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Progress Report on Evolutionary Anthropological Study of Akun Strait District, Eastern Aleutians, Alaska, 1970-1971 *

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Introduction

In late June and July, 1971, we continued a small-scale program of archaeological sampling, site survey, and biological work on 12 mile long, very irregularly-shaped Akun Island, including two of its offshore islets, and at ten mile distant Akutan village across Akutan Bay. The senior author had begun this eastern Aleutian study in 1970 for the purposes of examining the effects of Russian contact on prehistoric Aleut culture, physical anthropology and ecology, and to contribute to knowledge about Aleutian prehistory, resource utilization, and human microevolution. Table 1 lists the nature, location, and extent of our work.

Previous study has shown that the Aleutians are well suited for comparative research on contact and mixture because of the area's marked geographic isolation and limited terrestrial access. The 900 mile long chain of islands was first and seemingly entered but once by Asian-derived people more than 8500 years ago migrating along the now submerged Alaskan mainland coast (Laughlin 1967 and elsewhere). The earlier-settled, larger eastern islands had more people at historic contact than those in the west. These were later reached, were smaller, further apart, and more pelagic.

*We are very grateful for the help of Akutan Village Chief, Mr. Luke Shelikoff, and boatman Willy Tcheripanoff. They and all others of Akutan made much of our work easier, if not in fact, possible. Permission to excavate on Akun I. was granted by the Akutan Village Council, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Juneau Area Office, and the Department of Interior under permit no. 70-AK-052. Funds for the 1970 work were granted by the Society of the Sigma Xi, and travel aid was provided by Prof. G. A. Peek, Jr., Dean, Liberal Arts College, Arizona State University. Expendables were supplied in 1970 and 1971 by the Department of Anthropology, R. J. Ruppe, Chairman. The 1971 work was funded by a grant from the ASU Grants Committee, W. J. Burke, Chairman, and Dean of Graduate College. In Anchorage William and Karen Workman, Alaska Methodist University, helped and hosted during 1970 and 1971. Prof. D. Dumond made available copies of the Spaulding and Grayson papers on file at the University of Oregon. We are especially appreciative of the carbon 14 dates supplied by Dr. Robert Stuckenrath, Smithsonian Institution Radiocarbon Laboratory. Finally, we could not have both carried out this fieldwork without the care given our children by their grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. L. C. Adams and C. G. Turner, Sr.

The 1970 survey and tests on Akun and Akutan Islands found several interesting sites (Turner n.d. a). One, an abandoned village site on Akun Island overlooking Akun Strait, turned out to be ideal for the above purposes and the 1971 work was concentrated at this site (Fig. 1). It is large, deep (> 3 m), possesses large amounts of both prehistoric and historic refuse, has a pre-World War II trapper's hut still standing above a good freshwater stream, and can be reached in calm weather by power skiff or dory from Akutan village in about one hour. Called *Chulka* by living descendent Akutan Aleuts, it was apparently known to the Russians as *Artelnovsky* (spelled variously).¹ Historical sources relate that it was at Chulka that the foreman of the extreme eastern Aleutian sea otter hunters resided, at least in 1830, and where oral tradition claims all the people from Tigalda, Rootok, and Avatanak Islands who called themselves *quighilan*² moved prior to their migration to Akutan Island.

As early as 1771 Russian fur hunters are mentioned as being on Akun. However, it is not until 1830 or 1831 that specific mention of Chulka occurs in literature available to us. At that date it was visited by the Russian Orthodox priest Ivan Veniaminov who recorded 85 Aleuts living there in seven barabaras (Veniaminov 1840). Chulka was abandoned except as a seasonal camp between 1866, the date when a 22 year old chapel was destroyed (Spaulding 1955:17), and 1878-79 when oral tradition places Chulka villagers as founding their present village site on the north shore of Akutan Harbor. This last move was thought by Spaulding to have occurred so that the Akun Aleuts could be near the trading post established around this time by the Western Fur and Trading Company on a long, level and high beach terrace adjacent to a safer and deeper shoreside anchorage than exists at reef-encircled Chulka. As an additional stimulus, that and the various other late inter-island moves may have followed from the 1844 Russian policy of consolidating remnant villages devastated by the Alaskan smallpox epidemic of 1836-39 (Bancroft 1886:561-562).

Prior to the 1970 and 1971 testing and exploration, Chulka had been visited in 1953 for eight days by Philip T. Spaulding and Jack Pierce of

plate for a ship's step; a metal button with a soldered eye; and a small lead strap suggestive of a fishing line weight.

