

Tajuro's Jacket: A Story of Japanese Castaways, Russian Ambassadors and a Remarkable Early Nineteenth-Century Sailor's Jacket

By TYLER RUDD PUTMAN AND MATTHEW BRECKLE

This article examines the historical and material context of a rare sailor's jacket, c. 1804, probably produced in England and worn by a Japanese castaway named Tajuro (among the first Japanese men to circumnavigate the globe) during a Russian expedition to Japan. We place Tajuro's jacket in the longer history of garments worn by sailors and labourers. Because it is the only surviving example definitively used at sea by an identified seaman on a particular voyage, from the long eighteenth century, Tajuro's jacket provides a glimpse into what European, Russian, and American sailors wore in this era. It is an invaluable addition to the scanty material archive of common sailors' clothing with a story that shows the global possibilities of early modern travel.

Keywords: jacket, sailors, maritime history, castaways, Japan, Russia, diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Carefully preserved in the Historical Museum of Jomon Village Oku Matsushima and almost unknown outside Japan is a threadbare, two-hundred-year-old garment that looks quite unlike Japanese clothing of the time. This unique jacket descended from a Japanese castaway named Okuda Tajuro (dates unknown). Between 1793 and 1804, and by the vagaries of ocean storms and imperial ambitions, Tajuro was among the first group of Japanese people to circumnavigate the globe. Tajuro's story is unusual, but so, too, is this particular relic of his voyage. As one of the few surviving common jackets dating before

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Figure 1. Tajuro's jacket.

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1820 — and the only known one definitively used at sea (in any ocean), by an identified seaman, and on a particular voyage — Tajuro's jacket offers a unique opportunity to glimpse what sailors from different European nations wore in this era, when hundreds of thousands of men set sail. Hundreds of thousands of jackets clothed them. Only some of the men's stories and fewer than a half dozen of these garments survive (Figure 1).

A SEA STORY

When Okuda Tajuro and his fifteen shipmates set sail from Ishinomaki, Japan, on 27 November 1793, they could not know how many years would pass before they saw their native shores again. Such strict isolationism characterized the Edo period of Japanese history (1603–1868) that few people looking out from Japan's shores knew what lay beyond the horizon. In 1793, Tajuro and his shipmates were local sailors. But they were at the start of a journey that would make them *hyoryumin* ('sea drifters'), take them around the world and separate them from Japan for over a decade (for Maps of the voyages, see Supplementary Material Online at: <https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/suppl/10.3366/cost.2021.0201>).¹

Loaded with a cargo of firewood, timber and rice, their ship, the *Wakamiya Maru*, sailed for Edo (Tokyo) under the command of a Captain Heibei (d. 1793 or 1794). Five days into the passage, a strong south-west gale began blowing. With only a single mast and sail, the vessel struggled to tack into the wind and the gale carried her north-east into the open ocean. The winds continued intermittently for nearly a month, by which time the ship had been dismantled and the crew had jettisoned most of their cargo in an attempt to lighten the ship. Subsisting on little more than rice and rainwater, the sailors then drifted eastward until they

sighted land on 5 May 1794, five months after setting sail. The island (part of the Aleutian chain, which today includes both Alaskan and Russian territory) offered no good anchorage or landing place. Desperate to find help, the men moored their vessel among the rocks and rowed ashore in a small boat. While the crew searched for signs of human habitation, waves and rocks destroyed the remains of the *Wakamiya Maru*.

After ten desperate days on the island, the men took to their boat and steered northward. Hugging the coast for two days, they at last sighted smoke and landed on an inhabited island.² At first apprehensive of their reception, they found the local population friendly and helpful. Some days later, a Russian official arrived on the island and directed the castaways northward to the Russian trading post at Unalaska Island.

At this moment, Russia was in the midst of massive imperial expansion. Especially under Catherine the Great (reigned 1762–1796) and Alexander I (reigned 1801–1825), Russian ambitions extended into new territories spanning two continents.³ But communication and travel across this massive empire were difficult. On Unalaska Island the castaways tarried for a year. By their account, they were treated with some measure of kindness, but worked as servants, presumably because of their low status as mariners and foreigners. According to a Russian mariner who later encountered them, the Japanese claimed they ‘were forced [...] to do hard labor, even to clean privies [...]’.⁴ In April 1795 the fifteen remaining Japanese (Captain Heibei had since died) embarked in a Russian ship and sailed for Okhotsk, on the eastern shore of Siberia, where they arrived at the end of June. Here they were turned over to the custody of the Russian officials, who were themselves perched on the edge of their expanding empire. Four years later, in 1799, Okhotsk became the Pacific headquarters of the new Russian-American Company. This organization was a state-sponsored colonial and trading venture that projected Russian power into the northern Pacific and western North America. Russia was looking east, and Tajuro and his shipmates were being slowly drawn into the very centre of a grand colonial venture.

Beginning in November, the Russians transferred the men in three groups overland to Yakutsk and then on to Irkutsk. One man, Ichigoro, fell ill and died at Yakutsk. The remaining fourteen remained in Irkutsk for eight long years, where two more sailors died. Resigned to their fate, the remaining castaways doubted they would ever return to Japan.⁵

Meanwhile, far off on the other side of the continent, Russian officials gathered to contemplate how best to expand imperial influence in the North Pacific. During the reign (1682–1725) of Peter the Great, the Russians annexed Kamchatka and explored the Kurile Islands (an archipelago between the Russian Kamchatka Peninsula and Japan whose jurisdiction these two countries still dispute today). Under succeeding rulers, they expanded their reach to include the Aleutian Islands in an ever-widening Russian Empire. Russian interest in this region stemmed in part from the Chinese market’s desire for vast quantities of furs, especially seal and otter, which were most common along America’s north-west coast.⁶ In the waning years of Catherine the Great’s reign, the Russian

