

Western Alaska Aleut and Alutiiq Native Cultures



1. **Watch the video** for an introduction to Native Cultures of Western Alaska!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp_ZuRE24uQ

2. **Read the slideshow** to learn facts about these Native Cultures

3. See the video on the next slide for an introduction to a Alutiiq basket weaving:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5ltkNIZ3uE>

Unangan (Aleut) and Sugpiaq (Alutiiq) Cultures



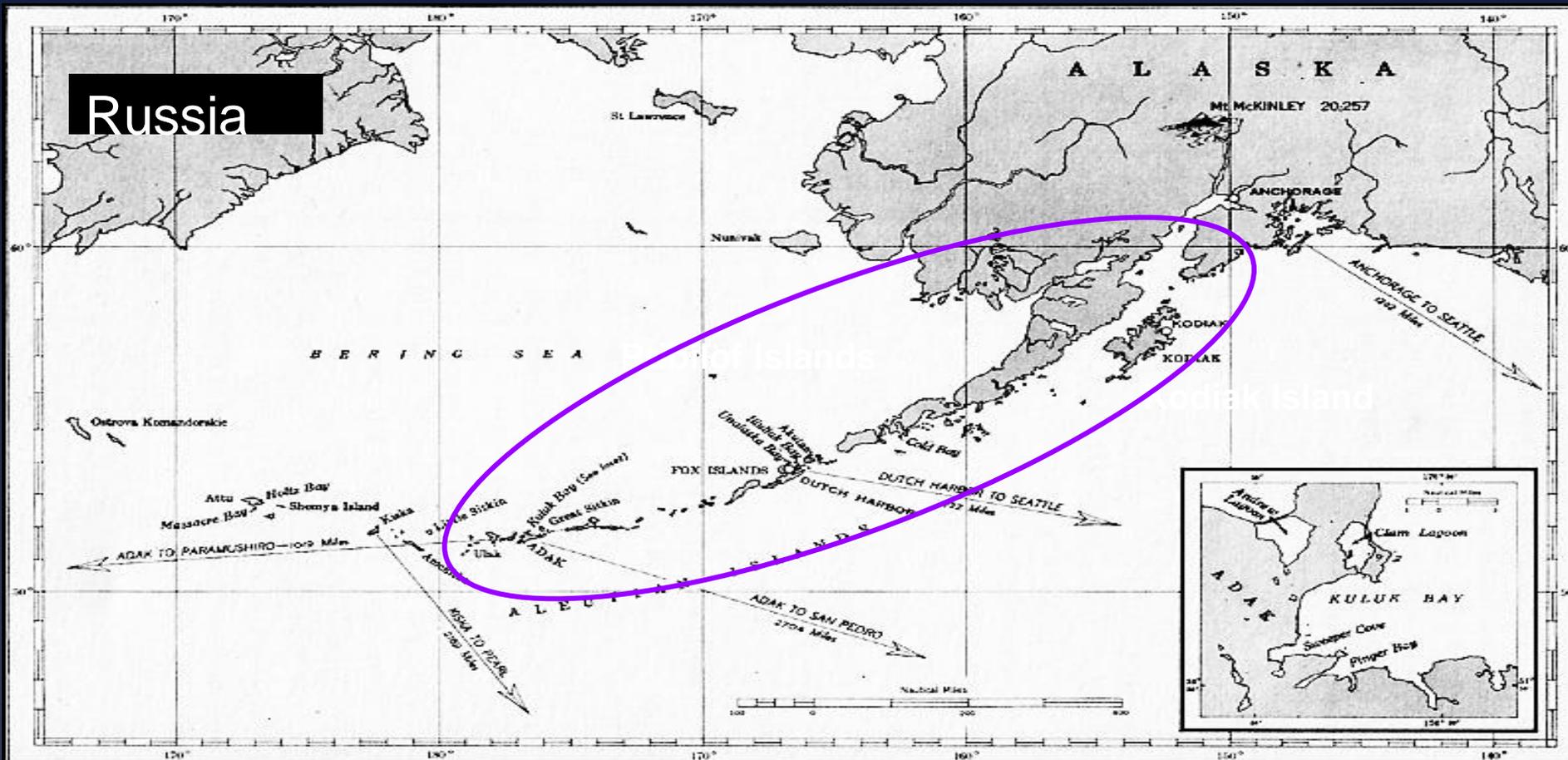
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5ltkNIZ3uE>

Aleutian Geography



Aleut and Alutiiq are the more common names given by the Russians. Unangan and Sugpiaq are the name the people have for themselves.

Russia



Maritime Environment and Climate

Pacific Ocean

Gulf of Alaska

Bering Sea

Rough seas

Wet

Windy

Foggy

Almost treeless

Cold (not extreme)



There are trees (Sitka Spruce for example) on the Alaska Peninsula and northern part of Kodiak Island.