Glass occurs in the form of two thicknesses of very thin window pane fragments, one reconstructable small clear-glass bottle having the raised words "Davis' vegetable pain killer"; and multicolored glass trade beads 3 mm in diameter. One bottomless heavy drinking glass shows scratches and intentional reworking suggestive that it had been employed as a replacement for an oil-lamp chimney. The neck of a light blue small cork-stoppered bottle had also been abraded, but for a totally unknown purpose. Both bottles had been mold-blown.

Fourteen different design patterns of Asian and other cultural art styles are distinguishable on the 62 plain and painted "china" fragments. Some of the sherds have perforations, evidence of their having

been mended. At least three types of mill-produced wool cloth can be recognized, and the cuts, seams, and pockets indicate most were once part of a heavy jacket. Nailed shoes can be readily identified from remnant soles and heels.

Finally, a fragment of a handmade grinding wheel with a 10 cm radius completes the list of 376 historic items. The total number would have been slightly greater if all of the heavy, rusted iron strapping (1-3 mm thick, 35-40 mm wide) had been saved instead of the representative sample of this abundant but uninformative class of refuse, some pieces of which exhibited riveting.

Sufficient classes of stone artifacts and their relative frequencies were either replaced or became less frequent by the exotic commercially-made trade items and materials to indicate that dynamics of culture change had overcome the static and

