskokwim River, and travelled over the divide to the headwaters of the Nushagak River. Moving down the Nushagak, they settled in what is now the Bristol Bay region.

Now the Yup'ik population is represented in two regional corporations: The Calista Corporation controlling lands in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, and the Bristol Bay Corporation, in a vital fishing area that has attracted a diverse Alaska Native and outsider population. "Yup'ik and Cup'ik still depend upon subsistence fishing, hunting, and gathering for food. Elders tell

[4] Alaska Native Language Center https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/cy/
[5] Caroline Funk, "Bow and Arrow Days," *Ethnohistory* 57:4 (Fall 2010)
[6] Ann Fienup Riordan, Eskimo Essays: Yup'ik Lives and how We See Them, Rutgers, 1990.
[7] Fienup Riordan ,1990, p. 153

stories of traditional ways of life, as a way to teach the younger generations survival skills and their heritage."[8]

Like the Inupiaq, the Yup'ik also identified as distinct Nations or societies

Elder Charlie Moses explained in an article in the local paper the origin of his *Nunakauyarmiu*t Nation, the people of Nelson Island: "Today, they are known as part of the Central Yup'ik Eskimo of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region, and are those separated linguistically as having a Nelson Island (*Qaluyaat*) dialect." Moses explains his understanding that the *Nunakauyarmiut* were all descended from one family, and through mutual agreement, were led by a Council of Elders. Their complex culture, their wisdom and values, and their belief in "*Ellam Yua*" sustained them in good years, and in bad. According to Moses, "They also practiced the conservation and preservation of their natural resources and environment, by never wasting, over harvesting, or destroying their land and/or waters." The Yup'ik Elders called this history "*nutemllaq*."[9] Moses also emphasized the role of trade as a part of the economy, in addition to subsistence. "During good seasons they were able to gather, prepare, store, or bury large quantities of dried fish, oil, meat, and edible plants…..They traded these goods with other tribes, near and far."[10]

Anthropologist Ann Fienup-Reardon who has worked closely with Yup'ik elders for decades still uses the term "regional group" and explains, "the closest Yup'ik language equivalent for "regional group" is *nunalgutkellriit,* meaning, "literally people from the same village or place… people who consider themselves related to each other and share use of a

[8] http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/
[9] Charlie Moses
[10] Charlie Moses, ibid.

common subsistence range." They acknowledge shared territory and speak a common dialect. And as Fienup Reardon notes, "although tiny by contemporary standards, each regional group viewed itself as socially and territorially distinct and was willing to wage war to remain so."[11] The nations were cohesive, and like the Iñupiat, had both allies and enemies with whom they were at war.

II. Community life and the Qasiq

Yup'ik community life revolved around the *qasiq*, (*qargi*, in Inupiaq, called kashim by the Russians) which was both a place: a men's house or community house, and a site which anchored the community life. Men lived in the *qasiq*, and young boys joined their male relatives there, "where they lived, worked, ate, bathed, slept and learned how to be men."[12] Men told stories while they worked on their tools and equipment. Community ceremonies including singing and dancing also took place in the *qasiq*. While men generally lived in the *qasiq*, women and children lived in individual *ena*, or small sod houses, built partly underground to conserve energy.[13]

When one thinks of the clothing that might be necessary to survive in the sub-Arctic, and to hunt and fish in all weather, one can begin to appreciate the achievement and contributions of women to Arctic cultures. While Yup'ik men hunted for both fish, and land and sea mammals, women processed and scraped the skins to make not only clothing perfectly adapted for its function, but also boots and shoes, and the skin covering for boats.

