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EPIDEMICS, PROPHECY, AND SELF-CHRISTIANIZATION: AHTNA INDIANS QUEST FOR RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY, 1880^S-1930^S

Historians and anthropologists have extensively researched spiritual encounters between America's indigenous people and Christian missionaries. One group of scholars, who more often than not are linked to Native American cultural activism, took a strong critical approach and came to view missionary activities as the tool of colonialism. Another group of scholars, who are mostly people with a theological background, on the contrary, treat missionary activities apologetically as the vehicle of social and moral improvement. The third group of researchers, to which I belong, avoids moral assessments of the missionary activities. Dialogues of indigenous people with Christianity were multifaceted and cannot be pigeonholed in some partisan "post-colonial" or "theological" scholarship. Using archival records of Alaska Russian Orthodox Mission and my own field notes of the 1990s, I examine a case of an abortive Russian Orthodox mission to the Ahtna Indians of Alaska. In the 1880s, this Athabaskan-speaking group suddenly took efforts to learn about Russian Orthodoxy, and many of them simultaneously began to actively seek conversion. My paper explores the driving cultural, economic, and psychological motives behind this peculiar case of "self-Christianization".

Key words: *Native Americans, American Indians, Ahtna, Copper River, Athabaskans, Alaska, Russian Orthodoxy, Conversion, Prophecy, Epidemics*

Native dialogues with Orthodox Christianity in Alaska and Siberia have been multifaceted. They have ranged from a resistance, as among the Chukchi, and selective borrowing, as for instance, among the Tlingit, to the embracement of Christianity, when such groups as the Aleuts and Sugpiaq turned it into their own indigenous church. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the role of native agency in those spiritual contacts and to stress that these contacts should not be reduced to the imposition of Christianity on indigenous people. It was frequently the choice of indigenous groups themselves that used the religion of newcomers to resolve their own spiritual and cultural problems.

In this paper, I explore the relationships between the Ahtna Indians and Russian Orthodoxy. The story, which follows below, deals with the Ahtna Indians' failed attempts to bring Orthodoxy to their country. Available nineteenth-century records that chronicle activities of Russian missionaries among the Ahtna and other Athabaskan-speaking groups suggest that,

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from the very beginning, in this area Orthodoxy did not face too much ostracism from native populations. Sparse hunting-oriented populations, which were newcomers to essentially Yupik and Alutiiq areas, Athabaskans had loose clan structure and lacked excessive social control over individual behavior. I assume that these factors made them susceptible to new ideas in the first place. Attitudes of many Ahtna and Athabaskans in general toward Orthodoxy and Catholicism, especially at the end of the nineteenth century, could be described as “self-Christianization.” Historian Jürgen Osterhammel introduced this expression to emphasize an initiative of native peoples to accommodate the Christian religion to their own ideology (*Osterhammel 1997*).

The Ahtna’s attitudes toward Orthodoxy provide us with an example of such “self-Christianization,” and show that in indigenous borderlands the initial drive to start a dialogue frequently came not only from clerics, but also from native populations themselves. So here we essentially have a society that sought contacts with missions. I want to stress this again simply because at least here in the United States in popular and semi-scholarly literature, which likes to present Native Americans as perpetual victims, Christianity is frequently treated as a colonial imposition that supposedly robbed native peoples of their traditional culture (*Tinker 1993*). Of course, one should keep in mind that there is an opposite trend that emphasizes only positive accomplishments of missionaries (*Oleksa 1987*). The latter scholarship manifests itself, for instance, in present-day Russia, where the growth of state Orthodoxy and nationalist sentiments encourage some scholars to romanticize Siberia and Alaska missionaries and treat them as cultural heroes (*Романова, Лазарева 1999*).

