REPORT

RUSSIAN ERA OCCUPATION ON AGATTU ISLAND AT ATU-216

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ABSTRACT

This report shares information about a Russian colonial occupation on the north coast of Agattu Island. Agattu Island is part of the Near Islands group of the western Aleutian Islands and was one of the first islands that Russian промышленники (*promyshlennikis* or fur traders), encountered on their colonial exploration of the Aleutian Archipelago. Ethnohistoric records suggest that the Near Islands were most intensively occupied by Russians during the early years of the fur trade between 1749 and the 1780s. However, recent excavations of ATU-216, an ancestral Unangax̂/Sasxinax̂ village with an extensive Russian-era component, provide evidence that Russian colonizers maintained a substantial presence in the Near Islands into the early nineteenth century. Decades of colonization and cultural exchange were instrumental in shaping the archaeological deposits at ATU-216.

INTRODUCTION

The ancestral Unangax̂/Aleut—or more precisely Sasxinax̂/Sasignan[1]—village recorded as ATU-216 in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) is located on the north shore of Agattu Island (Fig. 1). The village site is located on land owned by the Aleut Corporation, following the fee-simple title transfer process of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Project personnel from the Aleutian Mercury Dynamics Project performed excavations in midden areas of the archaeological site in June 2023 (Funk et al. 2023a; Funk et al. 2025). This report focuses on summary results from the top four stratigraphic levels of the midden excavations, which record a significant Russian colonial occupation. The occupation is uniquely undisturbed and has a robust expression of Russian material culture, with two large houses (unexcavated) and a large number of ceramics, beads, metal pieces, and textile fragments. While colonial Russian occupations of Unangax̂/Aleut and Alutiiq/Sugpiaq villages are common throughout the Aleutian chain and Kodiak Island (Bundy et al. 2003; Crowell 2011; Crowell et al. 2008; Knecht and Jordon 1985; Margaris et al. 2015; Veltre 2001), little is known about Russian contact with ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan in the Near Islands group of the western Aleutians.

RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM IN A COLONIAL CAPITALIST WORLD

It is crucial to understand Russian imperialism by placing it in the context of Western geopolitics and capitalist systems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in doing so, we can break away from universal patterns of colonization and instead discuss the unique nuances of Russian colonization in the western Aleutians. Russian imperialism was a direct consequence of the pressure to compete with other Western powers in a world trade system, i.e., Russian colonization was a capitalist endeavor (Crowell 2011; Makarova 1975). Russia did not have the same industrial power as Britain and France in the booming capitalist world trade system, therefore, a large emphasis was placed on building trade networks with China (Crowell 2011; Makarova 1975). The competitiveness of Western capitalism and geopolitics drove the Russian government to push for the exploration of the Pacific with hopes of finding connections to America that were not already settled by other European nations (Makarova 1975; Lightfoot 2003).

Russian expeditions in the North Pacific formally began in 1728 with the government-ordered scientific exploration of Vitus Bering (Bergsland 1994:VIII; Berkh 1974; Lightfoot 2003; Makarova 1975). On the vessel *Gavrill* (*St. Gabriel*), Bering set out into the North Pacific but did not go further east than Chukotka, and St. Diomede. A second expedition was ordered and set out in June 1741 on the vessels *Petr* (*St. Peter*) and *Pavel* (*St. Paul*) (Berkh