[11] Fienup-Riordan, Ann and Alice Rearden, *Anguyiim Nalliini/Time of Warring, The History of Bow-and-Arrow Warfare in Southwest Alaska,* Fairbanks, UA Press, 2016. P. 18

[12] http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/

[13] http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/

Frank Andrews Sr. recalled that his ancestors "were never heavy with a tool kit. They carried in their minds what they needed to live rich lives in the harsh environment of the Bering Sea coast." Andrews generously shared and passed along his knowledge and wisdom towards the end of his life, working with Yup'ik translators Alice Rearden and Marie Meade and anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan to document his knowledge of life on the Bering Sea coast.[14] As both he and his translators note, his knowledge was very specific to one particular area, in this case, the *Canineq* (lower coastal) area at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River. "When he talked about kayak building, tomcod fishing, or bird hunting, it was based on his own experience in the area surrounding *Kwigillingok*, where he spent his life." As the authors acknowledge, "each individual possessed an enormous amount of information and remarkable skills in order to live life on the in the harsh environment."[15]

Significance of Warfare

During a period of nearly 500 years, from about 1300 to the early 1800s, until shortly before the arrival of the first Russian fur traders, the Yup'ik world was at war: The Bow and Arrow Wars. The arrival of Russian traders brought an end to the era of warfare, not because the Russians stopped the battles, but due to the devastation brought by introduced diseases. As Ann Fienup Riordan says most succinctly, "Death was stopped by death itself."[16]

Yup'ik people have been telling anthropologists stories about warfare for a hundred years. The response from the anthropologists (until quite recently) was that hunter gatherers did not engage in warfare, and they had the evidence from their comparative culture research to

[14] Frank Andrew, and Ann Fienup-Riordan. *Paitarkiutenka = My legacy to you*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008

[15] Frank Andrew, ibid.

[16] Fienup-Riordan, *Time of Warring*, p. 16

prove it. Evidence disrupted their theories, so they disregarded it. Again, we see the problem that by the time European or American observers arrived, the entire system of Nations was nearly entirely wiped out. Only the most culturally aware would have been able to see the evidence. To outsiders, the Yup'ik appeared to be a culture of small, distributed settlements living close to the land and sea, with no political structure at all. And anthropologists asserted that this was not only a timeless culture, but subscribed to the "Myth of the Peaceful Eskimo," asserting that the Yup'ik had been living peacefully in these communities, little varying for thousands of years.[17]

While it was not much talked about, Yup'ik elders were well aware of this past, and evidence is all around, in place names, and in remains of ancient defensive villages. The prevalence of warfare and battle has now been brought into the light and further delineated in multiple stories recently compiled by anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan and translated by Yup'ik translator Alice Reardon, working with local elders, with the support of Calista Corporation. The existence of warfare and the telling details in the stories provide further evidence that there were indeed Yup'ik Nations willing to go to war to defend the honor of their Nations and their borders.[18] Yup'ik villages formed regional alliances to defend against alliances of those they considered enemies and mounted attacks and revenge attacks. "The full range of conflict extended to encompass almost the entire Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and most Yupiit."[19] Anthropologist Patricia Partnow, through interviews and oral histories, extends the range of the war onto the Alaska Peninsula where Yup'ik people gradually, or perhaps violently displaced Sugpiaq.[20]

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[17] Fienup-Riordan, "Yup'ik Warfare and the myth of the peaceful Eskimo," *Eskimo Essays: Yup'ik Lives and how We See Them*, Rutgers, 1990, p. 146

[18] Ann Fienup-Riordan and Alice Rearden, *Anguyiim Nalliini/Time of Warring, The History of Bow-and-Arrow Warfare in Southwest Alaska*, U. of Alaska Press 2016.

[19] Funk, 526

[20] Patricia Partnow, *Making History:Alutiiq Sugpiaq life on the Alaska Peninsula*, U. of Alaska Press, 2001.

Scholars have identified differences between Iñupiat warfare and Yup'ik warfare. While Iñupiat warfare existed, it involved generally large number of continually shifting alliances. By contrast, Yup'ik warfare seems to have been regional, involving 'longstanding conflict between two groups of allied Nations.'[21]

Evidence

Oral History

The "Bow and Arrow Wars," a period of violent cycles of attacks and retribution among and between various Yup'ik Nations, began perhaps as early as the 1300s. In the Yup'ik language, oral histories taking place in times "more recent than mythic time, but before colonialism" and which can be linked to known places in the landscape are called *qanemciq*. These are the stories recorded on the oral history tapes. Ann Fienup Riordan and Alice Rearden have assembled a range of oral histories about the Bow and Arrow Wars, collected over a long period of years by themselves and others, including material recorded during hearings related to the ANCSA process. According to those who told the stories, "War was a continuous factor in the lives of their named ancestors."[22]