Before I get to the story itself, I want to provide several basic facts about the Ahtna Indians. This Athabaskan-speaking group resides in the Copper River area at the southcentral Alaska. Because of the rumors of abundant copper deposits in their country, when Alaska belonged to the Russian Empire, the Ahtna were known as “Mednovtsy” (“Copper people”). Their overall number never exceeded 700 people, at least in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to earlier Russian estimates (1852), they had numbered only 210 persons (*Дорошин 1866*); because of the poor knowledge of their country, the newcomers mistakenly ascribed northernmost groups of the Ahtna to the Kolchan, another Athabaskan-speaking group. In contrast to the semi-sedentary Dena’ina, who supplemented their hunting of the moose and deer and other forest animals with fishing, the Ahtna were nomads who mostly depended on forest hunting. As in the case of many other hunting groups, such life style was precarious. As a result, they were exposed to bouts of famine when expected animals herds were not around. Ferdinand Wrangell, the chief administrator of Russian America, reported that in 1828 about 100 Ahtna perished because of the poor hunting (*Дорошин 1866*).

One also needs to stress that “Mednovtsy” were officially classified as natives completely independent from the Russian-American Company (RAC), the fur-trading company that was granted a monopoly control over “Russian America.” Therefore, the newcomers were never in a position to enforce any regulations on them. The Copper River natives were not exposed to intensive contact with Euro-Americans until the end of the 1880s. The geography of Ahtna country, including hardships of navigating the Copper River, explained their weak contacts with the Russians and later with the Americans. Prior to the 1880s, all their relations with the outside world were primarily restricted to trade.

Moreover, until the 1890, the Ahtna had little direct access to trading posts. They had either to use the middlemen services of the Dena’ina, their Athabaskan-speaking neighbors, or to descend from the mountains to the Cook Inlet area, or to the delta of the Copper River

to exchange furs for Russian and later for American merchandise. To be exact, prior to 1867 Russians did make random attempts to penetrate “Mednovtsy” country. Between the 1820s and 1850, there even existed a tiny trading post called Mednovskaia odinochka that worked only randomly. It was the only evidence of some Russian presence in the Ahtna country. Because of the Ahtna sovereign status, RAC leadership sought to cultivate their partnership through regular presents, which were provided to the Ahtna headmen each time, when a trade deal was successfully completed.

The most popular trade destinations were Knik and Tyonek in the Cook Inlet area. These two settlements were populated by the Dena’ina who all converted to Russian Orthodoxy by the 1880s. Historically, the Ahtna always maintained close relations with the “Kenaitze” (a Russian name for the Dena’ina). During their trade trips to Knik the Ahtna depended on the hospitality of the Dena’ina in whose homes they stayed and whose meals they shared. For some Russians, who lacked a detailed knowledge of the ethnic mosaic of the area, such contacts appeared as a blood link. For instance, the engineer Peter Doroshin, who was sent from St. Petersburg to explore coal deposits in the Cook Inlet, stressed that the Copper River natives were “the Kenaitze, their fellow-tribesmen” (*Дорошин* 1866). Descending to Knik or Tyonek, the delta of the Copper River or sometimes even St. Nicholas redoubt, the Ahtna interacted with Orthodox mixed-bloods and Dena’ina, many of whom became Orthodox as early as the 1840s. We may assume that the “Kenaitze” frequently acted as informal carriers of popular Orthodoxy to the Ahtna.

Formal missionary work among the Ahtna began in the late 1840s, when Hegumen Nikolai, the first missionary to this area, baptized in Knik and Kenai visiting Ahtna. Nikolai’s successors were also interested in spreading their activities to the “Mednovtsy,” but never had a chance to visit them in their country until the 1930s, despite the Ahtna’s desire to establish a dialogue with Orthodoxy. The first recorded instance of the Ahtna’s contact with Christianity took place in 1797, when Russian officer Dmitrii Tarkhanov tried to preach Orthodoxy to them (*Grinev* 1997: 8). Yet, available sources suggest that missionary work among the Copper Indians did not start until 1849. The register of parishioners of the Kenai area prepared by Hegumen Nikolai for 1851 already mentioned 82 Ahtna converted to Orthodoxy (*Николай* 1851).