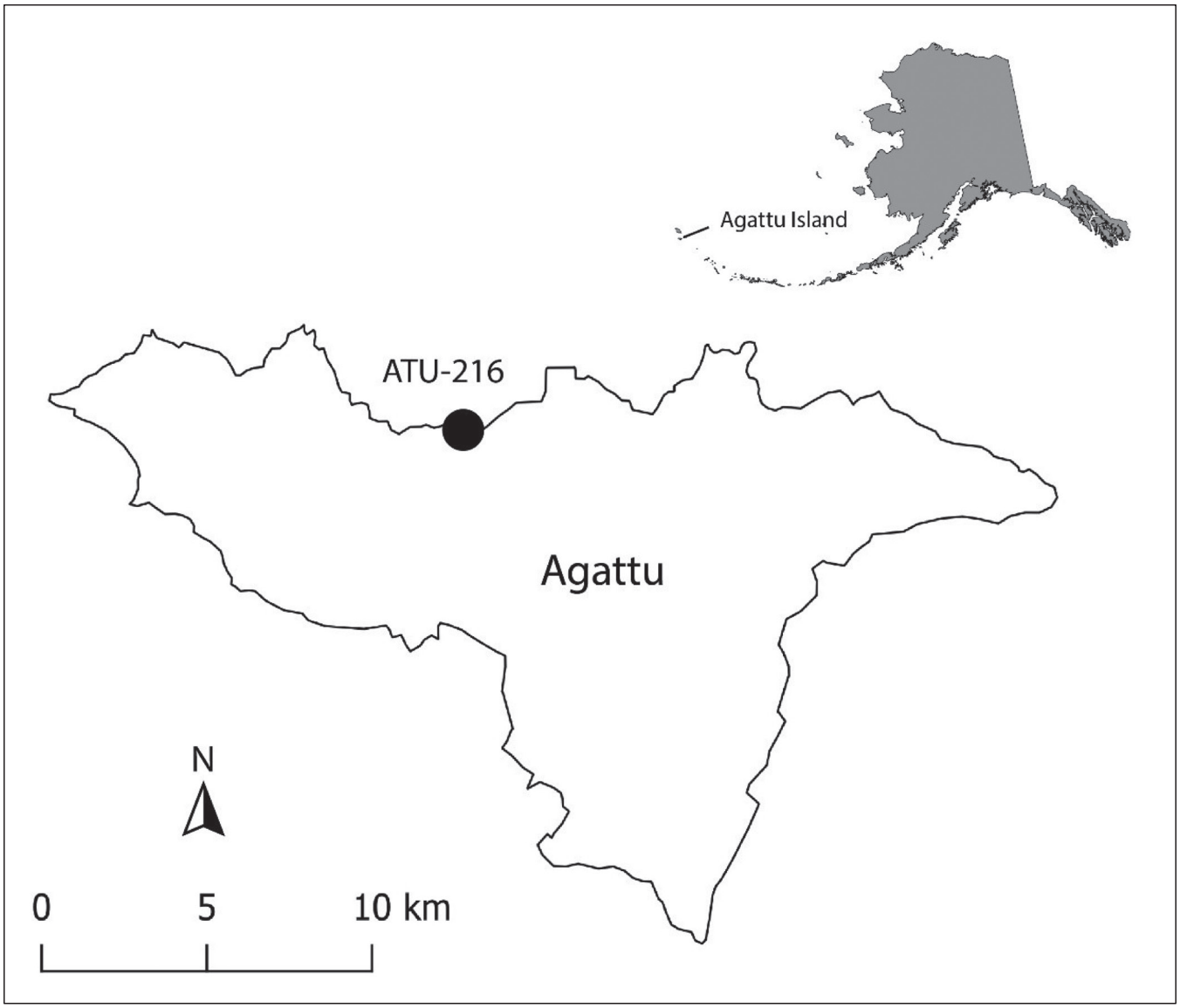

Figure 1. ATU-216 and Agattu Island, Alaska. Map by Miranda LaZar in QGIS 3.34.12

1974; Lightfoot 2003; Makarova 1975). This expedition is credited with the Russian discovery of the Aleutian Islands and returned with an abundance of marine mammal furs (Berkh 1974; Makarova 1975). The Russian government saw this as an opportunity for exploitation that would be marketable in the Chinese trade market and encouraged merchants and *промышленники* [*promyshlennikis*], or fur traders, to set out into the Aleutians (Makarova 1975).

COLONIZATION OF THE NEAR ISLANDS

The initial period of the fur trade in the region ranged from 1743–1755 and was heavily focused on mapping new islands and scouting locations of marine mammals (Makarova 1975). Merchants would hire skippers and *промышленники* (*promyshlennikis*) to run their vessels and voyages (Berkh 1974). The first prominent *промышленники* (p*romyshlennikis*) were Emel'ian Basov and Mikail Nevodchikov, who went to sea in 1743 and 1745, respectively (Berkh 1974; Black 1984; Makarova 1975). Nevodchikov's crew on the vessel *Evdokim* was the first to reach the Near Islands in 1745. The *Evdokim* is the only vessel that recorded visiting Agattu during this early phase of the fur trade but only stayed a day after initiating a hostile interaction with the Sasxinax̂/Sasignan (Berkh 1974; Black 1984). Between 1743 and 1755, 22 different vessels visited the coast of Kamchatka and the Near Islands, setting up camps and sending out hunting artels on Attu (Lightfoot 2003; Makarova 1975). While there were no formal government claims over the islands, the government encouraged Russian rule and the collection of *iasak* taxes from Sasxinax̂/Sasignan, usually in the form of furs (Makarova 1975).

By 1756, there was a notable shift in the voyages' geographical extent and increased demand of furs (Lightfoot 2003; Makarova 1975). Vessels began traveling further east, driven by declining sea otter populations near Kamchatka and the Near Islands (Lightfoot 2003). A total of 48 voyages recorded going to the Aleutian Islands, with some traveling to the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak Island, and beyond (Berkh 1974; Black 1984; Lightfoot 2003; Makarova 1975). Despite the pressure to move further eastward, many vessels continued to stop in the Near Islands to hunt and bring along (most likely enslaved) Sasxinax̂/Sasignan as interpreters. The vessel *Vladimir 3* recorded visiting Agattu, leaving an *артель* (*artel*)—small hunting forts typically located on coastlines—to hunt while the rest of the crew went further east (Crowell 2011; Makarova 1975).

Gradually over the end of the eighteenth century, large merchant companies replaced the smaller independent merchants and their vessels, eventually leading to the creation of the Russian American Company (RAC). The history of the RAC and its colonial impacts is well described elsewhere (Crowell 1997, 2011; Lightfoot 2003). Of relevance to this study, however, Agattu lies within one of the RAC's seven regional management areas, the Atkhinsk region. People from the Near Islands were eventually displaced by the RAC to the western district on Atka (Bergsland 1994:XVI; Black 1984). It is within this context that the Russian colonial occupation of ATU-216 formed.

ATU-216

ATU-216 is a multicomponent ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan village located on the north shore of Agattu Island in the Near Islands group of the western Aleutian Archipelago (Fig. 1). The Russians referred to Agattu as *круглый* (*Kruglyi*), which translates to 'round,' although the island is much more triangular shaped with large mountains in the center (Khlebnikov 1994:230). The site consists of 37 circular and 19 rectangular semisubterranean house depressions, with four of the latter likely large Russian houses, and midden mounds throughout (Fig. 2). It is located in a small cove near the center of Armeria Bay. A small freshwater lake, fed by numerous streams, is located on the northeastern edge of the site. The site appears to have minimal damage from storm or tidal erosion and was not disturbed by WWII operations. The small cove faces Attu to the northwest, and while severe windstorms blow in, it appears that the narrow cove and steep cobble beach protect the site from large waves. Geese, eiders, gulls, loons, sea otters, and seals were all frequent visitors to the cove during the 2023 field season. No sea lions were seen from the site, but two modern rookeries are located on the southern and eastern coasts of the island.