Origins

According to Yup'ik informers, the origin of the whole cycle of the Bow and Arrow Wars goes back to two boys playing with darts in a village on the Yukon. When one boy accidently poked out the eye of the other, the father of the injured boy retaliated by poking out both eyes of the offender." I myself have heard this story reported by Yup'ik students who have heard it passed down through their own families.[23]

[21] Fienup-Riordan, *Time of Warring* p. 61
[22] Ann Fienup-Riordan and Alice Rearden, *Anguyiim Nalliini/Time of Warring,*
[23] See also https://www.livescience.com/65282-legendary-massacre-dart-game.html

Beliefs of Anthropologists

With no context into which to place these stories, anthropologists at first saw these incidents as anomalies, or isolated and unexplainable. As they began to accept that there was indeed warfare, they have come up with various structural explanations: that warfare started possibly due to the incursion of "a violent Yupik Nation or Nations," or a wandering group of especially hostile people. Or, that warfare was symptomatic of ongoing group fission and populations shifting."[24] Improved technology may have allowed for population growth, and spread of population inland and upriver. Conflict may have been between coastal and up-river people, involving competition over resources.[25] Or that attacks were a response to Russian interruption of indigenous trade processes in the 1700s, even though only the Russian goods arrived in area, not the Russian's themselves.[26]

Yup'ik Reasons

Yet, in the oral histories the Yup'ik themselves never cite competition for resources as a reason; instead it was always revenge for "insults, adultery, theft, murder, or other intolerable acts of aggression."[27] According to Paul John: "They evidently went to war with one another because people sought revenge for their relatives, because they felt defensive, and not because of food or land" And Joshua Phillip agreed, "The land was not the issue, they were just killing each other. The concept of taking land away did not exist in the minds of these people."[28] It's also worth noting, however, that the stories of a wandering group of especially hostile people are still told and still being investigated.

[24] Funk
[25] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*.
[26] Caroline Funk, "Bow and Arrow Days", Ethnohistory 57:4 (Fall 2010)
[27] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring, 19*
[28] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring* 19

Aglurmiut

Many Yup'ik and anthropologists identify this "Warrior Nation," as the *Aglurmiut*. One thesis suggests that they were originally located on the Middle Yukon, and after fighting with people there, migrated to the coastal area, and again, after fighting, eventually migrated to the Bristol Bay area. It is, indeed, a fascinating story, sometimes associated with the archeological site called *Nunalleq*. Linguists remind us that '*nunalleq'* itself is a generic term meaning "old village" and discussions about the real name of the site and its association with the *Aglurmiut* are ongoing.[29]

Evidence from the stories

Living in fear

Stories, and oral testimony together with place names, are artifacts of an entire regional culture of warfare. The stories and testimony of violence in the oral history based book *At the time of the Warring* tell of the Yup'ik specifically training boys as warriors; training for lethal attacks.[30]

The goal of each attack was total annihilation of the enemy, and the usual mode was the sneak attack, perhaps at night, seeking to catch the men in the village unawares in their *qargi*. The attackers sought to block the doors, set the place on fire, and attack those who fled.

Since villages were so small, those that were nearly totally destroyed might wait a generation, living with the animus that demanded revenge, before mounting a return attack which could come at any time.

[29] Excavation at the site is on-going. See Pratt, Kenneth L., "Deconstructing the Aglurmiut Migration: An Analysis of Accounts from the Russian America period to the present." *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 11, nos. 1&2 (2013), 17. And Dr. Rick Knecht and Dr Charlotta Hillerdal "Nunalleq" https://nunalleq.wordpress.com/about/

[30] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*

Southwest Alaska was during this period in many respects a place of fear, where one always had to look out for marauding others. The village of *Tuntununak* built silent stone statues standing guard on a hill, the 'pretend people.' According to one account, "if a hunter failed to return, people assumed he had been killed by their enemies." People located their villages as defensible positions. "People were constantly alert, watching for the enemy"[31] They tell of people always on the lookout for attackers, living in fear, posting guards while subsistence harvesting, and being careful not to get too far from home. People were always aware of the constant danger from hostile raids, "at smaller sites and camping areas people carefully circumscribed their activity to guard against attack."[32] Raids occurred only every twenty years or so, a generation, waiting for the sons of the murdered from the last raid to grow up and retaliate.