merchants trading in the Pacific contemplated forming a company to regulate the fur trade. Catherine's successor, Paul I (reigned 1796–1801) first opposed the Russian-American Company, but thanks to the interference and persuasive powers of Russian noble Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov (1764–1807), the Czar gave his official blessing to the company in 1799.⁷ When Czar Alexander I assumed the throne in 1801, he took an active interest in the company, and, by becoming a member himself, encouraged the Russian nobility to do the same. The influx of patronage and cash allowed the company to expand its operations, and thereby solidified Russia's overseas colonial holdings.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Russian fur merchants shipped North Pacific furs to China by way of Siberia. This indirect route was arduous and time-consuming, and transporting adequate supplies for these expeditions overland from the western part of the empire was nearly impossible. In 1802, Captain Ivan Fedorovich von Krusenstern (1770–1846) proposed that the Russian-American Company not only supply the eastern colonies by sea, but also build ships on the east coast of the Asian continent, collect cargoes of furs in the Pacific north-west, and then sail with them directly to China, thereby avoiding unnecessary delay and expense.⁸ Krusenstern's proposal won the approval of Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumyantsev (1754–1826), Russia's Minister of Commerce and an influential friend of Czar Alexander I, and Admiral Nikolai Mordwinoff (1754–1845), the Minister of the Marine. Czar Alexander enthusiastically embraced the idea, and quickly authorized Krusenstern to put his plan into action. The Czar stipulated that the mission should be enlarged into a 'voyage of discovery and circumnavigation' and also carry a Russian ambassador to Japan.⁹ He appointed Rezanov minister plenipotentiary to Japan, with orders to open diplomatic relations with the Japanese Tokugawa Shogunate. That this expedition was sent westward, through the Atlantic, around Cape Horn and back to the North Pacific, where it would make landfall in Russian territory again before proceeding to Japan, testifies to Russia's vast geography.

In March 1803, an imperial messenger arrived in Irkutsk bearing an order for the surviving Japanese castaways to journey to St Petersburg. As part of their expansion, the Russian government planned to send an envoy to Japan, and it hoped that ferrying the stranded Japanese home would help gain them entrance to the normally unwelcoming country. 'Valuable presents were prepared to secure the favour of the monarch and his ministers', wrote a Russian official,

and to effect this with the greater certainty, the Japanese who in 1796 were captured in the Aleutic islands, such of them, at least, as had not embraced the Christian religion, and wished to return home, were to be conveyed back from Irkutsk, the place of their confinement.¹⁰

Though the Japanese castaways were not privy to this plan, their journey home had finally begun.

With only four days' notice, the men gathered necessities for the journey, including a new suit of woollen clothes and shoes provided by the government, and began the long overland journey. They were conveyed in three wheeled

carriages drawn by four horses that sped along at an astonishing speed. Travelling day and night, stopping only to change horses, the group allegedly covered nearly 6,000 miles in 50 days, averaging 120 miles per day. Unaccustomed to such movement, however, two men became ill and returned to Irkutsk and another was left behind in the city of Perm.

By the middle of April, the weary travellers reached Moscow where they expressed amazement at the city's vast size. Although at least three cities in Japan were larger than Moscow in 1803, Tajuro had never seen them, and the hustle and crowds of a city of 240,000 people overwhelmed him.¹¹ They had time enough to visit some of the chief monuments, but quickly took to the road again for the final leg to St Petersburg. Arriving at the seat of Russian government, the Japanese were billeted in the palace of Count Rumyantsev, the sponsor of the upcoming Russian voyage to Japan.

Meanwhile, the Russians busily prepared for the ocean voyage, including buying two ships for the purpose in England and renaming them the *Nadezhda* and *Neva*.¹² Krusenstern cautiously outfitted the vessels at Kronstadt, taking care to provide good provisions and clothing for his crews. 'All my sailors were well supplied with clothes and linen', he wrote,

the greatest part of which I had ordered from England. Besides this, I had mattresses, pillows, sheets, and coverlids, made for each man, and, as a necessary measure of precaution caused a considerable additional supply of clothes a linen to be provided.¹³

A Russian critic excoriated the expedition for trumpeting their plans because this led to higher prices, and noted that the expedition 'purchased at high prices in London clothing and footwear for the crews'.¹⁴ Among this load of British-made garments and textiles may have been an otherwise unremarkable sailor's jacket, perhaps part of a bale of ready-made garments laid in for future use at sea, commonly called 'slop' clothing. That Krusenstern purchased most of the voyage's textile goods from England demonstrates the global influence and reputation of Britain's textile production capacity and quality in this period.¹⁵

In St Petersburg, the ten remaining castaways appeared before the Czar, who asked if they wished to return to Japan. Only four of the men, Tsudayu, Gihei, Schafei and Tajuro, affirmed their wish to travel home.¹⁶ It seems likely that at least some of the men had converted to Christianity during their ten years in Siberia, making them apprehensive of their reception in Japan, where such outside religions were forbidden.¹⁷

The expedition's ships finally weighed anchor and sailed on 7 August 1803, nearly a decade after the crew of the *Wakamiya Maru* left their homes in Japan. The Japanese sailed on the *Nadezhda*, which also carried the ambassador, his suite and a translator. After a layover at Copenhagen to acquire more provisions and reload the cargoes, the ships sailed for the Atlantic, touching at Falmouth, England, before shaping a course for the Canary Islands. They made landfall on the coast of Brazil on 20 December 1803, and by 3 March 1804 the ships rounded Cape Horn into the Pacific. The expedition made stops at the Marquesas and Hawaiian Islands as they pushed farther west. From Hawaii, the *Neva* sailed

north for the Russian possessions in Alaska, while Krusenstern and the *Nadezhda* sailed directly for Kamchatka. They made Petropavlovsk on 16 July 1804, after a 35-day passage from Hawaii.¹⁸ It took months to refit and wait out bad weather. They put to sea again on 6 September 1804.¹⁹ After a stormy passage, Tajuro and his three compatriots finally reached Japanese waters again at the beginning of October. According to Hermann Löwenstern (1771–1836), a physician on the voyage, 'After so many years the Japanese on board are impatiently awaiting the moment when they catch sight of Japan. No one else looks more diligently for land than our Japanese.'²⁰ The crew was fast approaching the eleventh anniversary of their departure from Japan.

Ambassador Rezanov's mission was stymied from the beginning. As soon as the Russians sailed into Nagasaki, they were subjected to a string of 'indignities' (as they called them). First, the Japanese confiscated all the ship's powder and arms, even the officers' personal fowling pieces. The governor forced the *Nadezhda* to anchor offshore for nearly a month, essentially quarantining the ambassador. At last, Rezanov and his suite were allowed to take up residence on shore. But instead of venturing to Nagasaki, they were confined to a house, tightly walled and guarded by watchtowers, where they were kept under lock and key and constant surveillance.