Villages - Then and Now

Camp on Kodiak Island



Unalaska



With **semi-subterranean houses**, villages almost disappeared in the landscape. Notice fish drying racks out front. Unalaska is a major hub today as it borders Dutch Harbor - home of "Deadliest Catch"

Traditional Villages



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

- Several **sod houses**
- Boat and grass drying racks
- Located in protected areas
- Often on Bering Sea side of islands
- 12,000-15,00 Aleut people on islands at time of Russian contact - More than today

Driftwood - How was it used?



Housing



Semi-subterranean houses

Driftwood, whale bone, and sod construction

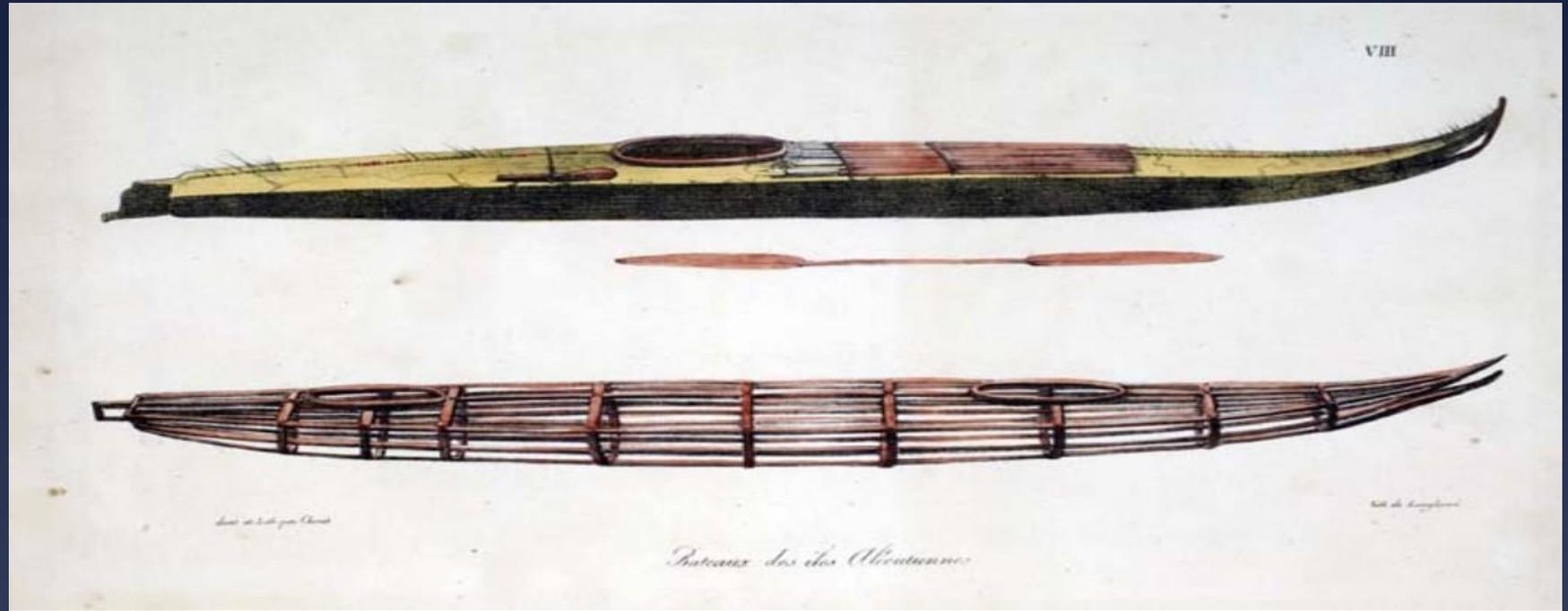
Single room w/grass partitions

Typically entered through roof

Several families



Traditional Transportation





Baidar

Larger boats

Up to 30 to 40 people

Used for long trips

Baidarka

1-3 people

Driftwood construction

Most important form of transportation

Extremely light and fast



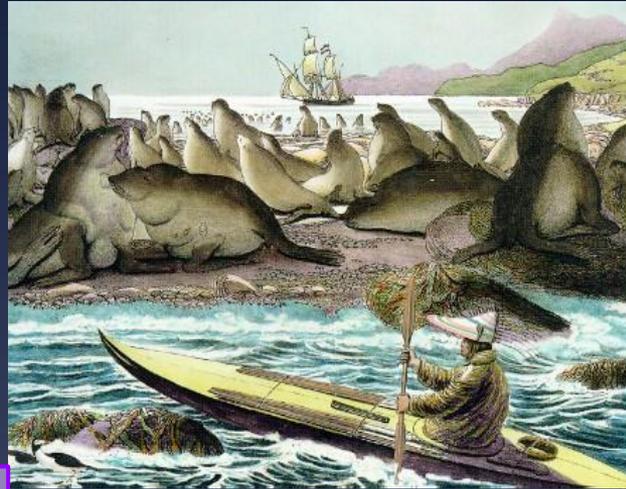
Hunting



Skill exploited by Russian fur traders and later Americans

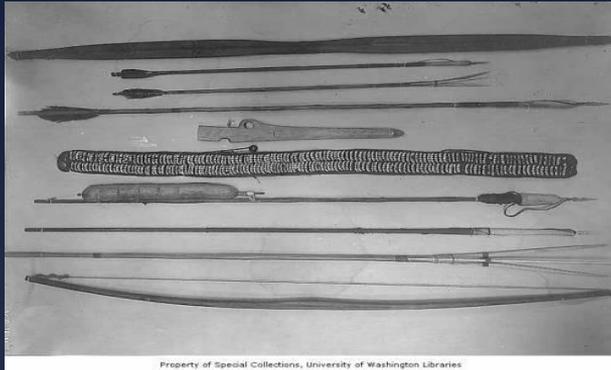
Men typically hunted

Teamwork essential



Russians, after **sea otter pelts**, could never effectively hunt the animals and needed the maneuverability of the Aleut bidarka - so they forced Aleut men to hunt for them. Later, after purchase (1867), Americans set up government fur seal operation on Pribilofs. Using Aleut men and women to round up, harvest and prepare fur seal pelts. After anti-fur movement in the 1980s, the US shut down the operation, taking with it the livelihood of hundreds of Aleut workers.

Traditional Technology



Property of Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries

Created with:
Driftwood
Baleen
Stone
Ivory

Bone
Grass
Animal tissue



Head of the throwing spear used by the Alutians and the Eskimos. It was the Alutians' main weapon in the bow-throwing spear hunt. They were used until 1900.

Ring Harpoon