Nikolai’s records also show that in July of 1860 five new Ahtna visitors came to St. Nicholas Redoubt in Kenai for trade. They too accepted baptism and invited the missionary to come to their habitats. Yet, referring to the obstacles of such a trip, the missionary answered to them, “I would be glad to visit you. Yet, I am not a bird and do not have wings. I have neither means no stamina to measure all that long distance on my feet for two to three months wandering through mountains, tundra, and swamps. Those who wish to get baptisms can reach me themselves”¹. Once Nikolai was all ready for the journey, but the canoe with Ahtna rowers who were expected to fetch him was crashed over rocks by a rapid current. At first he repeatedly postponed his trip to Ahtna country and then dropped the whole idea and continued to work only with the Ahtna who visited Knik and Kenai.

We may assume that a desire of some Ahtna to accept baptism in the 1850s was driven by a desire to strengthen reciprocal relationships with Russian trade centers and Christian

¹ “Я бы рад побывать у вас, да мудрено попасть к вам. Я не птица, крыльев не имею, а ногами измерить такое пространство, идти по горам, по лесам, по тундрам и болотам два или три месяца вперед, да оттуда столькоже, для этого не достанет у меня ни сил, ни средств. Желающие креститься пусть сами приходят сюда” (*Милитов (игумен Николай)* 1863: 17).

Dena'ina, who lived in their vicinity. It was obvious, for instance, in the behavior of Vasilii Tinal'tet, one of the Ahtna headmen. RAC wanted to make him a company's middleman in the Copper River country, the role he evidently adopted and successfully performed. In 1858 he and his fellow tribesmen sold a large number of furs to the company, for which RAC awarded him goods in the amount of 20 rubles. In the same year Tinal'tet adopted Orthodoxy, which was specially noted in the RAC documents (*Фуругельм* 1858: 147об).

On the surface, not much changed for the Ahtna with the transition of Alaska to Americans. The same mixed-blood Russian-speaking people or their relatives continued to serve trading posts in Knik, Tyonek and Kenai. Yet the choice of merchandise became more diverse and therefore the taste of the Ahtna for American goods increased. Thus, after an Ahtna Indian killed an Alaskan Commercial Company agent in Knik in 1886, his fellow-tribesmen approached Vladimir Stafeev, a Russian-born trade agent in Tyonek, wishing to pay redemption money. The natives especially stressed that they were so used to tea, gunpowder, and other "white men's" merchandise that they did not want the Knik trading post to be closed (*Стафеев* 1886: 13 января).

Incidentally, Stafeev left evidence of how the Ahtna initiated requests for baptism during trade meetings. For example, in 1887 in Tyonek, he traded with three "Mednovtsy" natives, two of whom asked Stafeev about the opportunity to accept baptism. Then in the evening of the same day, when Stafeev almost forgot about this request, the Ahtna again reminded him that "they want to accept baptism very much." As a result, the next day, on December 15, 1887, Stafeev baptized these two natives and gave them new names, Pavel and Karp. Two Dena'ina from the Tyonek village, Pavel Shitachka and Karp [Nukhdichugin], acted as their godparents. Being a lay Orthodox leader, Stafeev did not restrict himself to the formal baptism procedure, but also tried to indoctrinate them.

Stafeev described in detail how he introduced these two Ahtna to Orthodoxy: "I baptized two of them at my home. After the baptism I took them to the chapel, showed them icons with images of major feasts, and explained to them the meaning of baptism, the Nativity and other feasts. I also spoke about and showed them the icon depicting martyr Nestor. The old man liked icons so much that he did not want to leave the chapel for a long time. He especially enjoyed the images of the Savior and Kazan Mother of God. After this, I treated them with tea and cakes (*prianiki*). Then the Mednovtsy passionately thanked me for everything, first for the baptism, then for my talk in the chapel and finally for the tea and cakes. Yet, these two savages somehow had already learned quite enough earlier, specifically how to make the sign of the cross and even knew how to recite the prayer 'Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit'¹. One may assume that they had received this rudimentary knowledge of Orthodoxy from their Dena'ina neighbors.