The governor of Nagasaki requested the return of the four Japanese as soon as their presence was known, but Ambassador Rezanov wished to keep them, anticipating the favour he would gain by presenting them personally to the Emperor when an audience could be arranged. But an audience was not forthcoming, and in the end the four men remained on shore in the ambassador's compound for months.²¹ As time dragged on, the Russians grew increasingly frustrated. The crew of the *Wakamiya Maru* grew increasingly despondent. They were so close to home, but would they ever be allowed to go back to their village? After so many years away, what had happened to their families? How would the Japanese government receive castaways who had broken one of the greatest taboos of their society and who, by their presence alone, might yet disturb the peace?

On 16 January 1805, in the small harbour-side compound that held Russian envoys and soldiers, Tajuro attempted to take his own life. According to Löwenstern, Tajuro took a razor, calmly bound the blade open with a rag, and struck it repeatedly against his throat and mouth. A Russian soldier wrenched the blade from his hands before he could do more damage, but the wound bled copiously. The ambassador quickly notified the Japanese guards and sent word for Krusenstern and Karl Espenberg (1761–1822), the *Nadezhda*'s surgeon, to come quickly and attend to the wounds. The Japanese guards, however, would not let anyone approach or aid Tajuro and waited for the arrival of a Japanese doctor and surgeon. He wounded himself gravely; a Japanese author recorded that Tajuro could never speak afterwards.²²

Why, after so many years and apparently so close to returning home, would Tajuro choose suicide? Löwenstern noted that, when asked, Tajuro simply croaked, 'I owe Russia so much gratitude. My comrades have brought me

to this.²³ Krusenstern surmised that Tajuro had despaired of not seeing his family since his return, or perhaps had received word of the fate of other, earlier Japanese castaways on their return to Japan: ‘eternal confinement’ — lifetime imprisonment.²⁴ He offered one final reason, a motive also mentioned by Löwenstern. It seems that shortly after the *Nadezhda* arrived at Nagasaki, Tajuro sent a letter to local officials complaining of the treatment he had received at the hands of the Russians. The letter claimed the Russians were ‘the most bigoted of Christians’, and that the voyage to Japan was intended to introduce Christianity to the country. Whatever effect it had on the recipients, the letter produced acrimony among the four Japanese. Immediately before cutting his throat, Tajuro had a violent argument with his shipmate Schafei, and this conflict seems to have precipitated his suicide attempt.²⁵

Meanwhile, the Russians had made no progress with their negotiations. On 12 March the Russians learned they would not be allowed to visit Edo or have an audience with the Emperor and that the ship must leave Nagasaki as soon as it was ready for sea. At the beginning of April an audience with a minister sent from the capital sealed the fate of the expedition: the emperor decreed that no Russian ship should ever come to Japan again, that any future Japanese castaways in Russian territory should be sent home through the Dutch and that none of the presents brought from St Petersburg could be delivered to the Emperor or any other Japanese official. With nothing more to be done, the Russians prepared the *Nadezhda* for sea and departed Nagasaki on 18 April 1805.

The four Japanese were taken on shore for the last time on 27 March 1805, over eleven years after they put to sea. Tajuro, still suffering from his wound, was borne in a sedan chair, while a multitude of Japanese followed with the men’s baggage.²⁶ At long last, the men were home. But, as it turned out, they still had work to do for Japan. In the coming months, they were thoroughly debriefed by Japanese officials, scribes and artists, who recorded everything the men remembered in a document called *Kankai ibun*.²⁷ This document, the Japanese hoped, would serve as a reference in the event of future contact with the Russians and other peoples the crew of the *Wakamiya Maru* had encountered. Japanese authorities scrutinized everything the men had brought home — such as ‘garments of cotton, linen, silk and wool’ — and everything they remembered about their travels for clues about the outside world and the Russians, their powerful but largely unfamiliar neighbours.²⁸ For scholars today, *Kankai ibun* is an invaluable if underutilized ethnographic document, providing a glimpse of the world as it appeared to common Japanese sailors dictating experiences to scribes and helping artists depict animals, architecture, fashion and technology from all over the world (Figure 2).

What became of Tajuro remains a mystery. In 1807, the year Japanese scribes completed their account of the castaways’ story, he spent his days lying in bed, eating little, speaking not at all. We might not know if he ever made it to his home village except for one remarkable circumstance. His jacket survived long enough to join the collection of the Historical Museum of Jomon Village,