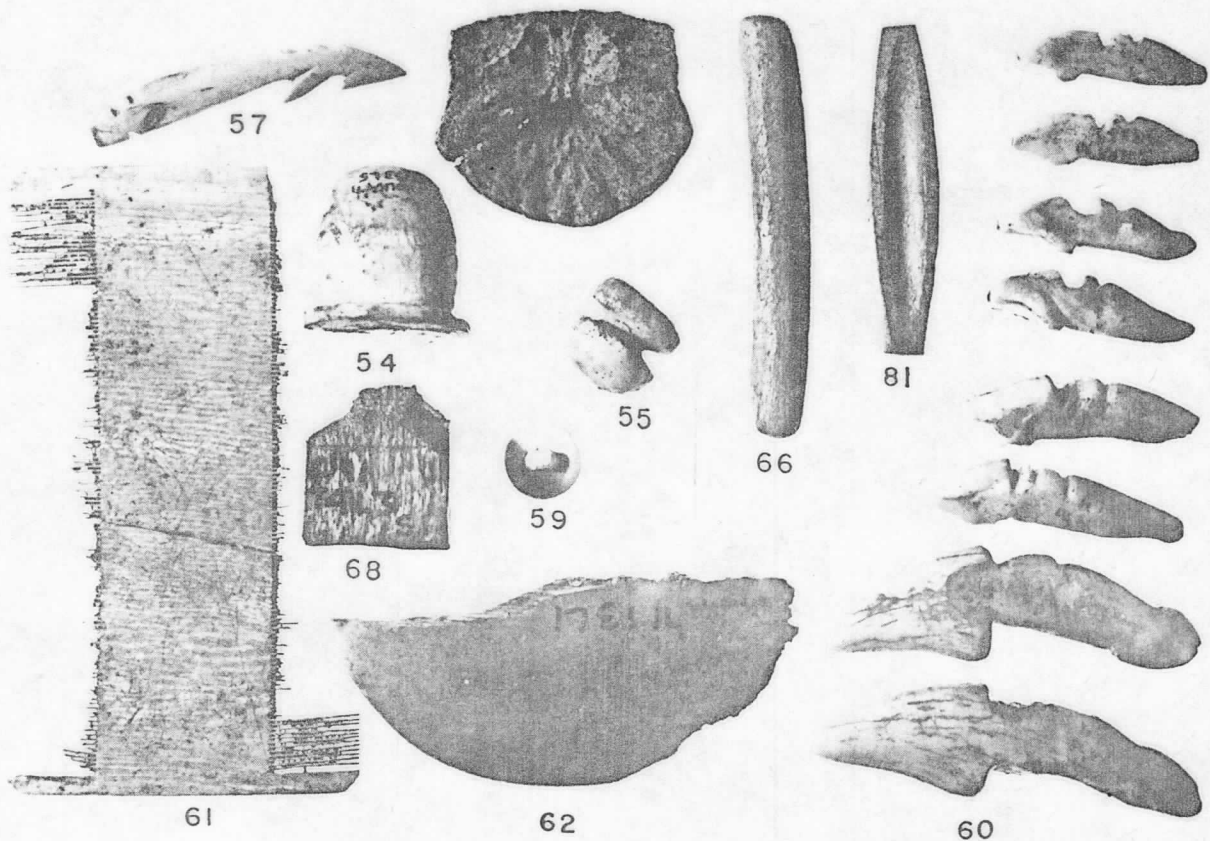


Fig. 8. Bone artifacts: Types and provenience. Fishhook, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 4 1971, Table 9:57. Comb (historic), Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971, Table 9:61. Labret, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 5 1971, Table 9:54. Worked bone billet, Chulka test 4, sec. 1 lev. 3 1971, Table 9:68. Spoon, Chulka test 3, lev. 1 1971, Table 9:62. Skin float repair plug, Chulka test 1, sec. 1, lev. 2 1970, Table 9:55. Ivory

button, Bhulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 4 1971, Table 9:59. Die, Chulka test 1, sec. 1, lev. 3 1970, Table 9:66. Unidentifiable object, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 3 1971, Table 9:81. Set of carved teeth (for mask?), Chulka test 1, sec. 2, lev. 4 1970, Table 9:60. Unnumbered object in upper center is an epiphysis penetrated by a bifacially-chipped stone projectile point (Length of number 66 is 6.1 cm).

determine this from our samples of marine invertebrates, fish bones, bird and mammal remains. However, in the upper part of the historic deposit there are enough rusted tin cans to suggest that a qualitative dietary difference had developed despite the occurrence of water-worn china fragments indicative that trash was being discarded in the sea as well as on the land. Today in the village of Akutan almost all trash is thrown away in the harbor, but according to Willy Tcheripanoff this was not always so. He says that in his childhood food trash was discarded on land behind the barabaras and seldom in the water.

Food remains are markedly different between

living Akutan Aleuts and prehistoric Chulka Aleuts. Historic Chulkans seem to have retained all of the observable elements of their ancestor's diet, plus adding whatever elements of food obtainable through trade. The abandonment of Chulka and the move to Akutan with its trading post, and later, the whaling station and crab-processing vessel, did more to alter the historic Aleut dietary than any changes brought about in the ecology by Russian exploitation. However, that must have sometimes left families of the sea mammal hunters near starvation during their absence. Excepting for fish, some sea urchins, berries in season, and occasional seal and sea lion meat, present-day Aleuts ignore much of their free natural

