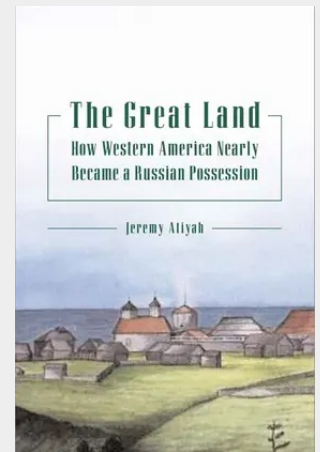


The Great Land

For more than a hundred years after Europeans had begun populating the Atlantic shores of North America, the Pacific coast of that continent remained a blank on their maps and in their minds. When Russians from Siberia first sighted the mountains of Alaska in 1741, they called it the Great Land. In fact they were glimpsing part of a 4,000-mile stretch of virgin coastline, reaching from Western Alaska to Oregon to Southern California. As far as Spanish Mexico, all was uncharted and unknown. Its water, its salmon, its sea otters, its sunshine, its trees and its harbours remained the preserve of Native Americans, and were entirely free of international commerce. But time was not standing still. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Europeans were aggressively taking their way of life to every corner of the globe. Northwest America could not remain exempt from this process. Who would be the first to settle the coast that was destined to become the cultural and economic powerhouse of the world? The answer to this question was not obvious. This book is the story of how Western America very nearly came to be a possession of the Empire of Russia. "A fascinating and near-forgotten history brought vividly to life." Colin Thubron "What a terrific book - it's incredibly well researched and written and tells a story about which I, for one, knew nothing! I was amazed by the cast of characters that Jeremy uncovered - battling away in those terrible conditions. It makes our lives seem very tame. What a triumph!" Rosie Boycott "The central premise of this wonderful book is, at first sight, scarcely believable: that the world's largest country was on the brink of extending its empire along the entire length of America's Pacific shore, thereby making San Francisco as Russian as St Petersburg and annexing Hawaii as an outpost of Siberia. Yet through meticulous research combined with a natural flair for story-telling, Jeremy Atiyah bestows this astonishing sequence of events with credibility. He weaves a compelling tale of heroism, intrigue and betrayal that begins with Catherine the Great and ends in the twilight of the Russian Empire and the ascendancy of America." Simon Calder "The story of Russia's colony in America is known to very few people in Britain. Not only, however, is it one of history's odder side-paths, packed with strange people and events: it is also a fascinating 'might-have-been'. Jeremy Atiyah tells this story in an accurate and informative narrative which is also great fun to read". Professor Dominic Lieven, London School of Economics, author of *The Russian Empire and its Rivals*. "What if the Russian Empire had succeeded in colonising North America's Pacific coast? And why did they not succeed? Just how close did they come to doing so - at a time when the Atlantic colonies were struggling to create the United States? Jeremy Atiyah offers intriguing answers to questions that I never knew enough even to ask." Lord Howe of Aberavon "Not many people know that Alaska and the whole north-west coast down to San Francisco almost became Russian. Jeremy Atiyah tells an astonishing story of Russian adventurers, half a world away from St Petersburg, struggling for empire, financed by furs and sea-otter skins. As if a brutal climate and hostile natives were not enough, the Russians had to contend with the growing ambitions of the Spanish, American and British governments. With Europe immersed in the Napoleonic Wars, the area became a giant chess-board of trade, diplomacy, exploration and adventure, played out across the whole North Pacific triangle, with Hawaii a paradise against the cold, damp hell of the northwest coast - at its apex. The Russians came out top. Russia owned Alaska until 'the cold dead hand of St Petersburg' threw away their most distant outpost by selling the whole region to the US in 1867, for a mere \$7.2 million. This is surely one of the most astonishing real-estate deals in history. It is a tribute to Atiyah's skill as

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