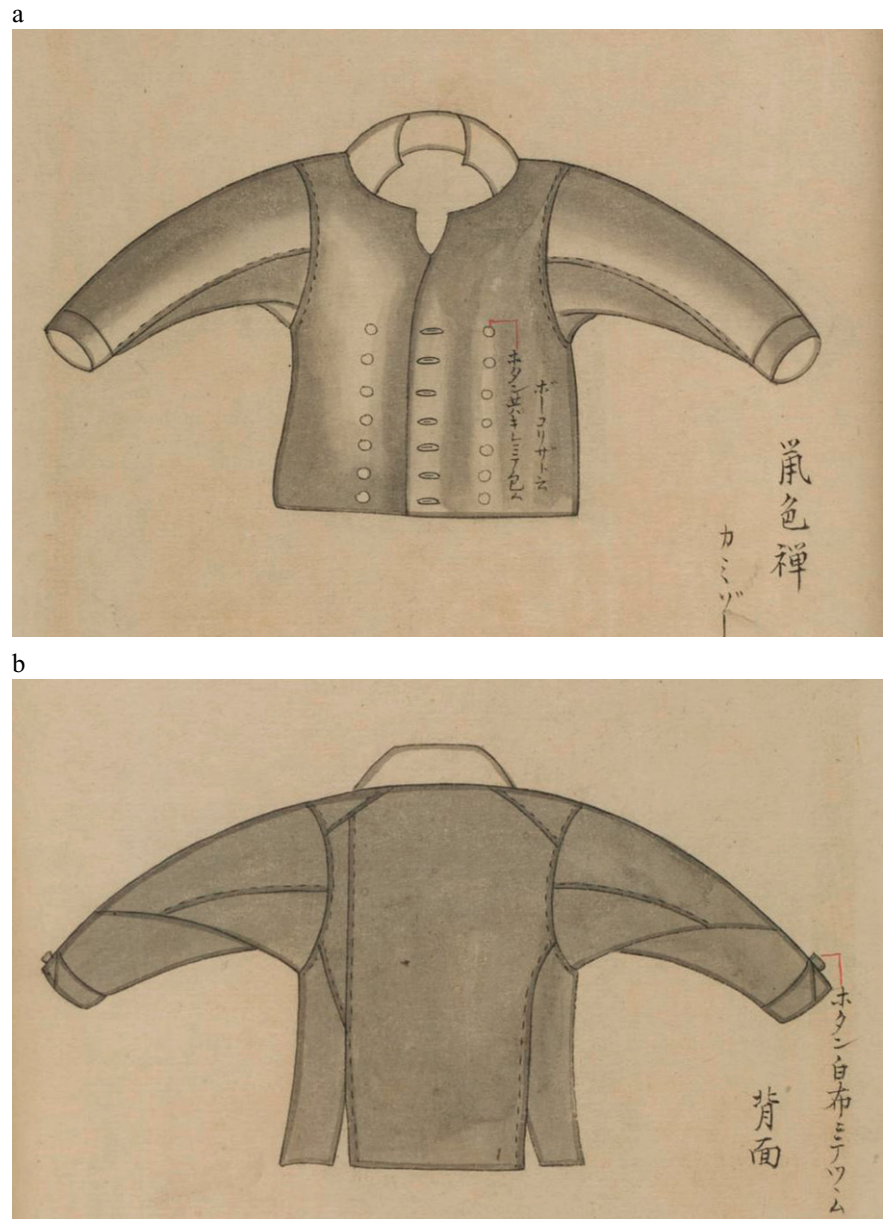


Figure 2a and b. A jacket similar to Tajuro's illustrated in two details from *Kankai ibun*, III (1807), illustrations. University of Southern California.
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Oku Matsushima, near where Tajuro once lived. Tajuro's jacket, which travelled with him across the Atlantic, around Cape Horn and finally, at long last, north-west across the Pacific and to Japan, suggests that this castaway had, at last, found his way home.

TAJURO'S JACKET IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXT

Making sense of Tajuro's jacket means we have to think about how it would have looked and felt to him and how it looked to other people. For the castaways, clothing and appearance was the most remarkable thing about the peoples they encountered. They often could not speak with people they met, but they were keen observers of how they looked. To see the world through Tajuro's eyes, we must abandon any ideas about sailors as well-travelled citizens of the world. A poor Japanese fisherman in the early nineteenth century was a decidedly unworldly figure. Many European sailors who voyaged around the Atlantic Basin were cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic and world-wise.²⁹ Their maritime contemporaries in Japanese waters, on the other hand, lived under strict rules that forbade contact with the outside world. What might result from even accidental deviation from that code terrified sailors, even after they returned. When he put to sea, Tajuro knew almost nothing about people who were not Japanese. He would meet many of them in the years to come.

The dark-skinned, bearded indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands who first rescued the Japanese castaways looked nothing like anyone the sailors had ever seen before. And their clothing, made from feathered puffin skin and sea lion pelts, struck the Japanese as so strange 'that we scarcely recognized them as human beings'.³⁰ It was only later, after they arrived in the more populous Russian governmental outpost in Unalaska, that they encountered indigenous peoples wearing clothing made from textiles.³¹ As the castaways moved on to Okhotsk and Irkutsk in mainland Russia, the frigid climate startled them, and years later they could still remember the elaborate leather garments the Russians gave them to keep out the cold.³²

In Irkutsk, where the castaways remained for eight years, clothing was more like what they remembered in Japan. It distinguished Russians from indigenous tribal groups who had adopted wool garments only recently.³³ And clothing distinguished people of particular importance, like priests and the wealthy.³⁴ In 1803, when the castaways were at last summoned to Moscow, clothing was their parting gift. The Russians in Irkutsk gave them each 'a suit of woollen clothes and a pair of shoes'.³⁵

As it turned out, Russian officials deemed these woollen clothes unsuitable for the Japanese when they arrived in St Petersburg after a gruelling 48-day journey. Their Russian handlers were keenly aware of the importance of clothing, and they ordered the castaways to wear Japanese garments to their audience with Alexander I. Of course, they had no such garments left. And so they arrived at 'the government office where the ten of us were measured'. A few days later, they

retrieved their 'Japanese clothes', each acquiring a new 'kimono of striped satin, with *haori* (coat) and *obi* (belt)'.³⁶ Thus the ten remaining Japanese castaways arrived at the court of Alexander attired in Russian interpretations of traditional Japanese clothing.

Just how closely these garments resembled contemporaneous Japanese clothing and how Russian tailors even knew where to begin in their fabrication is hard to say. Perhaps they were informed by the scanty evidence the Russians had about Japanese culture, drawn from earlier castaways who had made it to St Petersburg in 1702 and 1791.³⁷ Tajuro and his comrades recognized the new clothes as vaguely Japanese. But the Russians in St Petersburg knew almost as little about Japanese dress as they did about Japan in general. This was made evident a few days after their audience with the Emperor when the castaways were escorted through a museum with a gallery dedicated to foreign costume.³⁸ 'Our guides said there was a Japanese costume', they remembered, 'and asked us if we could discover it, but we looked in vain.' It turned out the Russians owned a single Japanese garment, probably a relic from one of the earlier castaways, a quilted *uwappari*, a sort of smock 'worn by poor Japanese folk and farmers'. 'We did not recognize it', the castaways said, 'until we saw a Japanese *mon* (crest) on it, and thereby knew it to be Japanese.'³⁹ The Japanese official who interrogated the castaways and transcribed their account could not help editorializing at this point in the narrative. 'It is a shame', he noted, 'that, among all the splendid costumes of the world, we were represented in this collection by such a garment.'⁴⁰ A poor farmer's smock was hardly the sort of clothing the Japanese would have chosen to represent their culture. But then again, neither were Tajuro and the other sailors from the *Wakamiya Maru* the sort of diplomats they might have selected.

After their grand tour of St Petersburg, the four castaways who remained adamant about their wish to return home became attached to the expedition of Rezanov, who also provided them with 'clothes and utensils' for the voyage.⁴¹ This is probably when Tajuro acquired his jacket, given that its current provenance maintains it was a gift from Alexander I.⁴² Tajuro may not have worn the jacket much on the voyage home, as the castaways commented on the hot weather and the minimal clothing of indigenous peoples in the Canary Islands, Brazil and the Marquesas.⁴³ When the weather cooled, the jacket may have been Tajuro's preferred garment. During the expedition's stop in Kamchatka in the summer of 1804, just before it headed to Japan, someone broke into Tajuro's baggage and stole most of his clothing and money.⁴⁴ When Rezanov attempted to replace the man's loss, Tajuro became so emotional he broke down in tears. 'The Russian emperor was our father, our everything', he told Rezanov. 'How could I think for a moment about the lost things, since all of the other benefits are so fresh in my memory?'⁴⁵ Löwenstern described this reaction and the way Tajuro then revealed that the castaways had carefully preserved a portrait of Alexander I as 'the first nice gesture from our callous Japanese'.⁴⁶ Tajuro, meanwhile, was left with only what he was wearing and a few other belongings. Either he was

wearing his coarse blue jacket at the time of his theft or he received it soon afterwards as a replacement for his losses.