For Yup'ik over these centuries, life was in many ways defined by always looking out for attackers, always saving up revenge.

Technology of war

The stories also tell of technologies developed for warfare including bows and arrows designed and made to kill men. And, knowing that attacks could come at any time, they built defensive villages, elevated above the surrounding ground. Sometimes they built two rows of houses facing each other with a corridor between, closed off at both ends for protection. Qargi were routinely build with escape tunnels, and the Yup'ik built houses with underground escape tunnels. Numerous stories describe people making last minute escapes through escape tunnels. And testimonies describe remains of tunnels in various places.[33]

[31] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring* p21, p. 24
[32] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*. p21; p24
[33] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, 22

Testimony of later observers

Corroborating oral accounts, researchers have found documentation from early visitors to the area. Russian explorer Zagoskin in 1842 described "an earthen fort" forty-six yards. in diameter, with walls five feet high and four feet thick.[34] Edward Nelson, one of the earliest American explorers in the area on an expedition for the Smithsonian 1877-81, reported that the Yup'ik he visited believed they were in constant danger from hostile raids, and he observed the sites of some of the defensive villages. He noted, "Formerly, the constant danger from hostile raids caused the people to choose locations for their dwellings which were easy of defense. This is demonstrated by the sites of ruins of the coast of Bering sea and the ruins of former Eskimo villages on the Arctic coast of Siberia, northwestward of Bering strait." Nelson observed defensive villages "built on highest points of islands near the shore, or on high capes or peninsula commanding a wide view of both sea and land." [35] Moravian missionary John Kilbuck noted the continued existence of "fortresses" at present day Hooper Bay even in 1911.[36]

Archeological evidence

The stories, and even the observations of westerners, were long ignored, easy to ignore because individually they sound so fantastical, or exaggerated. But the stories and the place names are corroborated by archeological remains. An on-going dig provides an unparalleled look. Extensive archaeological investigation at a site called Nunallaq is now being conducted by Dr. Rick Knecht under the auspices of the University of Aberdeen Department of Archaeology, in partnership with the village corporation Qanirtuuq, Inc. and the Yup'ik village of Quinhagak. Researchers describe it as "a multi-period prehistoric (or precontact) Yup'ik winter village site.

[34] Cited in Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, 23-24
[35] Nelson, p. 244
[36] AFP quoting Nelson, 1899;241, and quoting Kilbuck.

The waterlogged frozen tundra preserves organic material to an incredible degree. Everything from grass ropes, salmon berry seeds and head lice, along with an abundance of wooden and lithic artefacts and faunal remains builds the knowledge of a Yup'ik prehistory that up until now has been very little known or studied."[37] Archeologists theorize earliest occupation at the site, a part of the community of *Agaligmiut* at the mouth of the Kuskokwim dates to 1300 with its destruction between 1500 and 1650. Fienup-Riordan, quoting oral history sources says, "the destruction of Agaligmiut occurred during a period when warfare was already well-established." So she suggests "warfare waged in Southwest Alaska for at least 300 years prior to 1800 and probably much longer. [38]

Researchers at the *Nunallaq* archeological site have found a layer of remains that were indeed completely destroyed by fire, representing the remains described in the oral history as the assailants "burned the sod houses down to nothing.[39] Circa 1650, at the end of the period of occupation, as archeologists found, "the site was the scene of a terrible massacre in which attackers set a qasgiq on fire with people and dogs still inside."