ATU-216 was originally recorded in 1989 by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as AG-7 (BLM AA-11914) (BIA ANCSA 1996). Out of the 10 sites documented in this report, it is noted that ATU-216 is unique as the only large site on Agattu to exhibit substantial Russian influence (BIA ANCSA 1996:120). Excavations occurred at the time of the original recording but were limited to a single 1 m x 1 m test unit within Feature 49, one of the Russian-era structures (BIA ANCSA 1996:77). Russian colonial items from the 1 m x 1 m test unit and surface

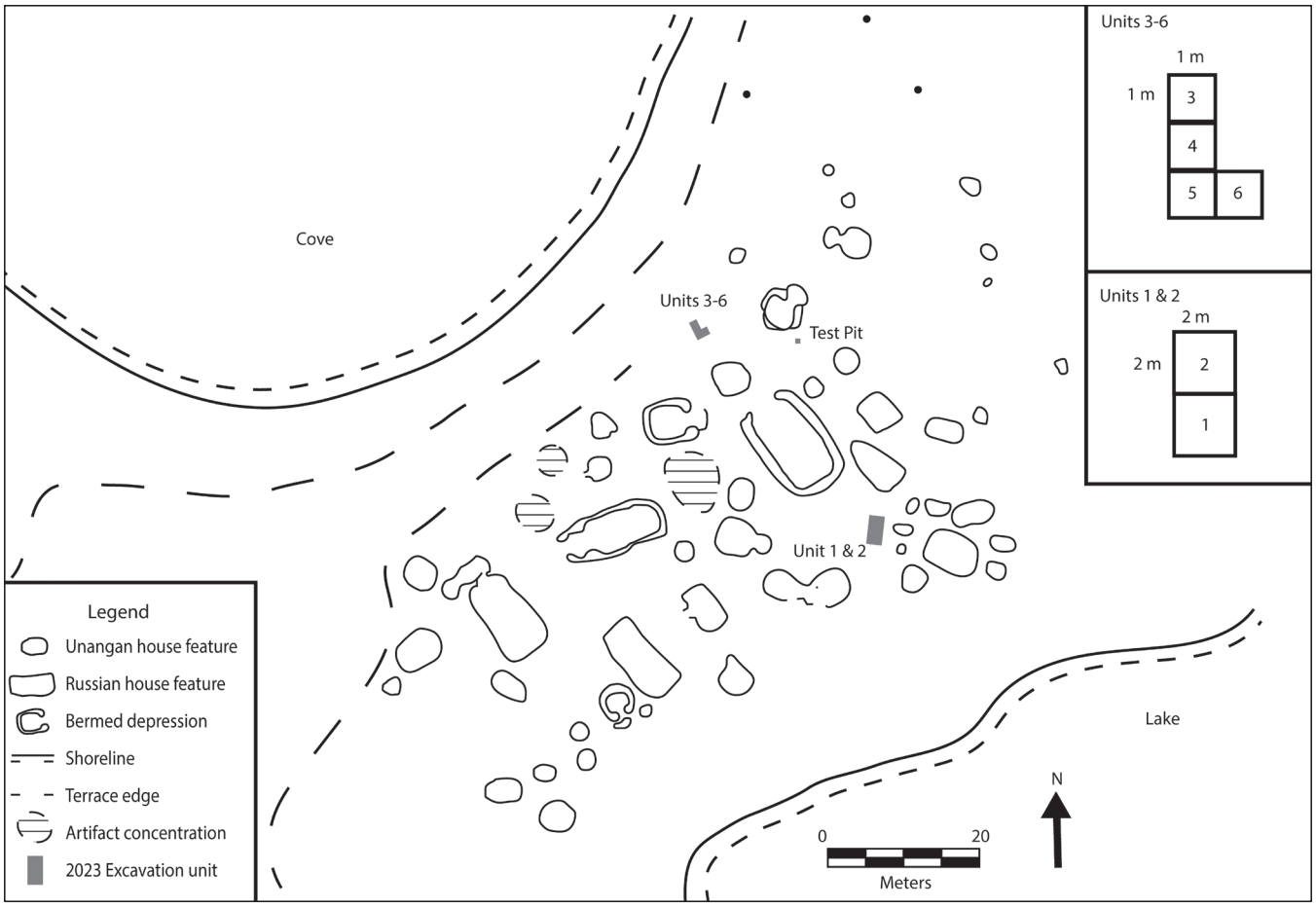

Figure 2. ATU-215 site landscape, features, and excavation units (adapted from BIA ANCSA 1996)

collections included a cloth-covered metal button, a brass spike harpoon socket piece, a decorated bone handle with metal pin, two whiteware ceramic sherds, musket balls, a fox skull, wooden and bamboo stakes, WWII bullet shells, metal sheeting, steel drums, and a wooden barrel (BIA ANCSA 1996:77).

In June 2023, additional units were excavated under the direction of Caroline Funk and Nicole Misarti as a part of the Aleutian Mercury Dynamics Project. The excavation crew included six members in addition to Funk and Misarti. We excavated over a four-week period and concentrated on midden deposits, with the goal of obtaining faunal material for tracking historical mercury levels (Funk et al. 2023a; Funk et al. 2023b; Funk et al. 2025). We excavated three midden localities (Fig. 2). Units one and two were both delineated to be 2 m x 2 m and located in the southeast sector of the site, close to the lake. Unit two remained unexcavated. Units three through six were in the center of the northern edge of the site and were all 1 m x 1 m. Lastly, we excavated a 50 cm x 50 cm test unit slightly southeast of units three through six. This report includes data from units three through six, which have the strongest stratigraphic control and are well dated with radiocarbon dates (Table 1).

