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**THE STORY OF THE PURCHASE OF FORT ROSS AND PAYMENT FOR BODEGA BAY BY THE RUSSIAN PROMYSHLENNIK, TARAKANOV.**

by  
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**INTRODUCTION**

**The story of the Russian negotiations for Fort Ross has generally followed a section in Bancroft (1886, ii, 297) which described the arrival of Ivan Kuskov at Bodega Bay and the subsequent acquisition to rights to land on the Sonoma coast.**

**The native chiefs were made friends by the distribution of petty gifts, and there is not much doubt that they made, either now [1811] or the next year, some kind of a formal cession of territory to the newcomers. The price paid, according to the statement of the natives in later years, as Payeras tells us, was three blankets, three pairs of breeches, two axes, three hoes, and some beads. Always more or less hostile to the Spaniards and to their brethren under Spanish rule [i.e., Christian Indian neophytes], the natives were indeed glad to have the strangers come as allies and protectors. In later disputes the Russians dwelt upon this cession as one of the strongest elements in their title — so expedient has it always been found in the New World to affirm the natives' right of ownership where the soil could be bought for a song, and to deny it when forcible possession must be taken.**

**With the long-awaited publication of the collected papers of Fr. Mariano Payeras, once the Father-President of the Missions of California, by Bellerophon Books of Santa Barbara, a very valuable historical resource becomes available to those interested in California history. Fr. Payeras lived and worked in California from 1796 until his death in 1823 at the Mission of La Purísima Concepcion. About six months before his death he made a visit to Fort Ross in the company of Fr. Agustin Fernandez de San Vicente, the representative of the new (and short-lived) imperial government of Mexico. The *diario* written by Fr. Payeras**

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following the trip is a lively and informative description of Fort Ross in late 1822 when Karl Schmidt was the commandant. Though various individuals have attempted to translate (Del Cioppo and Tucker 1979) or transliterate (Mathes 1989) parts of this document in the past, this information has not been readily available to many scholars.

As an addendum to the *diario*, Fr. Payeras penned a short item called *Notas para el Diario* (SBMA Doc 1842) which is found in the Mission Archives of Santa Barbara library. It provides the brief story of the purchase of Fort Ross and the "rental" of Bodega Bay by the Russians early in their stay. The information was said by Payeras to have been provided by two Indian neophytes of the mission of San Rafael named Vicente and Rufino. These two men were Bodega Miwok people from the village across the bay from the Russian harbor settlement of Port Rumiantsev (Bodega Bay).

The original note is as follows:

#### **Notas para el Diario**

Los Christianos de San Rafael, Vicente y Rufino del estero de San Juan Francisco Regis, frente Bodega dicen ser verdad que el comandante de un buque Ruso llamado Talacani vino primero y paro en Ross, y compro á su capitan Pánac:úccux aquel sitio dandole en pago, 3 fresadas, 3 calzones, avalorio, 2 achas, 3 azadones. Despues baxo á la Bodega y compro á su capitan Ióllo (ya murió y aora es capitan su hijo Valli:éla) capongon, casaca, calzones, camisos, armas, 3 achas, 5 azadones, azucar, 3 limotes, avalorio. Esto no fue comprado sino como dando permiso, y que les dieran aiuda. Ros si dice compararon: solo Ros, no los sitios inmediatos.

John Cutter's (1993) translation:

**Notes for the Diary**

**The Christians of San Rafael, Vicente and Rufino of the Estero of San Juan Francisco Regis opposite Bodega, say that it is true that the commander of a Russian ship named Talacani first came and stopped at Ross, and bought that place from its chief, Panac:úccux, giving him in payment three blankets, three pair of trousers, beads, two hatchets, and three hoes. Afterwards he went down to La Bodega and bought it from its chief, Ióllo (he is already dead and his son Valli:ela is now chief) for an Italian-style cape, a coat, trousers, shirts, arms, three hatchets, five hoes, sugar, three files, and beads. This was not purchased, but rather it was like giving permission, and so the Indians would give them help. It is said that they did buy Ross, but only Ross, not the neighboring places (Cutter 1993).**

**The identity of *Talacani* has been a mystery over the years. First of all, it was difficult to determine if it was meant to be the name of the ship or the ship's captain. In either case, it seemed to lead nowhere because the ship that Ivan Kuskov arrived on was called the Chirikov.**