Until the 1880s a desire to maintain beneficial trade relations with Russian/Creole and Dena'ina Christians might have explained the Ahtna's wish to accept conversion. Yet in

¹ "Торговался с хребтовскими [медновцами – AZ], принесли больше оленины. Двое из них просят креститься. Вечером я их спрашивал, оба сильно хотят. Крестил двух хребтовских. Одного назвал Павлом, 59 лет, другого Карпом, 20 лет. Крестил их дома. После крещения водил в часовню. Показывал образ дванадесятых праздника, истоковал им Воскресение и проч. праздники. И также говорил и показывал [икону – AZ] мученика Нестора. Старик долго не хотел выходить из часовни – сильно ему понравились образа Спасителя и Казанской ПБ. Я их угощал чаем с пряниками. За все они сильно благодарили, сперва то что я их крестил, затем что им говорил в часовне, и после за чай. Оба этих дикаря очень довольны были раньше научены. Крестятся и даже научились [молитве – AZ] во Имя Отца и Сына и Святаго духа" (*Стафеев* 1887: 15 декабря).

the 1880s there appeared another factor that might have also drawn the Ahtna to Russian Orthodoxy. Although the Ahtna had entered a period of dramatic changes as late as the end of the 1890s, epidemic diseases and the first American advances into Copper River country during these years perhaps created an anxiety and prompted “Mednovsty” to reassess their ideology and status in the changing social and economic environment. In 1886, a story spread about an Ahtna who died and, while his friends were making a coffin, was miraculously resurrected for only six days before “falling back asleep” again.

During these six days, the Ahtna Indian shared with his fellow-tribesmen a vision, in which an old man, a messenger from God, instructed the Ahtna to denounce shamanism and accept Orthodoxy. Moreover, the resurrected Indian assailed a shaman who happened to be nearby. The messenger of God supposedly asked the resurrected man to convey the following words to all shamans: “I would have said to you how you will be punished for your vocation, but you will not hear it from me. I will only say that you will face big trouble in the other world” and also “in the other world you will feel worse than others because you spoil people with your devil tools, force us to live and act in a bad manner.” The resurrected Indian then added that he “was raised just to tell people how they should live and that they should abandon all old things.”¹

The old man, who allegedly visited the above-mentioned Ahtna in his dream, said that Ahtna country would soon shrink in size. Furthermore, this prophet showed this old man a tiny piece left of Copper River country. He also expressed a regret that the people had not accepted baptism yet. One may suggest that the spirit visitor “conveyed” a message that the fact the people had not accepted baptism had prepared them for the calamity. In the vision, the messenger of God also drew the attention of the resurrected one to the fact that all surrounding tribes had already accepted Christianity. In order to be saved the Ahtna also should follow the pattern. Having delivered this message, the native instructed his friends to finish making his coffin.

The vision and the events that followed demonstrate a typical response quite common among preliterate indigenous groups having to cope with expanding Euro-American societies. Anthropology literature usually has referred to such events as religious revitalization after Anthony Wallace’s classic study *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* and an article (Wallace 1956, 1970). In his *Memory Eternal*, Sergei Kan too explored indigenous spiritual responses to Russian Orthodoxy. Particularly, he has described similar visions that prompted a conversion to Orthodoxy among the Tlingit Indians during the same decades (Kan 1999: 258–260). The 1886 spiritual encounter stirred a wide movement among the Ahtna, and in 1887 many of them were ready to go to Knik and Susitna in order to accept Orthodox baptism. Unfortunately, Hieromonk Nikita, who was responsible for missionary