When they finally made it back to Japan, the men had to don their Russian-made 'Japanese' garments all over again. Rezanov wanted the castaways in these clothes for their first meeting with Japanese officials.⁴⁷ The garments piqued the officials' interest, and the castaways reported that 'they questioned us in detail about them'.⁴⁸ Perhaps these curious Russo-Japanese garments held clues for the Japanese about what exactly the Russians knew about *them*, which was at least as worrying as how little they knew about the Russians. The Russians, meanwhile, were not making a good impression on the Japanese, and this was at least in part due to clothing. Löwenstern was particularly offended by Rezanov's inattention to the impression he was making. Rezanov, he recorded,

appears in a jacket despite the swarm of boats moving around us that have been able to recognize his face for a long time [...] Even when the boat with the provisions comes, Resanoff is not ashamed to appear in front of the Japanese in this sailor-like slovenly attire.⁴⁹

Though he wore a uniform to official meetings, Rezanov paid less attention to his dress at other moments when, Löwenstern believed, the appearance of the lead Russian envoy was still very important (Figure 3).

No one bothered to record whether the Japanese officials provided their returned castaways with new clothing, but probably some time elapsed before Tajuro and his comrades adjusted to garments of the sort that they had not worn in over a decade. Certainly, someone wore Tajuro's Russian jacket excessively, judging by its wear and patches. Perhaps he wore it for a while in preference to Japanese clothing. Or perhaps his family carefully folded it and brought it out only for special occasions. But somehow or other, it outlasted almost every other relic of the castaways, leaving us a remarkable chance to consider both the importance of clothing in this period and what this particular jacket can tell us about a whole class of garments — sailor's jackets — that were once ubiquitous but have left almost no extant material traces.

Tajuro's jacket survived in the hands of his family until it arrived at the Historical Museum sometime in the twentieth century. Of the handful of working men's jackets that remain from the period between 1750 and 1825, it is the only known one associated with a common sailor, Atlantic or Pacific, whose name we know and who unquestionably wore it at sea. As such, it offers an unparalleled chance to examine and speculate about the appearance and construction of sailors' jackets and make generalizations about the thousands of other such garments that once floated around the world's oceans on the bodies of working seamen.

TAJURO'S JACKET IN ITS MATERIAL CONTEXT: A CENSUS

For Atlantic seamen, clothing made them sailors, serving functional purposes (Tajuro's jacket and others lacked the long, encumbering 'skirts' or tails of

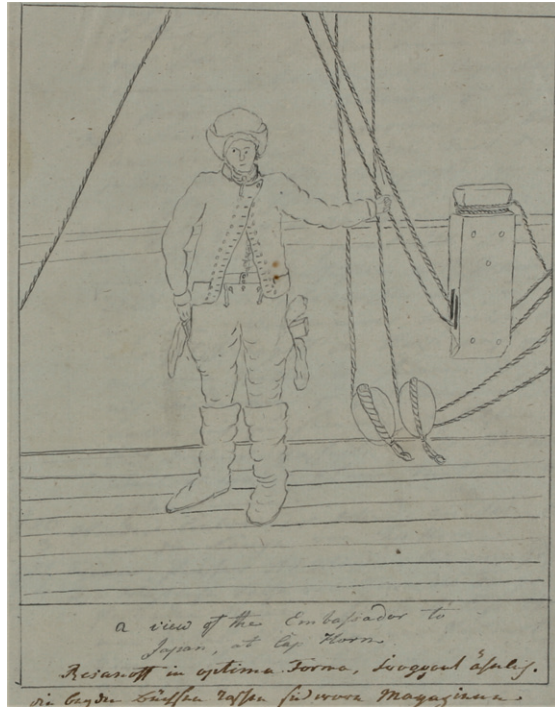


Figure 3. Löwenstern's sketch of Rezanov aboard ship before their arrival in Japan, showing him wearing a sailor's jacket. Curiously, this sketch is tabbed in to Löwenstern's manuscript diary (which he composed primarily in German) but is captioned in English.

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most contemporaneous men's coats) and a symbolic one. People who wore jackets like Tajuro's felt like sailors and — for better or worse — these garments differentiated them from land-bound society.⁵⁰ To understand what this meant and what Tajuro's jacket adds to our understanding, we must examine comparable garments and place Tajuro's jacket in a continuum that stretches back into the eighteenth century. This jacket is one example of a pan-European 'slop' clothing design chronology and a rare example of the many ready-made garments purchased for and worn by men at sea. But few people bothered to preserve these garments precisely because they were so common, and because they were worn until they could not be reused. Consequently, they rarely attracted the attention of early collectors and museums. Indeed, Tajuro's jacket survives in Japan because it had been divorced from all its associations with common working sailors and had become a dazzling exoticism. There are nevertheless a handful of comparable garments that allow us to better understand Tajuro's jacket in its material context. Two complete and several fragmentary jackets come from archaeological contexts — a ruined fort and a shipwreck — and several others survive in museum collections with provenances that slightly post-date Tajuro's



Figure 4. The Fort Prince of Wales jacket, late eighteenth-century, wool.
© Parks Canada

voyage. These jackets allow us to create a material chronology demonstrating continuity and change in this particular form.⁵¹

By the 1760s, the ready-made jackets supplied to the British Royal Navy by private contractors were relatively short (though still falling well below the hips) and featured a double-breasted closure in front.⁵² These jackets appear in period visual sources, but the archaeological record gives us the closest look at this style of jacket. One of the earliest pieces of this jacket type was recovered from the ruins of the carpenter's shop at the Hudson Bay Company's Fort Prince of Wales in Manitoba, Canada (Figure 4).⁵³ Deposited around the time of the French raid on the fort in 1782 by an unknown wearer, the jacket harks back to the cut and construction of mid-eighteenth-century coats (with long 'skirts' or tails) and 'waistcoats with sleeves', close-fitting garments worn either beneath a coat or alone as an outer garment.⁵⁴ Stylistically, it features a narrow reinforcing collar band and flared waist, features abandoned soon after in men's jackets. It is constructed of a heavily napped, plain-woven wool, dyed madder red and is lined with a white twill wool, providing warm and durable protection from the elements. A facing made from the same fabric as the exterior provides a firm backing for the buttonholes. A total of eighteen buttonholes, nine worked on each side of the centre front, close the jacket.