**On the other hand, we know that when Kuskov arrived in 1811 he joined up with a party of Aleut hunters being led by a Russian named Timofei Tarakanov (Pierce 1990:497-499). When the two names are compared, Tarakanov and Talacani, it is evident that they are the same. The replacement of the "r" in Tarakanov by an "l" in Talacani is seen in other consonant replacements found in the Bodega Bay Miwok language (cf. Callaghan 1970:71, example of the Spanish word *interprete* becoming *télpite* in Bodega Miwok). When asked about this interpretation, Callaghan (personal communication 1993) agreed that "[my] conclusion that Bodega Miwok Indians heard Tarakanov as something like Talacani (perhaps *tallakáani*) is probably correct. There was no 'r,' 'f,' or 'v' in Bodega Miwok, and words frequently ended in 'i'."**

**The notion of a lower-level official doing the negotiating for properties in California rather than the leader, Ivan Kuskov, may seem odd at first. However, when one considers that Timofei Tarakanov had had extensive experience dealing with Indians (cf. Owens 1990; Owens and Donnelly 1985:39-65) and may have even learned some of the Miwok language in the months he had spent hunting sea otter in the area of Bodega Bay (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:169-170) prior to Kuskov's first trip to the California coast in 1808, it makes more sense. The Bodega Miwok Indians quite reasonably would have considered Tarakanov to be the *capitan* of the Russians, if he was acting as spokesman in these dealings. In other instances, particularly in Oregon and Hawaii (Owens and Donnelly 1985:34, 84), Timofei Tarakanov was praised for his leadership, often undertaken in difficult situations.**

**Instructions given to Ivan Kuskov by Russian-American Company governor Alexander**

**Baranov dated October 14 [25], 1808 (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:165-174) state repeatedly information about sea-otter hunting along the California Coast, in particular around Bodega Bay, provided by Tarakanov. Tarakanov did not accompany Kuskov on the 1808 trip to California because he was attached to the ill-fated exploration of the Oregon country aboard the *Sv. Nikolai* (Owens and Donnelly 1985), whose members were captured by the Indians. Tarakanov did not escape and return to New Archangel (Sitka) until 1810. However, shortly after his repatriation to the Russian-American Company Alaska headquarters, he was once again assigned to lead a troupe of baidarkas to hunt along the California coast. Sailing on the *Isabella* sometime in June 1810, he arrived in California waters off the Farallones by July 8 [20], 1810 and in November was at Drake's Bay. At the end of February 1811, with the arrival of Kuskov at Bodega Bay, a party of baidarkas was sent to San Francisco Bay where they located Tarakanov with his 48 baidarkas. He then is believed to have stayed in California through the summer of 1811 before being taken back to Sitka.**

**The information that Tarakanov provided to Baranov for his letter of instructions to Kuskov in 1808 clearly had to be derived from a previous visit. On October 25, 1806, Baranov made a deal with an American sea-captain, Oliver Kimball, to take 12 baidarkas onboard his ship, the *Peacock*, to hunt along the California coast beginning at Trinidad harbor. Timofei Tarakanov was put in charge of the baidarkas. They were not to approach any Spanish settlements. After a successful voyage, Kimball returned to Sitka on August 3, 1807 (Pierce 1990:497-498). The group of otter hunters led by Tarakanov made Bodega Bay the base for their otter hunting in the area north of San Francisco (Owens 1990:139). At that time the Spanish had not really extended their presence northward beyond San Francisco Bay.**

**Whether Tarakanov made his dealings with the Bodegan chief, Ióllo, during the 1810-1811 visit or on the earlier trip in 1806-07, is not clear from the historical record (Pierce 1990:497-499), although it is interesting that the account by Fr. Payeras does state that he negotiated for the site of Fort Ross as well as the assistance of the Indians of Bodega Bay. Since by all accounts the Russians did not even investigate Fort Ross until the 1811 trip by Kuskov which resulted in the identification of the Indian site of Metini as a likely site for a fort, the later date would seem to be more likely.**