We excavated units in 10 cm depth increments, with natural and cultural deposits defined in each level when

Table 1. Radiocarbon dates from Russian-era occupation in units 3–6, levels 1–4 at ATU-216

Lab #	Material	Unit	Level	^{14}C Age (years BP)	δ^{13}C (‰)	Cal BP (2σ)[1]	Median Calendar Year AD
UGA-65953	Charcoal	6	2	140 ± 20	–25.21	278–7 cal BP	AD 1836
UGA-65954	Charcoal	6	3	140 ± 20	–24.84	278–7 cal BP	AD 1836

1. 2σ calibration using OxCal v4.4 IntCal20 calibration curve.

applicable. All material was either dry or wet screened in 1/8th inch screens. Notable material culture was identified and bagged separately in the field. Approximately 3000 pounds of midden material was excavated during the field season. At the time of preparation of this report, midden material was undergoing sorting, analysis, and curation at the University of Alaska Museum of the North. Due to the ongoing analysis, this report will only discuss Russian-era material culture that was sequestered in the field and does not address material that was recovered during midden sorting, with the exception of five textile fragments that were recovered during midden sorting and that are included in this analysis.

All material culture of Russian colonial origin was contained in the upper four levels of excavation, except for two beads; one found in level nine of unit five and the other in level five of unit five. The movement of these small beads to lower levels is likely due to natural or anthropogenic stratigraphy disturbance. All lower-level deposits (levels five through 16) are ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan, predating Russian arrival in the Aleutians. Two radiocarbon samples from levels one through four were submitted to the University of Georgia and are reported in Table 1. Radiocarbon dates were calibrated in OxCal v4.4 using the Intcal-20 calibration curve. The Russian-era occupation has a median age range of 113 cal BP. Below are descriptions of levels one through four:

Level one was a sod layer that consisted of organically rich brown to dark brown loam soils. This level was excavated as a natural level to expose the culturallyrich midden levels below. Depths of level one ranged from a minimum of 1 cm below ground surface (BGS) to a maximum of 7 cm BGS, following the slope of the midden surface. Massive root structures from *Heracleum maximum* (pushki) were removed as part of this level. Lithics and faunal materials were recovered from all units. Gun casings were recovered from unit four and unit five. Beads were recovered from unit five.

Level two consisted of dark brown midden soils with a high density of faunal materials (sea mammal, bird, fish, and urchin). Level two was excavated using an arbitrary 10 cm method with depths ranging from a minimum of 11 cm BGS to a maximum of 16 cm BGS. *Heracleum maximum* roots continued through this level, with some root systems entangled through bone in several of the units. Textile fragments were recovered from unit four in addition to beads, ceramics, and metal objects/fragments recovered from unit five. One radiocarbon date was analyzed for this level from unit six, giving a calibrated date of 278–007 cal BP.

Level three soils consisted of dark brown midden soils with a high density of urchin, fish, and bird and lower frequencies of sea mammal. Lenses of fresh green urchin (unit three) and greasy black compact working surface (unit four) were also present. Level three was excavated using an arbitrary 10 cm method to a minimum depth of 20 cm and a maximum depth of 26 cm BGS. Beads and ceramics were collected from unit five. One radiocarbon sample was analyzed for this level from unit six and gave a calibrated date of 278-007 cal BP (Table 1).

Level four soils consisted of mottled midden soils of fresh green urchin and dark brown loamy soils with high occurrences of faunal and lithic materials. Lenses of compact working surfaces expanded and continued from level three into this level (units three and four). Level four was excavated using an arbitrary 10 cm method to a minimum depth of 39 cm and a maximum depth of 36 cm BGS.

Note that bulk midden samples measuring 20 cm x 20 cm x 5 cm were removed from each level in all units.

MATERIAL CULTURE

We have identified 110 items of colonial origin in levels one through four (Table 2). Ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan artifacts, including lithics and worked bone, were also common in these levels but have not yet been analyzed and are not addressed in this report.

CERAMICS

A total of 10 ceramic sherds were recovered from the top four excavation levels and cataloged using the typology described by Thompson (2002) (Fig. 3). Eight sherds were porcelain and of Chinese origin with a Canton blue-willow motif. Canton blue-willow porcelain was produced between 1800–1830 (Margaris et al. 2015; South 1977; Thompson 2002). Two of the Canton blue-willow sherds were rim fragments with a crosshatch pattern. We identified a single sherd as Russian faience hollowware, originating in Gzhel Russia in 1815 (South 1977; Thompson 2002). One sherd was unidentifiable porcelain, with a faint red floral and/or dot design. Additional sherds were distributed throughout the site's surface but were not collected; they were left to age in place.

Table 2. Russian colonial material catalog for ATU-216, units 3–6, level 1–4.