Figure 5. The *Carleton* jacket, late eighteenth-century, wool.

Photo by M. Brenckle, courtesy of Central Maritime Museum, Gdansk, Poland

A similar jacket was excavated from the wreck of the British collier *General Carleton*, lost in September 1785 west of Gdansk, Poland.⁵⁵ The wreck site offered up a well-preserved assemblage of sailors' clothing from the era before there was a formally regulated uniform for common sailors on British naval ships. Nonetheless, most British sailors, by benefit of fashion and the limited stock available aboard ship, wore the same sorts of garments and would have looked quite uniform to outside observers. Among the *General Carleton* assemblage is one complete double-breasted jacket constructed of stout brown wool broadcloth (Figure 5). As with the Fort Prince of Wales example, this jacket is double breasted, and though unlined, also has a facing of cloth inside the centre front. The hem, however, is slightly shorter, and there is no pronounced flare at the waist (or skirts extending below the waist), presaging western European jackets of the coming decades.⁵⁶ Coats of the era still featured long skirts, but sailors' jackets and some waistcoats, especially after the 1780s, were increasingly cut straight across the waist.

In the late eighteenth century, a drastic shift occurred in civilian fashion that spanned the social ladder. Sailors wore clothing with details that marked them as maritime workers, but their garments also simultaneously responded

to wider fashion trends. By the late 1790s, jackets worn by most European sailors had shortened considerably and acquired standing collars, generally in keeping with current military fashion. The fashionable waistline continued to rise through the decade, until it reached a maximum height about 1800–1805. Contemporary images depict short jackets and high-waisted trousers.⁵⁷ Tajuro's jacket falls squarely within this period and displays the same characteristics.

Ascribing national origin based on style is difficult for a garment of the early nineteenth century. The short body, standing collar and close-fitting sleeves of Tajuro's jacket are all common features of period jackets, including those worn by some men on land. Contemporary images of British, French, Dutch and Russian seamen depict jackets with similar characteristics. A sailor's jacket, said to be worn by a sailor named John Ayres of St James's Norwich, Norfolk, England, exhibits the same general features. Except for its profusion of buttons, the Ayres jacket also mirrors that of another British sailor, John Lumley, 'one of Lord Nelson's seamen'. In George Orleans Delamotte's (1788–1861) drawing dating to about 1818–1825, Lumley wears what may be his old navy jacket (Figure 6).

Elsewhere the style fossilized, as in Scandinavia, where short jackets remained a staple of folk costume well into the nineteenth century. Examples at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm seem nearly indistinguishable from their seafaring counterparts of a half-century earlier (Figure 7). Even today, short-waisted jackets continue to influence men's and women's fashion trends.

TAJURO'S JACKET

Decoding Tajuro's jacket first requires us to peel back two hundred years of losses and additions.⁵⁸ The analysis presented here is based on high-resolution photographs, and future personal examination may reveal further details. Today, the jacket is threadbare, patched and missing substantial portions of its right side and left underarm. The light blue (probably silk) patches on the right shoulder, left armpit and left elbow, as well as the trim on the shortened left cuff, are all later repairs, as are the brown textiles that now reinforce the collar and right front facing. Tajuro's jacket clearly remained in use long enough after he arrived in Japan and probably even after his death to necessitate these repairs. Perhaps most interesting is the trimmed left sleeve, probably once matched by the missing right sleeve. The loss of the cuff ends of these sleeves removed any evidence for plackets or buttons at the cuff (Figure 8).

Today, Tajuro's jacket is threadbare and the warp yarns of its two-two twill-woven woollen body are heavily abraded, revealing the undyed wool at the core of each yarn. The yarns are large and the twill perhaps made more prominent by wear over time, but originally the body material would have been a single colour, fulled not at all or only slightly to obscure its weave (Figure 8). It is a remarkably coarse cloth, especially compared to contemporary English textiles used for comparable outer garments.⁵⁹ Remnants of its original hue are visible



Figure 6a. Jacket belonging to British naval veteran John Ayers, NWHCM: 19415.
© Norfolk Museums Service



Figure 6b. Watercolour sketch 'John Lumley, one of Lord Nelson's seamen', George Orleans Delamotte, *Drawings of Costumes and Characters* (c. 1820). Drawing vol. 271.
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in certain areas less exposed to light and wear, such as the rear seam of the right sleeve. Like many garments of this period, this rear underarm sleeve seam allowance is substantially larger than that of the front (and than most other seams in the garment), a common accommodation that budgeted a bit of surplus fabric



Figure 7. One example of a Swedish jacket dating to the mid-nineteenth century, acc. no. NM.0071496A, Stockholm: Nordiska Museet.
 < <https://digitaltmuseum.se/021027821133/troja> > *Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0*

for future garment alterations, but one that adds credence to hints that this was a ready-made jacket made for many potential bodies, not just one.

It is unclear whether Tajuro's jacket was originally British or Russian. Russian sailors typically wore green jackets in this period which might have been made from a similarly coarse wool. But documentary evidence and the timing of Tajuro's acquisition suggest that the jacket may have come aboard in England, along with much of the material for the Krusenstern expedition. The slop clothing trade had been well established in Britain for more than a century and was able to provide large quantities of relatively well-made garments at short notice.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, there is little about the jacket's style or construction that makes a strong argument for one place of origin over another. The weave structure does not clarify this either. The cloth, a 2/2 twill (in this case indigo-dyed) made of z-twisted wool yarns seems to have been used commonly in the period.⁶¹ The surface of the cloth currently has no nap, but whether it was manufactured this way originally, or is the result of extreme wear is impossible to determine (Figure 9). There is little evidence for any nap, even in protected areas subjected to the least amount of wear. The edges of the garment were turned, leaving no raw edges at the centre front, hem, or along the collar. This indicates the cloth was minimally fulled when made and would not hold a raw edge. This type of construction appears in similar garments made of lower-quality textiles throughout the Atlantic world.