**In a statement about the relations with the Indians of California, Golovnin (1979:163) says:**

**According to established usage, the Russians had an absolute right to settle on this coast, whereas the Spanish want to drive them out on the basis of unfounded and trifling claims. The Russians established their settlement with the voluntary agreement and permission of the native inhabitants of this country [California], a people who do not recognize the rule of the Spanish and are in constant warfare with them. These people gave permission to select a place and settle on their shores for a**

specific sum given to them in various goods. The friendly relations of these people with the Russians, which continue to this day, clearly prove that the Russian *promyshlenniks* go hunting for wild goats [sic, mule deer] in the woods, frequently spend the night with the Indians, and return safely without being injured or accosted by them. In contrast, the Spaniards do not dare appear in small numbers or unarmed for fear of being killed. These Indians willingly give their daughters in marriage to the Russians and the Aleuts, and there are many Indian wives in Fort Ross. This establishes not only friendly but family ties.

#### **IOLLO AND VALLI:ELA**

The account provided by Vicente and Rufino identifies the chief of the village near Bodega as being named Ióllo at the time of the transaction, but "now" (1822), having died, his son, Valli:éla, had succeeded him. This latter chief, identified as *Valenila* by Golovnin (1979:165) in 1818, is undoubtedly the same one. Golovnin reported his interaction with the Bodega Miwok chief as follows:

The chief of the people living next to Port Rumiantsev came to see me when my sloop was anchored there. He brought gifts consisting of various parts of their regalia, arrow, and household items, and asked to be taken under Russian protection. An Aleut who had lived over a year among these people acted as interpreter<sup>1</sup>. This chief, called Valenila, definitely wanted more Russians to settle among them in order to protect them from Spanish oppression. He begged me for a Russian flag, explaining that he wanted to raise it as a sign of friendship and peace whenever Russian ships should appear near the shore. In view of all this, it would be contrary to justice and reason to assert that the Russians occupied land belonging to someone else and settled on the shores of New Albion without having the right to do so.

Another, more jaundiced, description of the chief comes from Fedor LÜtke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275-276):

There is no evidence that they [the Indians of Bodega Bay] revere God, and in general it seems that not only do they have no understanding of God, but that they never even wonder how and for what purpose they and everything else around them were created [!]. Nevertheless there was one among them who called himself their leader, and

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<sup>1</sup> This Aleut is not otherwise identified, but is very likely the individual mentioned in another contemporary (1818) account by Fedor LÜtke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275).



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whom our people by custom refer to as a *toion*. But we could not determine how extensive his power is over all the others. We did not even see any exterior indications of respect shown him by the others, and he would not have looked any different from the others if some of our people had not given him two shirts the day before, both of which he wasted no time in putting on. It appears that this position is hereditary, because his father was also a *toion*.

In a separate account of Golovnin's visit (Matiushkin 1971:66-70) we learn more of Valenila.

The very day we weighed anchor the Indian chief sought to pay us a visit. He came out to us in a longboat, wearing two shirts (given as a present to him for some service) and a garland of intertwined grasses. Looking over our ship, he was impressed by its size. Although our captain [Golovnin] gave him some axes, knives, etc., most important of all for him was a Russian military flag, which he was told to raise as soon as he saw a ship like ours. On such occasions he was promised valuable gifts from our fellow countrymen. This Indian, Valennoela, who visited us, is not an elder of the settlement here, but because of the chief's illness, he was chosen by his comrades on account of his bravery.

Upon the arrival of the *Kamchatka* (Golovnin's ship) on September 21 (October 2) 1818, Matiushkin says he went ashore at Bodega Bay and walked along the shoreline.

About a mile beyond the anchorage I saw a puff of smoke from behind a small promontory. I climbed it and saw a band of New Albion nomads. They all looked at me, but since I was aware of their peace-loving nature and special affection toward Russians, I approached them boldly and soon noticed our painter in their midst. Surrounded by savages, he laughed and played with them, while drawing their pictures. Most of all, he amused them when they saw some one of them on paper. Mikhail Tikhonovich drew many of them just for pleasure, and from these he made two paintings. One represents their chief, lying in a hut of branches and reeds, at the point of death. His wife is in tears, and several men surround his bed. One of them, with a bunch of feathers, seems to be acting both as a physician (for he is pulling straps across the sick man's stomach) [sic ?] and as a priest, telling the sick man's fortune. The other painting shows a woman cooking food.