Catalog Number	Field tag	Unit	Level	Material	Count	Object
UA2023-080-0058	349060	3	2	Ceramic	2	(2) Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain
UA2023-080-0120	349027	4	1	Ceramic	1	IIIg-LG-34 Russian faience
UA2023-080-0149	349206	5	2	Ceramic	3	(3) Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain
UA2023-080-0151	349136	5	3	Ceramic	2	(2) Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain
UA2023-080-0154	349206	5	2	Ceramic	1	Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain
UA2023-080-0165	349380	6	1	Ceramic	1	Porcelain
UA2023-080-0055	349083	3	3A	Metal	1	Ring
UA2023-080-0073	349059	3	2	Metal	1	Handle
UA2023-080-0074	349063	3	2	Metal	1	Cap
UA2023-080-0122	349325	3	2	Metal	3	(3) Fragments
UA2023-080-0123	349319	4	1	Metal	1	Cartridge case
UA2023-080-0155	349335	4	2	Metal	2	(1) Possible ulu; (1) ring
UA2023-080-0157	349050	5	1	Metal	14	(3) Cartridge cases; (11) fragments
UA2023-080-0158	349207	5	2	Metal	2	Grommet; (1) harpoon tip
UA2023-080-0172	349175	5	2	Metal	2	Rings
UA2023-080-0175	349209	6	1	Metal	2	(1) Nail; (1) cartridge case
UA2023-080-0177	349381	6	1	Metal	1	Cartridge case
UA2023-080-0190	349051	6	1	Metal	1	Cartridge case
UA2023-080-0282	349334	5	2	Textile	2	(1) Wool fiber fragment; (1) bast fiber fragment
UA2023-080-0549	349336	5	2	Textile	1	Bast fiber fragment
UA2023-080-0257	349323	4	2	Textile	1	Bast fiber fragment
UA2023-080-0668	349124	4	2	Textile	3	(1) Bast fiber with rolled edge; (2) bast fiber fragments
UA2023-080-0111	349320	4	1	Bead	1	Dark blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0113	349126	4	3	Bead	1	Red with black interior ring 4 mm
UA2023-080-0114	349323	4	2	Bead	23	(7) white ranging from 3–3.5 mm; (1) red with black interior ring 3 mm; (12) dark blue all roughly 3 mm; (3) light blue 3 mm
UA2023-080-0116	349323	4	2	Bead	6	(3) white 4 mm; (1) light blue; (2) dark blue 3 mm
UA2023-080-0144	349208	5	2	Bead	13	(5) white 3.5 mm; (7) dark blue 3.5 mm; (1) light blue 3.5 mm; (1) red 1.3 cm
UA2023-080-0148	349346	5	3	Bead	1	Dark blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0150	349049	5	1	Bead	1	(1) white 8 mm
UA2023-080-0167	349210	6	3	Bead	4	(1) white 4 mm; (2) light blue 3 mm; (1) dark blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0170	349174	6	2	Bead	6	(2) small white 3.5–4 mm; (2) large white 7.5–10 mm; (2) dark blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0173	349210	6	3	Bead	4	(2) white 3.5–4 mm; (2) dark blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0174	349217	6	4	Bead	1	Light blue 3.5 mm
UA2023-080-0171	349387	6	2	Glass	1	Colorless shard