A tailor or seamstress constructed the body of Tajuro's jacket from twelve pieces of wool: four sleeve pieces, a single-piece collar, two pocket welts, two front body panels, two front facings and a single back piece.⁶² Seven buttonholes

a



b



Figure 8a and b. Details of the back and back right sleeve of Tajuro's jacket.
 © The Historical Museum of Jomon Village Oku Matsushima, Japan.

close its front, with two (and possibly a third, now lost) in a second, double-breasted row at the top of the left lapel (Figure 10). Notably, the buttonholes are quite finely worked in comparison to the coarseness of the textile. Two surviving buttons are turned bone of a sort common in this period. They have notably darker centres, protected from wear, perhaps suggesting they were originally

a



b



Figure 9a and b. Details of back left shoulder and a close-up of the textiles of Tajuro's jacket.

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dyed a dark hue to help them blend into the darker body colour. Behind the buttonholes is a narrow supportive interfacing, or button stand, and a much wider facing, allowing Tajuro to wear the jacket open while still revealing only the blue wool body cloth. Lining the body and sleeves is a thin white (probably woollen) material.

In many ways, Tajuro's jacket confirms what we know about common jackets of the period. The shapes of its various pieces, and how it would have fitted Tajuro, are comparable to visual and material evidence. Its welt pockets, for example, are similar to those on other garments. But other aspects are notably unique. The jacket's two-piece collar (with an inner and outer piece), for example, is unusual for a period in which most jacket and waistcoat collars were constructed from four pieces, with two seamed pairs faced against each other. Perhaps most interesting, at some point after its construction a long dart was added to the centre back, extending from a few inches below the collar to near the bottom hem. Most men's coats of this period were made with fitted, two-piece backs, while waistcoats included only a single back panel, sometimes with ties for adjusting fit. In the case of Tajuro's jacket, a closer fit was achieved through this dart. The dart would have required almost as much work as a complete back seam, making it unlikely that its original tailor would have chosen this option over a more typical two-piece coat-style back. It is more likely that someone added the dart later to fit a particular wearer. Notably, the *General Carleton* jacket discussed above exhibits a similar post-construction customization on its back.⁶³ This remarkable correlation suggests that this fitting technique, absent from every extant outer garment known to the authors, was commonly used by working men to get a simple, cheap and more fashionable fit to their ready-made clothes.⁶⁴

Tajuro's jacket is a rare addition to the material culture of early sailor's clothing. In its construction and fashion, it offers new information and verifies what might otherwise be presumed idiosyncrasies in the material and visual record (like single-piece backs, for example). Tajuro's story is equally fascinating, and bringing it into the view of English-speaking historians and dress history specialists gives us the chance to see life at sea in all its messiness. Tajuro's jacket traversed the globe at a time when maritime commerce and exploration were drawing far-flung peoples and cultures closer together. That one poor Japanese fisherman could accidentally visit Alaska, Siberia, England and the Hawaiian Islands in the space of a few years is a testament to the power and spread of these new networks. When he returned to his homeland after years abroad, Tajuro's jacket set him apart from his old countrymen. In the Atlantic world, this sort of jacket was the most commonplace of garments, garnering little attention and no careful preservation. But Japanese people preserved Tajuro's jacket as a peculiar relic of a foreign culture. The result — this rare survival — gives us a new opportunity to consider what Tajuro's experiences meant and how they were often determined by what he and others wore.

a



b



Figure 10a and b. Details of the collar and front of Tajuro's jacket.
© The Historical Museum of Jomon Village Oku Matsushima, Japan

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2. Plummer notes their point of landfall as Adak Island in a map (*Shogun's*, p. 50), though later in her text is more general and says it 'was one of the Andreianovskii [Andreanoff] Islands', p. 89.
3. The most comprehensive study of this expansion is over half a century old: George Alexander Lensen, *The Russian Push Towards Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697–1875* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).
4. Victoria Moessner, *The First Russian Voyage around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 248.
5. This narrative is drawn from Stewart Culin (ed.), 'The Wreck of the Wakamiya Maru', *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, 20.4 (May 1920), 364–72 and 436, and Stewart Culin (ed.), 'Across Siberia in the Dragon Year of 1796', *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, 20.5 (June 1920), 505–12.
6. A. J. von Krusenstern, *Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806* (London: C. Roworth for John Murray, 1813), p. xix.
7. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, pp. xix–xxii.
8. Urey Lisiansky, *A Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 4, 5, & 6; performed, by Order of His Imperial Majesty Alexander the First, Emperor of Russia, in the Ship Neva* (London: Printed for John Booth, 1814), p. xiii.
9. Lisiansky, *Voyage*, p. xiv.
10. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 5.
11. Notably, at least three cities (Edo [Tokyo], Kyoto and Osaka) in Japan had populations over 300,000 by 1800, and London, where the castaways would stop briefly later in their voyage, had exceeded 860,000 residents in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Tertius Chandler and Gerald Fox, *3000 Years of Urban Growth* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 367, 377.
12. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 3.
13. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 12.
14. Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, 1818, translated and quoted in Lensen, *The Russian Push*, p. 130.

15. In 1728, English author Daniel Defoe summarized what outsiders might believe about British woollen textiles: 'But take our English Woolen Manufacture, and go where you will you will find it; 'tis in every Country, in every Market, in every trading place; and 'tis receiv'd, valued, and made use of, nay call'd for and wanted every where. In a Word, all the World wears it, all the World desires it, and all the World almost envies us the Glory and Advantage of it.' *A Plan of the English Commerce* (London: Printed for Charles Rivington, 1728), pp. 180–81. Thanks to Neal Thomas Hurst for this reference.
16. Steward Culin (ed.), 'Sightseeing in Petersburg a Century Ago', *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, 20.7 (August 1920), 710. This source uses Sahei', a name that has been changed here to match Moessner's usage (see note 25).
17. The Japanese sailors who returned to Japan were, in fact, made to prove they were not Christian. Stewart Culin (ed.), 'The Return of the Shogun's Sailors', *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, 20.8 (September 1920), 814.
18. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 209.
19. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 216.
20. Moessner, *The First Russian Voyage*, p. 156.
21. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 281.
22. Culin, 'The Return', p. 813. The Russians noted that the wound had largely healed by the time they departed a few months later: Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 282. Whether he was able to contribute to the composition of *Kankai ibun*, then, remains unclear.
23. Moessner, p. 219.
24. Krusenstern, *Voyage*, p. 282.
25. Moessner, *The First Russian Voyage*, p. 219. *Kankai ibun* described the incidence with characteristic diffidence. It claims that Tajuro was 'naturally an eccentric and gloomy man', and ascribes his attempted suicide to insanity (Culin, 'The Return', p. 813).
26. Moessner, *The First Russian Voyage*, p. 283.
27. This text, compiled by Japanese officials between 1805 and 1807, was the result of forty days of questioning. After considerable editing, the scholars presented the resulting book titled *Kankai ibun* (or, as it has usually appeared in English, *The Wonderful News of the Circumnavigation*) to the government. There are at least seventeen known copies (in various different hands) of *Kankai ibun*, according to Hashimoto Hatsuko, 'A Manuscript Copy of Wakamiya-maru Roshiaokoku Hyoryuki', < <http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/researchlab/wp/wp-content/uploads/kiyo/pdf-data/sa28/hashimoto.pdf> > [accessed 9 September 2019]. See also Timon Screech, 'The Strange Tale of a Circumnavigation: A Rare Japanese Book from the SOAS Collection in Historical Context', *Orientations*, 38.8 (November/December 2007), 67. The University of Southern California has helpfully digitized its copy: < <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15799coll58/id/19307/rec/1> > [consulted March 2021].
28. Culin, 'The Return', p. 814.
29. The literature on this subject is substantial, and among the most influential monographs are Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Daniel Vickers with Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Emma Christopher, *Slave Ships and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Matthew Taylor Raffety, *The Republic Afloat: Law, Honor, and Citizenship in Maritime America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear Like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
30. Culin, 'The Wreck', p. 370.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