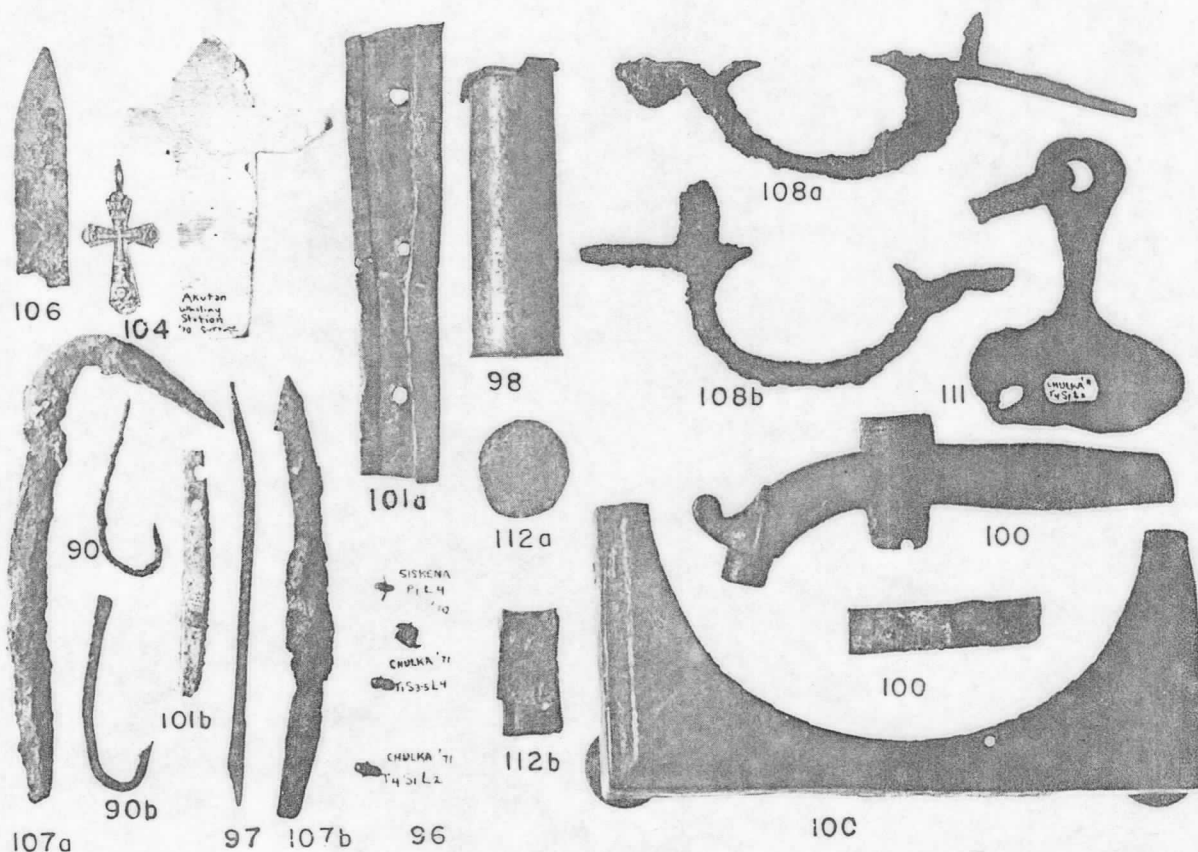


Fig. 12. Historic artifacts: Types and provenience. (Table 13 figure reference) Knife, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971; 106. Cross, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971; 104. Unnumbered bone cross, Akutan whaling station surface, 1970. Brass scrap, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 2 (?) 1971; 101a. Shotgun shell, Chulka test 1, sec. 1, lev. 1 1970; 98. Musket trigger guard, Chulka test 1, sec. 2, lev. 1 1970; 108a. Rifle trigger guard, Chulka test 1, sec. 1, lev. 1 1970; 108b. Brass latch, Chulka test 4, sec. 1, lev. 2 1971; 111. Iron spike, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 3 1971; 107a. Metal fishhook, Chulka test 4, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971; 90a.

Metal fishhook, Chulka test 4, sec. 1, lev. 2 1971; 90b. Brass Scrap, Chulka surface, 1970; 101b. Heavy needle, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 4 1971; 97. Iron spike, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971; 107b. Lead "coin," Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 3 1971; 112a. Lead weight, Chulka test 4, sec. 3, lev. 2 1971; 112b. Glass bead, Chulka test 4, sec. 1, lev. 2 1971; 96a. Glass bead, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 4 1971; 96b. Glass bead, Siskena pit 1, lev. 4 1970; 96c. Samovar fragments, Chulka test 1, sec. 3, lev. 3 1971; 100. (Length of number 106 is 5.9 cm).

Table 13
Historic Materials from Chulka and Siskena

Figure reference number	Artifact type (whole and fragmentary)	Chulka Surface no. %	Chulka Historic no. %	Chulka Prehistoric no. %	Siskena Historic and Prehistoric no. %	Total
88	"China"	5 50.0	53 14.8	4 28.6	0 0.0	62
89	Leather	0 0.0	14 3.9	0 0.0	0 0.0	14
90	Metal fishhook	1 10.0	4 1.1	1 7.1	0 0.0	6
91	Pocket knife	0 0.0	2 0.6	0 0.0	0 0.0	2
92	Button	1 10.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	2
93	Metal boat plug (threaded)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
94	Bottle glass	1 10.0	16 4.5	0 0.0	0 0.0	17
95	Plate glass	0 0.0	61 17.0	2 14.3	0 0.0	63
96	Glass bead (trade)	0 0.0	1 0.3	1 7.1	1 50.0	3
97	Heavy needle (harness awl)	0 0.0	0 0.0	1 7.1	0 0.0	1
98	Shotgun and rifle shell case	0 0.0	2 0.6	0 0.0	1 50.0	3
99	Axe	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
100	Samovar (fragmentary)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
101	Brass scrap	2 20.0	26 7.3	3 21.4	0 0.0	31
102	Iron scrap	0 0.0	120 33.5	2 14.3	0 0.0	122
103	Cloth scrap	0 0.0	39 10.9	0 0.0	0 0.0	39
104	Brass Orthodox cross (necklace)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
105	Grinding wheel (hand-made)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
106	Iron knife blade	0 0.0	5 1.4	0 0.0	0 0.0	5
107	Iron spike (ship and Misc.)	0 0.0	3 0.8	0 0.0	0 0.0	3
108	Iron trigger guard (musket and rifle)	0 0.0	2 0.6	0 0.0	0 0.0	2
109	Large iron ring	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
110	Wood screw	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
111	Brass latch (hand-made)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
112	Lead (line weight)	0 0.0	1 0.3	0 0.0	0 0.0	1
Totals		10	358	14	2	384