As Knecht described it, "We found this burned floor with all this burned stuff on it, riddled with arrow points—absolutely riddled…We also found the bodies of people who were dragged out of the house, along with the long grass ropes that were used to do so. Their skeletons are burned and kind of dismembered."[40] This site supports the oral histories and stories that the

[37] https://nunalleq.wordpress.com/ [Oct. 2, 2019]

[38] https://www.archaeology.org/news/7601-190422-alaska-massacre-site

[39] The site of what is now called Nunallaq was noted by Funk, 2010, 556., https://nunalleq.wordpress.com/ [Oct. 2, 2019]

See also, award winning educational video: http://www.seriousanimation.com/nunalleq/

[40] Daniel Weiss, "Cultural Revival," *Archaeology*, Sept.-Oct. 2015. https://www.archaeology.org/issues/187-1509/features/3558-alaska-yupik-cultural-revival#art_page2 [Oct. 2, 2019]. See also David Malakoff. "The story of Nunallaq," *The Archaeological Conservancy*, March 2018, https://www.archaeologicalconservancy.org/the-story-of-nunalleq/

Bow and Arrow wars continued from the 1300s to the mid-1800s as a series of back and forth violence, attacks and escapes, and shifting alliances and enmities.

It should be noted that there has not been a lot of archeological investigation in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, especially compared to areas like Kodiak Island and the Aleutians, or locations like Point Hope which makes it difficult to put the *Nunallaq* site in context.[41] And, the story of the *Aglurmiut*, a "Warrior people" and their supposed migration into the Bristol Bay area is not necessarily agreed upon by all anthropologists.[42]

Thoughts

Note: these are my own reflections, open to discussion

A Time of Warring paints a picture of a culture that was always afraid of attack, a culture which trained its boys first and foremost as warriors. (Although it's not clear if it is all boys or just some boys.) The Yup'ik as described in this series of stories are the Spartans of the sub-Arctic. In the Yup'ik society presented from the point of view of warfare, men were expected to respond and go on attacks if asked, not unlike the aggressive violent world portrayed in 'Game of Thrones,' or 'The Vikings.' But a larger question is the nature of violence itself, and the effect of this violent culture on people's psyches

Generational trauma has become an issue related to repeated epidemics beginning in the mid -19th century, and to the traumas of assimilation, language loss, and boarding schools. From Smallpox in the 1830s and 1840s, to the "great sickness," possibly influenza or measles in 1900, to the worldwide flu in 1918-1920 the region has suffered through repeated epidemics. Then came devasting waves of Tuberculosis. Southwest Alaska had the highest rated of TB in the

[41] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, p. 18.
[42] Pratt, "the Aglurmiut Migration" 17.

world in the 1940s and '50s. Traveling nurses and doctors could swooped in to diagnose the affected, and then took them out of their villages to hospitals far away, many never to return home. And while antibiotics to cure TB were finally discovered in the 1950s, patients were still hospitalized into the 1960s.[43] Amidst all this, children were taken to boarding schools, and the repeated traumas only compounded on themselves. Howard Napoleon finally wrote a devastating and revealing analysis in the 1990s called Yuuyaraq, attributing many of the problems and pathologies to these repeated traumas.[44] But what effect did 500 years of back and forth attacks do to people? Building defensive villages? Every house with an escape tunnel?[45]

III. Trade and international relations

There were a number of trade routes through Yup'ik territories: From Lake Iliamna on the Alaska Peninsula, through territory of the Upper Kuskokwim, and then down the Kuskokwim.[46] And from the middle Yukon, over the important portage to the middle Kuskokwim.[47]

Pastolik was the Yup'ik settlement closest to Iñupiaq territory. There is some evidence that *Pastulurmiut* acted as traders, gathering furs, seal products from other Yup'ik and trading them either to Chukchi directly or through the people of King Island, Sledge Island or Big Diomede into the Russian market, in exchange for Russian and Asian goods. They may also have

[43] Linguist Michael Krauss has said in interviews that he completed his important map of language areas in Alaska by interviewing people, especially TB patients, from all over Alaska at the Alaska Native Service Hospital. http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/fairbanks-couple-reflects-on-lifetime-devoted-to-study-of-alaska/article_9d81999c-8939-11e6-bf9b-bf1957547077.html

[44] Available here http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/Books/Yuuyaraq.pdf

[45] Mary Annette Pember, "Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Natives Inherited Pain," Indian Country Media Network, 2016.