32. Culin, 'Across Siberia', p. 505.
33. Ibid., p. 507.
34. Ibid., pp. 510–11.
35. Stewart Culin (ed.), 'The Shogun's Subjects Visit the Russian Court', *Asia: The American Magazine on the Orient*, 20.6 (July 1920), 583.
36. Ibid., p. 587.
37. See Plummer, *Shogun's*, pp. 70–87.
38. This may have been today's Hermitage Museum, which began with Catherine the Great's art collection in the 1760s.
39. Culin, 'Sightseeing in Petersburg', p. 706.
40. Ibid., p. 706.
41. Ibid., p. 710. George von Langsdorff, a Russian with the expedition, noted that the castaways were given 'money, clothes, and watches' before leaving St Petersburg (G. H. Von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World* [Carlisle, PA: George Philips, 1817], p. 181). Löwenstern noted that 'Five Japanese, to whom the Emperor had given watches, came onboard' (Moessner, *The First Russian*, p. 5).
42. Mikio Oshima, 'The First Japanese to Circle the Globe: Castaways of the Wakamiya-Maru', *Ships & Ocean Newsletter*, 209 (20 April 2009), 23. The image and mention of Tajuro's jacket in this article, brought to our attention by David Rickman, is the only other time the garment has been referenced in an English-language publication.
43. Culin, 'The Return', pp. 807 and 809.
44. Moessner, *The First Russian*, p. 119.
45. Ibid., p. 149.
46. Ibid., p. 149.
47. Among Resanoff's orders for the expedition's arrival in Japan was that 'the Japanese returning from Russia are to be on the quarterdeck in their [Japanese] dress and act as interpreters' (Moessner, *The First Russian*, p. 164). According to Langsdorff, 'The Japanese whom we had brought with us were then presented to the *Great Man*, dressed in their silk clothes of Russian manufacture' (Langsdorff, *Voyages*, p. 207).
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49. Moessner, *The First Russian*, p. 188.
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- Potter and James A. Hanson, *The Encyclopedia of Trade Goods, Volume 4: Clothing & Textiles of the Fur Trade* (Chadron, NE: Museum of the Fur Trade, 2014), pp. 180–81; and Tyler Rudd Putman, 'The Slop Shop and the Almshouse: Ready-Made Menswear in Philadelphia, 1780–1820' (MA thesis, University of Delaware, 2011), pp. 146–47.
54. While we use 'jacket' in this article to refer to a class of men's garments that fit relatively closely to the body, fall at or near the hip, and have attached sleeves, different people at the end of the eighteenth century used 'waistcoat with sleeves', 'jacket', 'roundabout' and other labels, sometimes carefully and sometimes interchangeably.
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 56. The *Carleton* jacket is 23 1/16 inches long, with a 37-inch chest.
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 58. The following analysis is based on examination of high-resolution photographs so it does not cover details that might be detected through personal examination.
 59. Thanks to Sean Phillips (of Kochan and Phillips Historic Textiles) for his insights into the jacket's material in 2017.
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 61. See, for example, the fragments of American uniform jackets recovered from the War of 1812 battlefields at Lundy's Lane and Chrysler's Farm (see 'United States Army Grey Coat Uniform Fragments', Willoughby Historical Museum, Canada, < <http://images.ourontario.ca/1812/71858/data?n=6> > [accessed March 2021]), and a pair of breeches from the *General Carleton* wreck. Details of cloth are from an email communication with Justin Squizzero of the Marshfield School of Weaving, Marshfield, Vermont, 17 January 2017.
 62. The missing sleeve may have included round cuffs or plackets as well.
 63. As does the back lining of the Revolutionary War (c. 1780) officer's coat of Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman at the Maryland Historical Society (49.88.1 A&B), according to work done by Neal Thomas Hurst, Associate Curator of Costume and Textiles at Colonial Williamsburg.
 64. The use of the single-piece back for short jackets appears in several other late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sources. According to London tailor Robert Byfield, sailors' double-breasted 'monkey jackets' were to be made without back seam or side seams, a construction method that would have required a similar technique to alter the fit: Robert Byfield, *Sectum, The Universal Directory in the Art of Cutting* (London: H. S. Mason, 1825), p. 37. The London tailor William Stothard's c. 1813 memorandum book of uniform drafts (now part of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University) features several uniform jackets and pelisses for dragoon, hussar and rifle regiments made with one-piece backs.

TYLER RUDD PUTMAN is the Gallery Interpretation Manager at the Museum of the American Revolution. He earned an MA from the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture and an MA and PhD in History at the University of Delaware. His background also includes work in public archaeology, historical tailoring and tall ship sailing.

MATTHEW BRENCKLE holds degrees in archaeology and maritime history from Brown University and East Carolina University. For twelve years he worked as the historian for the USS Constitution Museum. He is the author of numerous books and articles on naval material culture and sailor clothing, and co-authored the museum's 2012 book about the everyday lives of the ship's 1812 crew. He left the museum in 2016 to open his own business reproducing historic hats, a trade he has followed for almost twenty years.