The painter referred to was Mikhail Tikhonovich Tikhonov who made several drawings of the people in the vicinity of Bodega Bay. One of these portrays the inside of a tule hut in which a ritual ceremony is under way. Matiushkin identifies the individual shown lying on down with his back as none other than the old chief, *Ióllo*, who was later described in the Payeras account (1822) as having died and been replaced by *Valli-éla*. In fact, even the sad look on the face of the woman by his head (possibly his wife) and the short, disheveled hair, this painting is a remarkable rendering of a scene closely following his death. It was common for California Indian women to cut their hair short in mourning at such a time. Two men shown in the drawing seem to be making



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some form of offering with the one wearing the hairnet and hairpin holding a plume of feathers and strings of black, white and yellow cylindrical beads.

On October 3 [14], 1822 Kiril Khlebnikov (1990:96) noted in his journal that while at Bodega Bay, "in the afternoon we crossed the mountains to visit the Indian inhabitants but they had all gone into the forest to gather acorns for the winter. The chief of the Indians here, Valenil, lives in the fort." This statement seems rather strange and I wonder about a mistranslation. Why would the chief of the Bodega people be living up in Fort Ross? Also, did Khlebnikov actually mean inside the stockade or just nearby?

*Valli-éla* appears again in the historical record in a lengthy report by Mariano Vallejo (1833) of his visit to Fort Ross and to Bodega Bay in late April and early May of 1833. At Bodega Bay Vallejo encountered the chief of the Indian village across the bay from the Russian port establishment. He gives the name of the chief as Gualinela.

A chief of the Christian Indians lives nearby [the Russian settlement at Bodega Bay] on his rancharia, Fiutume [sic]. By actual count, his band numbers only 43 men and women. Their objective is to guard the Russian buildings because the Russians ensure that they are not to be bothered by outsiders while they remain on their rancharia. Before the arrival of the Russians, it was the opposite case. Gualinela is the name of the chief of the rancharia. He told me that just prior to my arrival there were 200 armed men, some heathen Indians and some Christians from [Mission] San Rafael. They had banded together to discourage any troops of soldiers from passing through their area. This information was confirmed by a Christian Indian from the mission San Rafael named Forebio [sic, Toribio?]. Forebio had informed the Indians that they would be killed or taken to San Francisco and that they would be beaten and kidnapped by a "fierce captain of soldiers." Captain is what they call all of our commissioned officers. By saying these things, Forebio managed to alarm all the Indians. The Christian Indians and the heathen alike responded to him saying that they were a united people, armed, brave, and ready to die. They agreed that they were tired of suffering the cunning and treacherous lies of the soldiers, who said one thing, then did another. The soldiers, they said always promised friendship but as soon as their confidence had been gained, the soldiers would violently imprison them and take them to the Missions San Rafael or San Francisco Solano. There they would be forcibly converted to Christianity. The Indians also said they would not allow themselves to be taken, as was common before Forebio arrived.

Essentially this is the statement verified by the Christian Indians and by Gualinela, chief of the Fiutume rancharia.

The name given to the chief of the village at Bodega Bay at the time of the purchase, *Ióllo*, does

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not have a known meaning (Catherine Callaghan, personal communication 1993). It is tempting to suggest that it might be a corruption of *toion*, as mentioned before being often used by the Russians for "chief" (and known to have been later used for the Kashaya Chief). On the other hand, the name *Valli-éla* is interpreted by Catherine Callaghan (personal communication 1993) as being properly "*wállin ?éla*, roughly 'Great Water Spirit'." Isabel Kelly (1991:342) reports a shift in moieties from generation to generation among the Bodega Miwok. According to her main consultant, Tom Smith, a Bodega Miwok, "I am Land; my boy gets a Water name" (Kelly 1991:342). Kelly (1991:342) then goes on to point out a number of cases where the model does not hold, but it may have been due to a breakdown in customs in the modern period. At any rate, it could be that if *Valli-éla* would be a name derived from the Water moiety, *Ióllo* would probably be a Land moiety name.