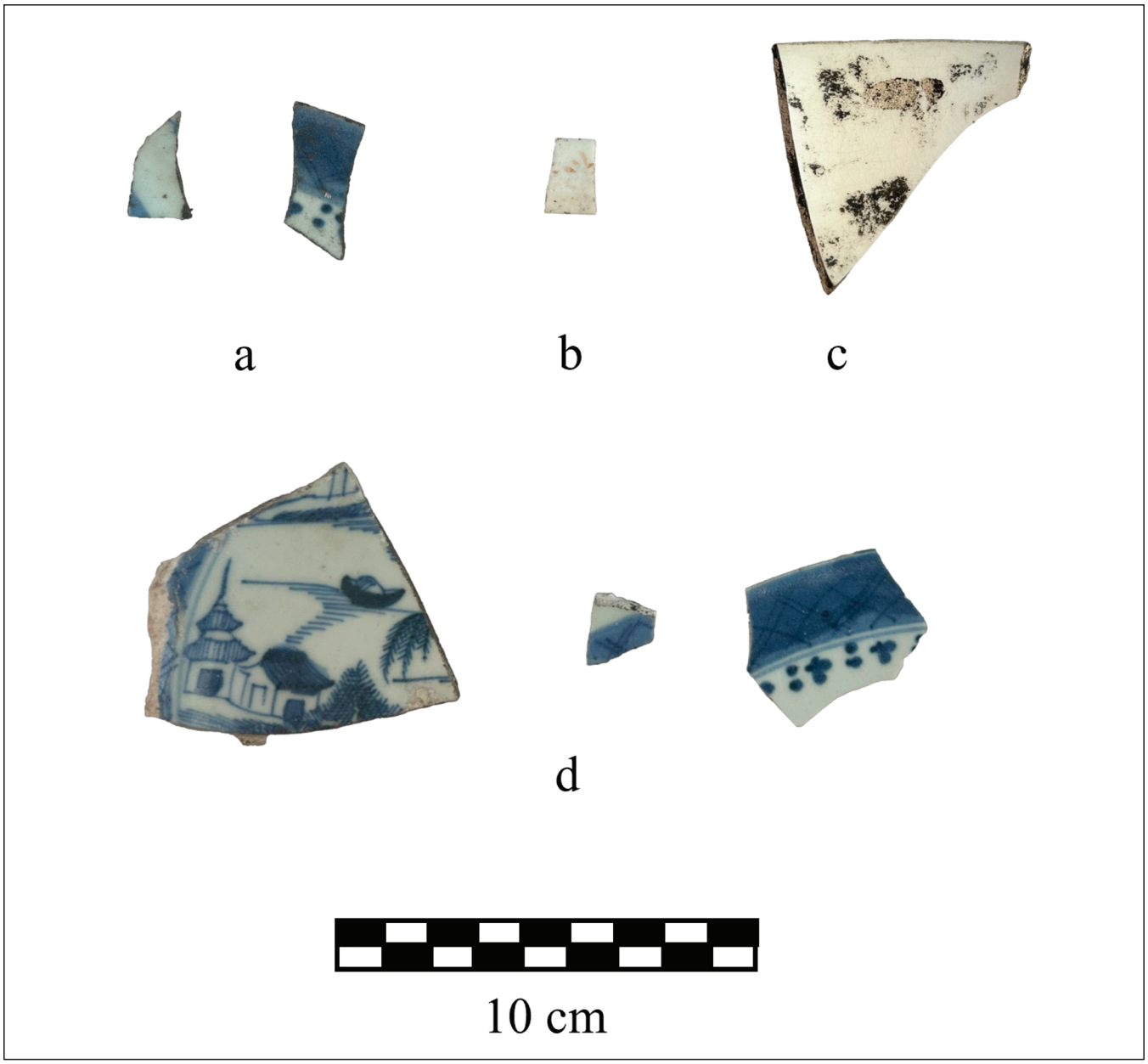

Figure 3. Ceramic artifacts at ATU-216: (a) UA2023-080-0151, Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain, rim fragment; (b) UA2023-080-0165, unidentified porcelain; (c) UA2023-080-0120, IIIg-LG-34 Russian faience; (d) UA2023-080-0149 Ib-UG-01 Canton porcelain, rim fragment. Photos from the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

BEADS

Current analysis has identified a total of 61 trade beads distributed throughout the Russian occupation era levels (Fig. 4). An additional three beads were collected from non-Russian occupation levels (one dark blue from unit four level nine) and two (one white, one dark blue) from unit five level five. These three beads were not included in the final count, as they were not collected from the levels of analysis (one through four). Bead colors vary, with dark blue (n = 32) and white (n = 25) being the most common. Additional colors include light blue (n = 7), red with a dark interior ring (n = 3), red (n = 1), and black (n = 1). The red with a dark interior ring are most likely cornaline d'Aleppo beads, commonly found in Alaska assemblages (Bundy et al. 2003:36). Diameter size ranges from a minimum of 3 mm to 4 mm, with the exception of two beads: one white spherical bead with an 8 mm diameter (unit five level one) and one large red bead with a diameter of 1.3 cm (unit five level two). Approximately 94% of the identified beads

appear to be barrel shaped, with 6% spherical (mainly the larger-sized white beads). Manufacturing methods of barrel-shaped beads tend to be drawn, which consists of cutting beads from long, thin glass, while wire-round barrel beads are rare (Bundy et al 2003:35; Grillo and Aultman 2003).

METAL

The preservation of metal materials on the site surface was striking, and 31 metal fragments were excavated in levels one through four (Fig. 5). Of this sample, seven are bullet casings, three are metal rings, one is a possible bracket, one is a possible ulu, one is a spike or nail, one is a harpoon tip, one is a metal cap, and 16 are unidentified ferrous metal objects that resemble sheet metal or some small metal fragment. Three of the cartridge cases were identified at the Museum of the North by Steve Lanford (pers. comm., Nov. 2, 2023). They consist of one Winchester WRA co .303 Savage and two Winchester .30 WCF super speed casings. The manufacture date for both types of ammunition begin in 1895 (Barnes and Warner 1980). The .303 Savage was initially developed as a military cartridge and was introduced commercially by 1899 (Barnes and Warner 1980:58). The .30 WCF super speed casings were originally marketed as a sporting cartridge (Barnes and Warner 1980:48), suggesting use during fox hunting and trapping periods that postdate occupation of ATU-216.

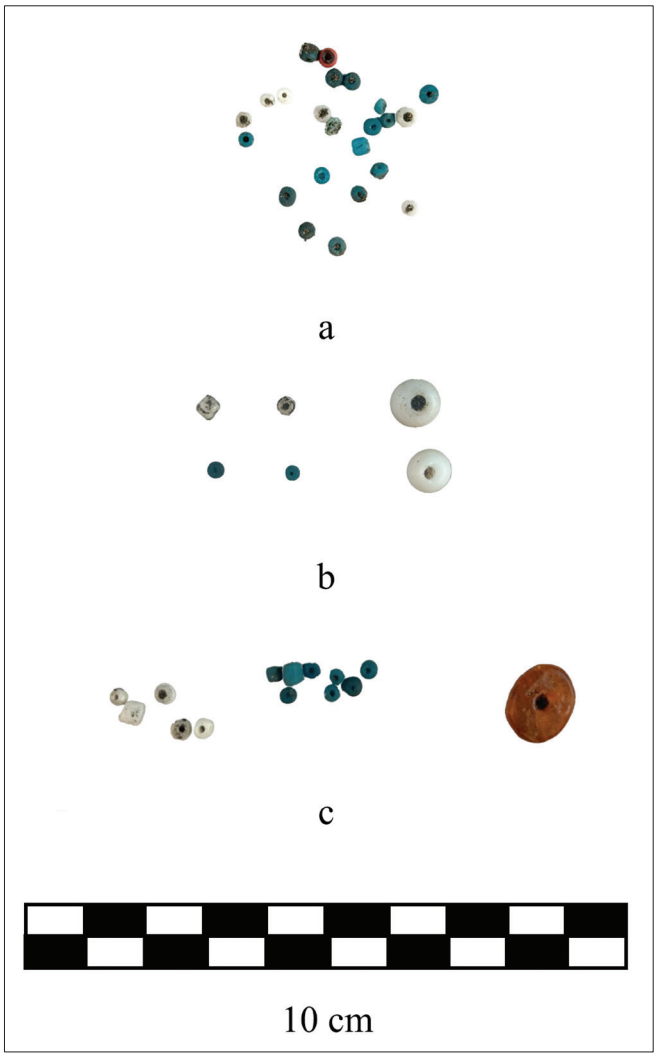

Figure 4. Beads at ATU-216: (a) UA2023-080-0114, white (7), red with black interior ring (1), dark blue (12), light blue (3); (b) UA2023-080-0170, small white (2), large white (2), dark blue (2); (c) UA2023-080-0144, white (5), dark blue (7), light blue (1), red (1). Photos from the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

