



**Nora Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer, Lydia Black, eds.** *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka/Russians in Tlingit America: The Battles of Sitka, 1802 and 1804*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. Plates. xlix + 491 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98600-5; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98601-2.

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## Indian War in Russian America

In 1799, after the establishment of the Russian-American Company (RAC), a group of Russian, Chugach, and Alutiiq sea otter hunters headed by Alexander Baranov set up a small fort (present-day Sitka) in southeastern Alaska. Eventually, the fort became New Archangel, the capital of Russian America—the overseas colony of the Russian Empire that was sold to the United States in 1867. New Archangel was established on the land that belonged to the Tlingit Indians. From the very beginning to the very end, the Tlingit maintained a cold peace with the intruders, never feeling happy about this alien outpost in the middle of their territory. In their turn, the Russians never felt secure living near the warlike sovereign people who did not recognize themselves as part of the empire and who, in fact, tried to attack the fort as late as the 1850s. Historians believe that, in addition to many other factors, the “Indian threat” was not an insignificant factor in the final decision of the Russian government to get rid of this faraway possession.

The book under review is a collection of primary sources and several academic essays that reconstruct the most memorable period in the history of Russian-Tlingit relations: two battles over Sitka in 1802 and 1804, which secured an unsteady Russian presence in this region. Although Baranov and his group received from a local Tlingit headman formal permission to build the fort, other Tlingit leaders were against this decision. In 1802, a com-

bined force of the Tlingit attacked the fort that was protected by only sixteen men and massacred many of its residents. Those who survived either scattered around or were taken as prisoners. Soon, they were retrieved by English merchant captain Henry Barber, who was cruising on his ship nearby and who later ransomed the prisoners back to Baranov. This is how the first Sitka battle ended. Two years later, seeking revenge and stubbornly wishing to rebuild the fort that he considered the outpost for Russian expansion farther southward, Baranov returned with an overwhelming force of Russian and native allies to punish the Tlingit. The presence in the region of a military vessel *Neva*, which came from St. Petersburg under the command of Yuri Lisiansky as part of the first Russian round-the-world expedition, greatly boosted the military venture of the chief administrator of Alaska. After a brief and violent fight (the second Sitka battle), which involved guns and cannons on both sides, the Tlingit finally backed off and Baranov rebuilt his stronghold.

The editors set a goal to gather all available archival, anthropological, folkloric, archeological, and heraldic sources to reconstruct as fully as possible the events surrounding the two battles. The result of all these efforts is a marvelous collection of documents that not only complements earlier scholarship but also provides many new sources unfamiliar to students of Alaskan and Tlingit

git history. The core of the collection consists of Russian archival documents and Tlingit oral tales that deal with the so-called Baranov Era (1792-1818), when the assertive and enterprising Baranov was the first chief administrator of Russian America. The editors have paired these two blocks of documents with each other, allowing readers to approach the events from the viewpoint of both newcomers and indigenous people. Unlike earlier publications on the same topic, which explored the Sitka battles on the basis of Russian, European, and American sources, the major novelty of this anthology is that it brings the Tlingit perspective to these battles. At the same time, the anthology does sample several interesting unknown Russian and American archival documents. For example, the reader will find here for the first time a detailed script (handwritten by Baranov) of the elaborate ceremony that was to accompany the transition of a land site for future New Archangel from the Tlingit to the Russians. The document is an excellent clue to the mind-set of the early nineteenth-century Russian Empire builder.

The authors of the anthology are Richard Dauenhauer, the folklore scholar from the University of Alaska who for thirty years studied the oral legacy of the Tlingit Indians; and his wife, Nora Dauenhauer, a native Tlingit speaker, who transcribed many of the historic oral tales included in the collection. The third editor is the late Lydia Black, a native speaker of Russian, a professor of anthropology, and a public historian who for many years explored the history of Russian presence in Alaska with an emphasis on the contribution of the Russian Orthodox Church. Such a research team was more than qualified to complete this particular project.