¹ “У медновцев один умер, стали плакать и делать гроб. Вдруг чрез какое-то время покойник оживает и встает. Вставши, начал рассказывать: ‘Прежде два человека тоже оживали как и я, и они говорили что видали Бога. Но он врал. Они видели черта, который их учил убивать, грабить и обирать людей. Бог есть, но мы его не можем видеть. Бог велит все делать хорошее, а не то что говорили раньше.’ Он увидел тут же шамана и начал укорять в его шаманстве: ‘Я бы тебе сказал что будет тебе за твое ремесло, но ты этого не услышишь от меня. Одно скажу, что тебе будет худо на том свете’. Сказавши это, он лег и умер. Во время разговора делавший гроб остановился его делать, видя что как-никак покойник ожил и говорит. Когда они остановились, он обратился к ним и сказал, что гроб вы доканчиваете и что я встал только сказать вам как надо жить, и оставить все прежнее. Теперь медновцы хотят идти в Кнык и Сушитну и креститься” (Стафеев 1886: 16 марта).

work during this time, had alcohol problems, treated his proselytizing assignments as drudgery and did not respond to the Ahtna's initiative. In 1886 the number of the Ahtna converts did not exceed twelve people. Two years later the Ahtna, through Knik Dena'ina, sent a message to Mitropol'skii, an acting Kenai missionary who replaced Nikita, asking him to come and enlighten them about Orthodoxy (*Митропольский* 1888).

It appears that, far from being a sudden revelation, the "dead man's" prophesy fell on the ground that was already fertilized with the seeds of Orthodoxy brought by Nikolai, Dena'ina and Creole Christians. A year before the above-mentioned resurrection miracle, Lieutenant Henry Allen, who visited the Ahtna, had already indicated that, among the Copper River natives, there existed people who were ready to bolster their traditional powers with the new "spiritual medicine." According to Allen, an Ahtna "influential chief" named Nicolai [Nikolai] did not tolerate shamans and successfully competed with them by using new Orthodox spiritual medicine: "His power is supposed to come from the church (Greek), of which he is an apostle. He wears on a hat a Greek cross as talisman, and has a small quantity of paper and a pencil, with which he pretends to keep a record of all matters of importance to his people." We also learn that natives in the lower part of Ahtna country believed in Nicolai's spiritual remedies: "Some have such confidence in his healing power as to send the garment of a sick child many miles to him in order that he may sleep on it" (*Allen* 1887: 135–136). This evidence suggests that Nicolai reinterpreted his old role as a shaman in the light of the new Orthodox "medicine power."

The Russian Church at first decided to capitalize on this favorable situation and selected the Knik area, the area most visited by Ahtna traders, as the major center of the proselytizing work among the Copper River people.¹ Missionary Nikolai Mitropol'skii became the first cleric who for the first time since the 1850s encountered and baptized more Ahtna, which earned him praises from ecclesiastical authorities. Nikolai Mitropol'skii bought a house for \$70 in the Knik area and purposely wintered in 1888–1889 in this area populated by the Dena'ina in order to meet the Ahtna. In September of 1888, along with his reader Nikolai Sorokovikov, the missionary completed building local St. Nicholas chapel started by local Dena'ina and Creoles, who had erected walls. Mitropol'skii reported that during that winter he had baptized 80 Ahtna.

Encouraged by this success, Vladimir Donskoi, Dean of Alaska Orthodox Clergy, even considered moving the center of the mission northward from Kenai to Tyonek, Susitna, or to Knik. Yet, the project fell through. Alexander Iaroshevich, who succeeded Mitropol'skii, similarly went to Knik, where he stayed for seven months during the fall of 1894 and in winter of 1894–1895. But, to his frustration, the "catch" was only 18 Ahtna new converts. He attributed this decrease to the opening of new trading centers in other areas. In reality, it appears that the missionary did not have time to conduct his missionary work since he became involved into violent clashes with A. Krisson, a local trade agent for American Commercial Company, who harassed Iaroshevich and prevented him for expanding missionary work.