[46] Raymond L. Collins, "Dichinanek' Hwt'ana: A history of the people of the Upper Kuskokwim who live in Nikolai and Telida, Alaska." Sally Jo Collins, ed. McGrath, Alaska, 2000, 2004.

[47] Bockstoce, *Fur and Frontiers*.

fought with the Chukchi. There is evidence of a kind of defensive armor that might have come from Russia

Arrival of Russians

Compared to the *Iñupiat*, the Yup'ik remained more isolated, and had generally far less trade with outsiders. Russian incursions had far less impact on the Yup'ik than on the neighboring *Unangan*, or the *Sugpiaq*. Incursions into Yup'ik territory came towards the end of the period of Russian domination when the Russian state had denounced its former conquest and enslavement methods. In the Yukon and Kuskokwim River drainages the Russians sought to establish fur trading posts more on the model of the English and French. But their supply lines were stretched thin, their few posts were isolated, and they often lacked competitive goods to trade.

By the time the Russian America Company moved into Yup'ik territory beyond the coast, traders were intent on establishing trading posts and capturing the wealth of fur which was already being traded from the area through Indigenous trading networks. Yup'ik trappers had already increased their focus on trapping for trade, in response to the indirect demand of the fur market in China. Athabascan trappers on the Kuskokwim traded their furs to the Iñupiaq or Chukchi traders at Pastolik, while those on the Yukon probably traded into the markets at Sisualik. By whatever route, the furs ended up in China. The Russians effort was to claim a middle-man position for themselves.[48]

Yup'ik trappers and traders were undoubtedly aware of Russian traders even before they built Alexandrovski Redoubt, on Bristol Bay in 1818. Then, in 1833 the Russian company moved into Yup'ik territory, building a fort on Norton Sound near the mouth of the Yukon River,

[48] See Bockstoce for details

a post they called St. Michaels, which they used as a base to expand outwards in the region. [49] In 1837 the Russian-American Company established a post further up the Yukon River to advance their efforts to intercept the trade in furs from the Interior.

This history is recounted in the history of the village of Russian Mission:

> *"Today's village sits on the site of an old fur trading post. The Russian-American Company, one of the largest maritime fur trade companies in the world, set up the post in 1837. Due to the amount of wildlife in the area trapping remained an important part of the culture, and while the fur industry has declined in recent years, many residents still earn some income from trapping.*
> *The settlement became an Eskimo village called "Ikogmiut" meaning "people of the point." Russian Mission became home to the first Russian Orthodox mission in Interior Alaska which was built in 1857 by Russian-Aleut priest Jacob Netzuetov. The priest dubbed the mission, "Pokrovskaya Mission" and the village became known as Russian Mission in 1900. At one time there were two villages named Russian Mission, but eventually the village along the Kuskokwim was renamed Chuathbaluk."*[50]

A Russian American Company trader also established a post on the Upper Kuskokwim, near the present village of Sleetmute. When a smallpox epidemic ravaged the Kuskokwim River many of the local people blamed the Russians, and in a traditional act of retaliation attacked and killed Russian American Company employees at Russian Mission on the Yukon River in 1839."[51]

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[49] See Bockstoce,

[50] Calista Villages of Southwest: Village Profile: Russian Mission "Ikogmiut," https://www.calistacorp.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/CAL_13_0799_Feb_SK_FINAL.pdf [accessed 4/16/2021]

Calista had histories of all of the villages on it's website, but took them down recently. Here is a link on the WebArchive- the WayBack Machine Calista Village Histories,-archived 2017. https://web.archive.org/web/20170223085253if_/http://www.calistacorp.com/shareholders/communities#.WK6i7uj7TIU

[51] http://www.akhistorycourse.org/southwest-alaska/1743-1867-era-of-russian-violence [Oct. 2, 2019] For further history of the area, Kenneth Pratt, the 1855 attack on Andreevskaia Odinochka: a review of Russian, American, and Yup'ik accounts http://www.alaskaanthropology.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/akanth-articles_326_v8_n1_Pratt.pdf