The editors repeatedly stress that they want to bring the Tlingit perspective to the discussed events. To be honest, when I began reading this anthology, I was afraid that it would be one more piece of history from an "indigenous viewpoint," which, in some recent publications on indigenous peoples (postcolonial scholarship sometimes labels them as subaltern peoples), has replaced an equally biased Eurocentric view. As one who has just completed an article that critiques present-day attempts of Russian patriotic writers and popular historians to write the history of Alaska from a "Russian viewpoint," I had little desire to read the history of Russian America written from the "Native American viewpoint." Although the subtitle of their book, *Russians in Tlingit America*, is clearly a challenge to *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867* (2005) by Andrei Grinev, which is mostly based on Russian archives, the anthology does not disappoint. The editors should be

commended for presenting a multi-voiced picture of the Russian-Tlingit relations: "By reading different points of view, we learn that history is not simple and straightforward" (p. xvii). Incidentally, given the content of their own anthology, the rhetorical question the editors repeatedly ask themselves—"Who owns history?"—makes little sense because the answer is clear: history does not belong to anybody (pp. xii, xv).

The Dauenhauers began working on this project as early as in the mid-1980s; Black stepped in later. Yet the work had to be put on hold because the elders from the Raven clan of the Tlingit, whose ancestors participated in the Sitka battles, objected to publicizing oral histories related to the battles. They claimed that this oral history belonged only to them and that "from the Tlingit point of view, an unauthorized telling constitutes stealing" (p. xiii). The work was renewed only in 2003, when a new generation of elders lifted these objections. In the meantime, much was written by historians and anthropologists both in Russia and in the United States about Russian-Tlingit relations, including the 1802 and 1804 events. Three monographs stand out in this field. Grinev, a historian from St. Petersburg, pioneered this topic in 1991 by publishing his *Indeitsy tlinkity v period Russkoi Ameriki, 1741-1867*, which recently (2005) became available in English as *Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741-1867*. After twenty years of archival and field research, Sergei Kan, an anthropologist from Dartmouth College, wrote *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity* (1999), which, in addition to religious encounters, explores political relations of the Tlingit with Russians. Finally, and most important, Alexander Zorin, a Russian historian from Kursk, published *Indeiskaia voina v Russkoi Amerike: russko-tlinkitskoe voennoe protivoborstvo* (Indian War in Russian America: Russian-Tlingit Military Confrontation) (2002) that deals directly with the discussed topic: military conflicts of Russians and Tlingit during the "Baranov Era." Moreover, Zorin has provided a detailed chronicle of the first and second Sitka battles and even a list of names of Russians and their native allies who perished, escaped, or were taken as prisoners as a result of the first battle. Unfortunately, in their bibliography, the editors do not even mention this comprehensive and marvelously written monograph. Given the work done by other researchers in this field, I would have refrained from the editors' claim that their book is "a scholarly breakthrough and features many 'firsts'" (p. xiii).

Yet, it needs to be stressed that the editors totally succeeded in finding their own way of dealing with this

heavily studied topic. First, choosing the format of an anthology, they avoided producing another narrative that would have simply repeated the above mentioned three books. Second, by bringing together a variety of primary sources that sample different points of view on the Russian-Tlingit relations, they allow readers to make their own judgments. Third, in addition to primary documents, the anthology includes several scholarly essays that introduce new materials and new perspectives that one will not find in earlier scholarship. For example, in his essay, Allan Engstrom might have put to rest the legend about the mysterious disappearance of Aleksei Ilyich Chirikov's sailors in 1741 during the first contact of Rus-

sians and the Tlingit; the historian convincingly argues that the sailors drowned in coastal waters. Kristen Griffin brings to our attention archeological finds from the battle sites. W. W. Schuhmacher shows the shady and ambivalent role played by notorious Barber; despite his behavior during the first Sitka battle, the captain was hired by Baranov as an RAC navigator. Fourth, and, most important, they have created an excellent reader that will serve as a resource not only for those who are interested in Tlingit history and Russian America but also for instructors and students who may want to explore Russian imperial, Pacific Northwest, American West, and Native American history.

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