Ivan Bortnovskii, who came to replace Iaroshevich, was more successful. Like both of his predecessors, he decided to winter in Knik again to continue work among the Dena'ina and to purposely meet the Ahtna. As a result, this missionary spent the winter of 1897–1898 in so-called New Knik (Eklutna), a new site to which the local "Kenaitze" had moved their village in 1897. In contrast to Iaroshevich, Bortnovskii was very optimistic about bringing

¹ For more about the activities of these missionaries among the Ahtna, see *Znamenski* 2002: 54–55.

the Copper River people to Orthodoxy. Eventually, the overall number of the newly Ahtna converts reached 127 people, whose godparents were Dena'ina Indians. Yet the Ahtna's own attempts to start a dialogue with Orthodoxy did not receive further support. For financial reasons, Ahtna requests to erect chapels in their country did not receive a positive response. A chronic lack of resources prevented clerics from establishing a permanent mission among the Ahtna. Paul Shadura, who took over in 1907, gradually wrapped up missionary work among the Ahtna, especially after 1917, when, as a result of the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, all funding for the Orthodox Church in North America was terminated. A few "Mednovtsy" names were being mentioned in his confessional rosters until 1921. Since 1922, the names of the Ahtna disappeared from the rosters (*Шадюра* 1922).

In the 1930s, capitalizing on the improved roads, the Orthodox Church in North America made the third and last attempt to revitalize missionary work among the Ahtna. Thus, in 1937, driving from Cordoba, priest Valerii Povarnitsyn (*Поварницын* 1937: 57–62) was sent to Chitina and Copper Center, two major Ahtna villages. His notes suggest that the initiative for contact again came from the Ahtna themselves. Povarnitsyn was struck by the fact that the Ahtna, who were "totally unaffected by Russian culture" and who clung to their "habits, manners, and customs," nevertheless had accepted Orthodox faith "gladly without any material considerations" (*Поварницын* 1937: 59). Moreover, from his notes, it is clear that somewhere in 1929, in both villages, the Ahtna themselves had built Orthodox chapels, where they chanted basic prayers in Old Church Slavonic. I saw the remains of one of these structures in Copper Center during my visit there in 2001. To partake of the Orthodox rites during this missionary visit, around 300 Ahtna gathered from surrounding areas. The priest was utterly stunned by this zeal. With surprise, he also reported that in Copper Center a local Ahtna chapel leader named Andrei, a "passionately religious person," supplemented the priest sermon with his own¹. Still, the Russian Church again failed to provide adequate support for its own mission, and the indigenous Orthodoxy continued to develop on its own.

Although the history of the Ahtna's Orthodoxy between the 1920s and the 1940s needs further research, to my knowledge, Orthodoxy, especially after all Ahtna chapels were destroyed in fires in the 1950s, gradually lost its significance. The major challenge came from Pentecostalism, a revivalist brand of Protestantism that put stress on direct receipt of Holy Spirit from God, which spiritually sway the small Ahtna population. Most important, Pentecostals believed that people were capable of prophesizing, receiving visions, and speaking in tongues – precisely the features that resonated well with the indigenous tradition. During my field trip to the Copper River area, I found out that middle-aged and young Ahtna barely knew anything about encounters of their ancestors with Orthodoxy. Moreover, many middle-aged Ahtna could not explain the origin and meaning of Russian Orthodox crosses and "spirit houses" that had been placed on the graves by their ancestors. They only pointed out that these neglected and half-rotten wooden structures had come to them from the Dena'ina.

Yet it is not my intention to lament the failure of Orthodox mission to the Ahtna Indians. What can we learn from this story? Let us return to the point I made in the beginning: we

¹ "Их лидер, Андрей, человек фанатично-религиозный, посвященный в стихарь, стоя со мной рядом на амвоне, на их родном наречии произнес довольно продолжительную проповедь. Во время речи он неоднократно показывал на св. Крест, который я держал в руках пред народом" (*Поварницын* 1937: 60).

see the indigenous group that repeatedly attempted to attach Orthodox Christianity to its spirituality in an effort to rekindle and refurbish indigenous “medicine power” that was failing to cope with epidemic diseases and rapid modernization. The Russian Orthodoxy, which was within reach and whose ritualism could be easily linked to the indigenous tradition, seemed to have provided to the Ahtna a good spiritual niche. Yet, the arrival of the Pentecostals, which appeared to have a more attractive spiritual agenda and which were focused on active evangelism, overpowered the dormant presence of Russian Orthodoxy. In my view, research of similar failed attempts of native self-Christianization may provide more convincing evidence in support of recent scholarship that has argued that indigenous peoples’ interest in Christianity could not be explained away exclusively through the lenses of omnipotent colonial hegemony.