The Russian colonial effort in Southwest Alaska was entirely aimed at the fur resource. In the earliest years of the invasion of Alaska Native lands, as early as 1748, the Russians terrorized and murdered many *Unangan* on the Aleutian Islands, and enslaved the survivors, forcing them to hunt for otter which they then sold into the Chinese market. (See Chapter 4) Once the Russians had overhunted and depleted the otter in the Aleutians and conquered the *Sugpiaq* on Kodiak Island and in Prince William Sound, the Russian America Company moved into the territory of the Sitka-kwan Tlingit. After two fierce battles, in 1804 they established their headquarters at Sitka (which they called New Archangelesk). The Russian colony headquartered in Sitka was never profitable. The Tlingit in Southeast put up extreme resistance, attacking the Russian hunting parties, and preventing them from hunting otters in their territory. Further, Russia had a difficult time supplying Sitka, and their own trading posts. (See Chapter 5)

Disease

Influenza was recorded in the region as early as 1830-31, and an epidemic was reported in Nushagak in 1832. The route from Nushagak to the Upper Kuskokwim was a major trade route, and a major access point for Russian trade goods. So not surprisingly, smallpox spread to the interior, and specifically to Lukin's Odinochka. There were repeated smallpox epidemics in 1838-39, 1852-53, and then 1861; influenza and measles decimated populations in 1900 and then Spanish influenza, 1919. Some groups like the *Unalirmiut* on Norton Sound were completely wiped out. Disease reduced the population of Pastolik from over 250 to just 116.[52] After the 1838-39 epidemic, according to Fienup-Riordan, "the net effect was tremendous dispersal and shift in regional population with many individuals and local families seeking refuge with kinsmen or partners in other regions." As she says, "it is a testament to the strength of Yup'ik

[52] Fienup Reardon, *Warring*, p. 17

oral tradition that in the face of such devastation so many details of precontact Yup'ik life and Bow and Arrow warfare in particular endure in the memories of contemporary elders."[53]

Geography, Spread of people and warfare east and south

Warfare and displacement could and did have ripple effects over a large geographic area. Fienup-Riordan hypothesized "population pressure from the north as *Malimiut* moving south across Seward Peninsula pushed others south. Warfare and raids drove Yup'ik people over the Kilbuck Mountains, the divide between the Kuskokwim and the Bering Sea drainage, and the Nushagak and the Bristol Bay area to the Southeast just prior to the arrival of the Russians."[54] In the Bristol Bay area, Yup'ik began to displace the Sugpiaq-Alutiiq, as discussed separately by Patricia Partnow, studying the Sugpiaq-Alutiiq on the Alaska Peninsula.[55]

It's possible to see also, within the generalized warfare, another picture, that of a "warrior group" a particularly contentious small Nation that started out on the lower Yukon, and migrated over the years, after battling and being pushed out by others, until finally ending up first on the Nushagak River, then on the Alaska Peninsula. Their story is one of displacement

End of war

The Yup'ik stories of the Bow and Arrow wars end with stories of men who were brave enough to challenge the status quo and put an end to the fighting. The end of warfare also coincided with the arrival of Russians to the area, not because the Russians stopped the battles, but due to the devastation brought by introduced diseases. Although the availability of some Russian goods did have an effect on life in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, the fact that the Russians could never manage to navigate the Kuskokwim mouth to supply their posts which

[53] Fienup Reardon, *Warring*, p. 17. See also Robert Fortuine, *Chills and Fever: Health and Disease in the Early History of Alaska*. U. of Alaska Press, 1989.

[54] Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, 61

[55] Patricia Partnow, *Making History: Alutiiq Sugpiaq life on the Alaska Peninsula*, U of Alaska Press, 2001.

meant that coastal Yup'ik experienced little direct interference in their lives, except, of course, that the arrival of outsiders brought devastating diseases. As Ann Fienup Riordan says most succinctly, "Death was stopped by death itself."[56]

[56] Fienup Reardon, *Warring*, p. 2