These harpoons were used for hunting walrus and bison. The harpoon head is made of walrus ivory and is attached to a wooden shaft. The ring is made of walrus baleen and is used to catch the animal when it is pulled through the ring. This is the main tool used for pulling walrus and bison.

Alutian Weapons

The Alutians commonly hunted sea mammals from light skin boats called bidjaks using a variety of throwing weapons. The main weapons were the logging and non-logging harpoon, the throwing knife, the dart, and the bow and arrow. These weapons were tipped with bone or ivory heads and stone points attached to wooden shafts. Sinew, threads, leather, blubber, and glue were used to bind the pieces together. These artifacts are from several archaeological sites in the Alutian Islands.



Traditional Clothing



Woven grass or root hats

Bentwood visors

Sea mammal furs

Waterproof skin/gut parkas

Subsistence Resources



Seals
Sea lions
Whales
Halibut/rockfish
Salmon
Birds and eggs
Shellfish
Beach greens/ kelp
Tidal animals
Caribou
Sitka black-tailed deer

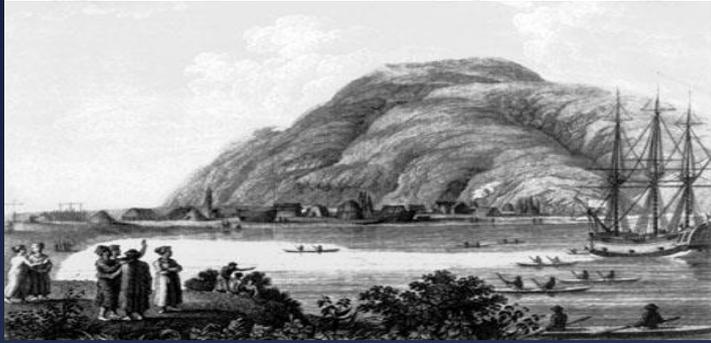


Art



Hunting visors were the quintessential form of art. Functional in blocking sun and rain, but often elaborately decorated. Hunting skill was designated by amount of sea lion whiskers attached to visor. Masks are fairly distinctive - often have a hoop or partial hoop surrounding face, forehead sticks out and does mouth with deep insect eyes. Beautiful long beaded headdresses.

History



Alaska State Library - Historical Collection



Longest contact with non-Natives

Impact of fur - otters and seals

Invaded by Japanese soldiers during WWII

Interned by US government

In first 50 years of contact, over 80% of Aleut population died. Also, they became first literate Alaska Native people, often speaking at least two languages due to contact and education by Russian Orthodox missionaries. Aleut people were largely impacted by sea otter decimation followed by fur seal industry ran by US govt. Islands were invaded during WWII. Japanese attacked Attu and Kiska. Some Aleut were captured. US forces relocated Aleut to SE Alaska.

Aleut and Alutiq Today



Use modern technology
Maintain cultural identity
How have their cultures
changed?