TEXTILE FRAGMENTS

Textile fragments were analyzed under microscopy (20x–50x) at the Arizona State Museum by Edward Jolie with assistance from authors LaZar and Lackos. Two fragments of 1/1 balanced plainweave textile were identified in the field and preserved through controlled drying. Five additional 1/1 balanced plainweave fragments were identified during midden sorting (Fig. 6). All fragments were found in level two of units four and five. Six out of the seven fragments had Z-spun warps and wefts and were

Figure 5. Metal artifacts at ATU-216: (a) UA2023-080-0073, bracket; (b) UA2023-080-0055, ring; (c) UA2023-080-0175, cartridge case; (d) UA2023-080-0155, possible ulu; (e) UA2023-080-0175, nail; (f) UA2023-080-0074, cap. Photos from the University of Alaska Museum of the North.

likely a bast fiber. The remaining fragment had S-spun warps and wefts and was a wiry texture that suggests the fiber was wool. The presence of two distinct spin directions and fibers implies the recovery of at least two separate textile pieces. Five fragments were partially carbonized, evidenced by their dark color. The longest bast fiber fragment had a rolled edge, but no stitching or binding was detected, making it unclear whether the fragment was an intentional selvage/hemmed edge or an edge that had rolled on a worn fabric.

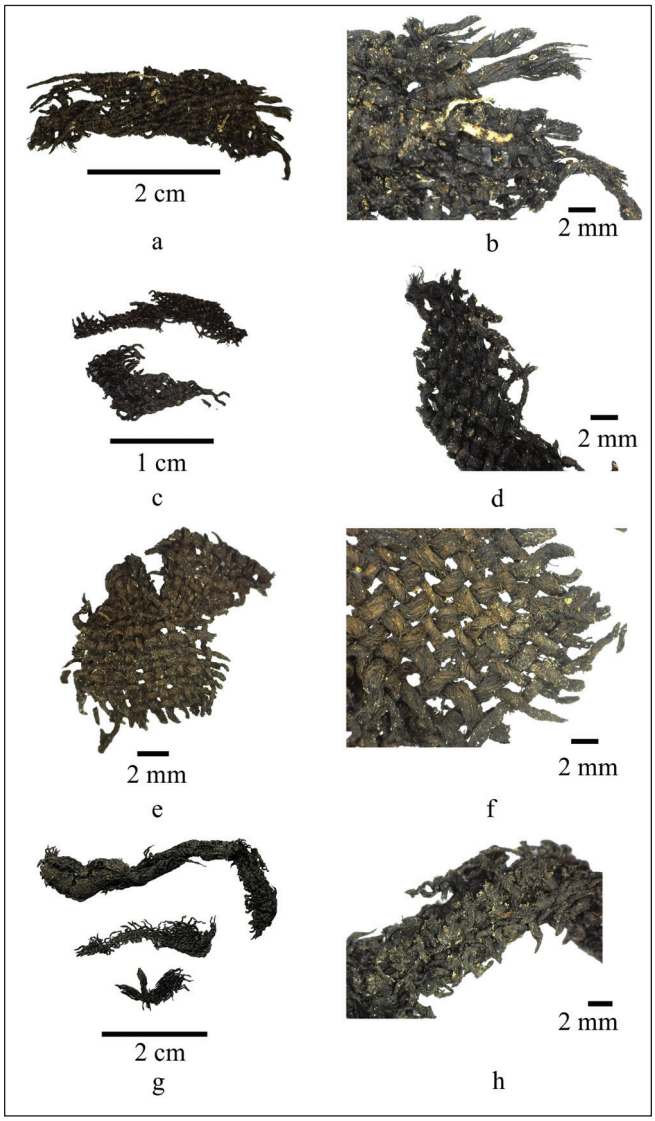

Figure 6. Textiles fragments at ATU-216: (a) UA2023-080-0549, bast fiber fragment; (b) UA2023-080-0549 magnified; (c) UA2023-080-0282, wool fiber fragment (1), bast fiber fragment (1); (d) UA2023-080-0282 magnified; (e) UA2023-080-0257 bast fiber fragment; (f) UA2023-080-0257 magnified; (g) UA2023-080-0668, bast fiber fragment with rolled edge (1), bast fiber fragment (2); (h) UA2023-080-0668 magnified. Magnified images captured with Dino-Lite USB digital microscope (model AM4113ZT) 20-50x.

GLASS

A single piece of glass was recovered from unit six level two. The fragment is colorless and curved but contains no diagnostic elements.

FAUNAL MATERIAL

Faunal materials in the Russian colonial era occupation levels included a preponderance of sea mammal elements compared to deep ancestral Unangax̂ occupation levels, which included higher occurrences of bird, fish, and urchin. This analysis is ongoing, yet Russian-era subsistence and perhaps seasonal occupation timing was different from ancestral use of the place.

DISCUSSION

Material culture from the Russian-era occupation at ATU-216 shows that Russians occupied the ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan village site in the early nineteenth century. The manufacture of Canton blue-willow porcelain, the most abundant ceramic at ATU-216, did not begin until 1800 and continued until 1830, while the Russian faience holloware was produced between 1815 and 1860 (South 1977; Thompson 2002). The absence of the English transferprint wares manufactured by Spode and Copeland, a company contracted by the Hudson's Bay Company, further implies that the site was occupied prior to the Hudson's Bay Company's 1839 trade deal with the RAC (Knecht and Jordan 1985; Margaris et al. 2015). Nonetheless, a colonial RAC occupation on Agattu in the early 1800s is relatively unexpected given the much higher traffic of vessels and *артели* (*artels*) in the Near Islands between 1745 and 1780, as well as the decline of marine mammal populations out west after 1756.