Another contemporary description of the village from the same voyage is provided by Fedor Lütke (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:275):

September 22 [(October 3), 1818]. We went ashore to an Indian settlement some distance to the north. I believe it would be difficult to find a people who have less political comprehension than these Indians. Their living quarters are more like beehives or anthills than human habitations. They are made of sticks stuck in the ground in a semicircle about one and one-half arshins [42 inches] high; these are fastened together and then covered with dry grass or tree branches. These dwellings do not give them shelter from rain or foul weather, which, fortunately for them, is quite rare in the area where they live.

The word used for the chief of Fort Ross, *Pánac:úccux*, is uncertain in its derivation. Again, according to Callaghan (personal communication 1993), it might "represent *panáak ?úkkuh* or *panáak ?úkkus* 'woodpecker paw,' though this is by no means certain, since the Bodega Miwok word for 'woodpecker' is apparently *?óje wolóolok*. (Isabel Kelly gives *oyewololok*.) But one of the Marin Miwok words is apparently *panáak* (Henshaw give Pa-nák; note Lake Miwok *panáak* 'woodpecker'). Bodega Miwok *?úkkuh* means 'hand,' and 'paw'."

By contrast, an alternate interpretation is offered by Pomo linguist, Robert Oswalt (personal communication 1993). He states that "*Pánac:úccux* is not Kashaya but probably Yupik Eskimo." Yupik was a language spoken by many of the native peoples of Alaska who accompanied the Russians to California to hunt sea otters. Using a Yup'ik Eskimo dictionary (Jacobson 1984), Oswalt suggests that the meaning of the name may signify "spearman" or "spearer" (Oswalt, personal communication 1993). Oswalt acknowledges that he is not familiar with Bodega Miwok, therefore I am more inclined toward Callaghan's interpretation of the name as "Woodpecker Hand" (or perhaps, Woodpecker claw).

## CONCLUSIONS

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The price paid for Fort Ross has always seemed a ridiculous pittance, unworthy of an entity like the Russian-American Company. This revised image of the transaction, as being handled not by Ivan Kuskov, fresh off the ship *Chirikov* from New Archangel, but rather by Timofei Tarakanov, a *promyshlennik* who had had to travel light as the head of a fleet of *baidarkas* (kayaks) for many months in San Francisco Bay. Very likely, the items offered were the few things he could readily scrape up for the transaction.

It is intriguing to note that there were evidently two separate transactions, one with the Kashaya Pomo chief at Fort Ross, *Pánac-úccux*, for an actual transfer of possession of property, as opposed to the one with *Ióllo*, chief of the Bodega Bay Miwok, that specified only a use permit was obtained. Thus, according to Payeras and his informants, only the area of Fort Ross was actually acquired.

The difference in the gifts given is notable. The few items given to *Pánac-úccux* were things one would expect to find in the possession of a travelling *baidarchik* (head of a baidarka flotilla), whereas the items given to *Ióllo* at Bodega Bay were things one might expect to come directly off a ship, such as the *Chirikov*, anchored in Bodega Bay.

Several years later, in September 1817, it was deemed advisable to re-affirm the accord with the Fort Ross Kashaya Pomo by entering into an agreement. This was done by Leontii Hagemester, a Russian Naval Officer soon to replace Alexander Baranov as the governor of Russian America in New Archangel. In this agreement, the native chiefs named for Fort Ross were *Chu-gu-an*, *Amat-tan*, and *Gem-le-le* (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989:296-297), none of which appears to be the same as *Pánac:úccux*.

In his article on Tarakanov, Owens (1990:143) closes with a statement that "it is my hope that the name of Timofei Tarakanov, rescued now from historical confusion, may also be retrieved from historical obscurity." This article adds another intriguing note to the Tarakanov story.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This manuscript is the product of the happy coincidence of a number of disparate pieces of historical information, several of them not yet formally published in English, coming together in the mind of the author. Moreover, it is a testament to the generosity of a number of scholars willing to help me out with pieces to the puzzle. First, I must thank publisher Harry Knill for providing me pre-publication access to an important work of compilation and translation by historian Donald Cutter, "The Works of Fr. Mariano Payeras." Next, came the linguists, Catherine Callaghan and Robert Oswalt, who offered critical help with the names of the Bodega Miwok and Kashaya chiefs, and finally, historian Stephen Watrous, who read over the manuscript and offered many useful critical suggestions as well as an important English translation of a Russian account of a visit to California in 1818.

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