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Знаменский Андрей

Эпидемии, пророчество и «самохристианизация»: православие среди индейцев Атна, 1880–1930-е гг.

О духовных контактах между американскими индейцами и христианскими миссионерами написана масса антропологических и исторических исследований. Часть авторов этих работ смотрит негативно на деятельность христианских миссионеров среди коренных жителей и считает их деятельность орудием колониализма. Другая часть исследователей, наоборот, восхваляет деятельность миссионеров и считает, что христианские миссии послужили улучшению моральной и общественной жизни коренных жителей. Третья группа исследователей, ко которой принадлежу я, считает, что контракты американских индейцев с христианскими миссиями были многоплановыми и не могут сводиться к неполицорректным оценкам «хорошо» или к политкорректным «плохо». В своем докладе, используя архивные материалы православной миссии на Аляске и свои собственные полевые материалы 1990-х гг., я исследую историю несостоявшейся православной миссии к индейцам Атна, атапаскоязычной группе, проживающей в районе реки Медной на Аляске. В 1880-е гг. они неожиданно стал искать контактов с православными миссионерами, стараясь узнать больше об этой религии. В своей работе я пытаюсь проанализировать культурные, экономические и психологические причины подобной «самохристианизации».

Ключевые слова: коренные американцы, индейцы, атна, медновцы, атапаски, Аляска, православие, миссионерство, пророчества, эпидемии

GLOBAL FLOWS OR GLOBAL FLAWS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE MODERN GLOBAL CONJUNCTURE

The present essay is an attempt to consider the place and role of indigenous peoples in the modern world of global flows and shifting social, political, economic, and cultural environments. I discuss some strategies, developed by the Native communities in order to adapt themselves to the new conditions, yet maintaining their ethnocultural identities. Special emphasis is placed on the autochthonal North American nations' multifaceted response to the ongoing globalisation, colonisation, and cultural assimilation, concomitant with these processes. I consider, in particular, the pan-Indian movement in the context of these processes. But some examples of the indigenous communities from other parts of the globe are provided in order to illustrate and substantiate the argumentation as well.

I utilise the Western—non-Western dichotomy, albeit its evident flaws as an essentially homogenising and oversimplified framework, intentionally for convenience. Different levels of identity, related sociopolitical discourse, and cultural mobilisations, from local to metacultural and transnational, various means of «resistance» and response to the global processes and their consequences, and the influence of these processes on the indigenous communities, both positive and negative, are considered.

Key words: *indigenous peoples, modernity, globalisation, identity, sovereignty, colonialism and decolonisation*

We live in a strange world. Unstoppable technological progress, increasing networking on various levels and of various scales, and high mobility of modern people expand our knowledge of world yet shortening the distances. The boundaries are being blurred and «as transnational migration and connections brings distant worlds into immediate juxtaposition, the production of meaning can no longer be understood in terms of the classic distinctions: here/there, self/other, similarity/difference» (Landzelius 2002: 42). The modern world is rapidly changing and globalising. This process is inexorable, and it is not willing to wait for the «retarded». Historically, it has been established that the role of the «retarded» is often assigned to the indigenous peoples. But does it reflect the real state of things? Unlikely.

The necessity to take interests and voices of the indigenous peoples into consideration has been discussed thoroughly and is beyond doubt. Such a necessity regarding the specific context of the modern global environment appears to be self-evident as well. A

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