Only one RAC settlement in the Near Islands is mentioned in the ethnohistorical documents: Port Chichagov on the northeastern coast of Attu (Khlebnikov 1994). Given the size of site, ATU-216 was likely either an *артель* (*artel*) or *одиночка* (*odinochka*) that built onto the already existing ancestral Sasxinax̂/Sasignan village (Luehrmann 2008; Margaris et al. 2015). *Одиночки* (*odinochkas*) were similar hunting camps to *артели* (*artels*) but

were distinguished by their smaller scale—with only one RAC officer or manager present—and by their specialized uses and/or seasonal occupations (Davydov 1977, as cited in Margaris et al. 2015; Luehrmann 2008, as cited in Margaris et al. 2015). In addition to RAC officers or managers, conscripted Alaska Native workers lived at both *артели* (*artels*) and *одиночки* (*odinochkas*) (Davydov 1977, as cited in Margaris et al. 2015; Luehrmann 2008, as cited in Margaris et al. 2015). Due to their larger scale, *артели* (*artels*) at Alaska Native village sites are more commonly recorded in the archaeological record than *одиночки* (*odinochkas*) (Crowell 2011; Margaris et al. 2015). The Russians occupied ATU-216 roughly the same time they did *Mikt'sqaq Angayuk*, an Alutiiq site that served as an *одиночка* (*odinochka*) on Kodiak Island that has a similar expression of colonial materials in the archaeological assemblage (Margaris et al. 2015). However, the size of the Russian structures and sheer number of colonial objects at ATU-216 lends support for the interpretation that the site was an *артель* (*artel*). Future analysis of faunal material from ATU-216 will help determine if the site was occupied seasonally or year-round.

The use of ATU-216 as an *артель* (*artel*) or *одиночка* (*odinochka*) by the RAC is corroborated by the presence of imported trade goods. The hierarchal structure of the RAC relied on material representation of status (Crowell 1997, 2011). This is manifested at ATU-216 through the presence of four Russian-style structures and Chinese porcelain, both of which would have belonged to an officer or manager and not working-class employees. Further analysis of the bast fibers in the textile fragments will determine if the textiles were produced in Russia or were trade objects obtained by merchants. Prior to the RAC, the merchants who had access to large trade networks did not go on the voyages themselves. Instead, they sent skippers and *промышленники* (*promyshlennikis*), neither of which would have been able to access or afford imported goods such as Chinese porcelain (Berkh 1974; Crowell 2011). We would not expect imported items, like porcelain, to be present in Russian-era archaeological sites prior to the formation of the RAC.

Russian colonization was not a linear process—there were cycles of violence and multidirectional cultural interchange. Nor were the Sasxinax̂/Sasignan passive victims of the process. By the time a RAC *артель* (*artel*) or *одиночка* (*odinochka*) was built at ATU-216, there had been approximately 50 to 100 years of interactions between the Sasxinax̂/Sasignan and the Russians on Agattu. The unique position of Agattu, and the other Near Islands, allowed Russians to build longstanding relationships with Sasxinax̂/Sasignan leaders and communities. Cultural exchange occurred through both material items and knowledge. The dispersal of beads by Russian crew members to Sasxinax̂/Sasignan people was encouraged as a gesture of "good will," although it was likely more of an exchange item to garner information, Russian allegiance, or assurance that *iasak* would be paid (Bundy et al. 2003). Beads were common ornamentation prior to Russian occupation and were often carved from bone or ivory (Bundy et al. 2003). Glass trade beads introduced into the Unangax̂ economy were used for similar purposes, adorning men's hunting hats and labrets as well as women's clothing (Bundy et al. 2003). Additionally, at the time of the Russian occupation at ATU-216, Alaska Natives on the mainland were finding ways to trade with American merchants, obtaining material goods (e.g., guns and knives) that the RAC had previously prohibited (Gibson 1976). While the American vessels likely did not reach the Near Islands, it is not improbable that the Sasxinax̂/Sasignan found their own ways to trade for imported goods or that they received these items through unofficial down-the-line trade systems. Sasxinax̂/Sasignan knowledge of the environment, other Unangax̂ cultural groups, and hunting technology that was shared with, and exploited by, Russians was instrumental in shaping the large scale of colonization across the North Pacific. Future research on the Sasxinax̂/Sasignan material culture and faunal remains in the upper four levels at ATU-216 will provide much-needed insight into cultural exchange and local acts of Sasxinax̂/Sasignan survivance.

CONCLUSION

Based on these preliminary results, we interpret the ATU-216 Russian-era occupation as a small RAC *артель* (*artel*) or *одиночка* (*odinochka*) controlled by a regional officer and/or manager between 1815 and 1830. We argue that Russian fur traders, and later the RAC, maintained a presence in the Near Islands throughout their colonization of the North Pacific, despite ethnographic documents suggesting a decline of hunting camps in the region after 1780. The site was occupied during an important transition period of Russian colonization and capitalist endeavors. The success of the early fur trade gained merchants access to the Chinese trade markets, but direct trade with the European market was still very limited. At ATU-216,

we recognize the multidirectional cultural exchange that continued for half a century prior to this archaeological occupation that shaped the midden assemblages excavated in 2023.

ENDNOTES

1. Aleut or Unangax̂ refer to people who live in the Aleutian Islands region broadly. People from the Near Islands are recorded as Sasxinax̂ or Sasignan as in the late 1700s CE (Corbett and Hanson 2023:14). In this report, we use Sasxinax̂/Sasignan to refer to the people of the Near Islands and Unangax̂ when discussing the people of the Aleutians more broadly.

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