

INTRODUCTION TO THE NORTH BY NORTHWEST SPECIAL VOLUME

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This special volume of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* is the result of a call for papers by arctic archaeologists and anthropologists (Betts, Mason, and Reedy-Maschner) who have for years recognized a need for increased communication and data sharing between researchers who work on the Canadian and American sides of the Western Arctic (here loosely defined as arctic regions west of the Coronation Gulf in the Northwest Territories, including the Yukon Territory and Alaska [west of the 141st meridian]).

For more than fifty years (e.g., MacNeish 1956; McGhee 1974), archaeologists have recognized a strong Western Thule affiliation for archaeological deposits in the Western Canadian Arctic, and cultural and genetic linkages between the Inupiat and Inuvialuit have been recognized for far longer (e.g., Stefánsson 1913, 1919, 1923). Despite the clear understanding of the Western Arctic as distinct both geographically and culturally, it is ironic that the international boundary that bisects it continues to create an artificial divide between those who work in Canada and those who work in the United States (a similar situation, created by the same international boundary, pertains on the Pacific Northwest Coast, as noted by Ames and Maschner [1999]).

Arctic-based researchers have recognized this issue for some time, and this volume is not the first attempt to bring together scholars from both areas. In 1992, researchers from Canadian federal and territorial institutions were invited to give papers at the Alaska Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings in Fairbanks, Alaska, specifically to share data from the Northern Oil and Gas Action Plan (NOGAP) archaeological project in the Mackenzie Delta region. Since that time, Canadian archaeologists and anthropologists have regularly attended AAA (since 1972) and Arctic Conference meetings (since its inception by Dr. H.D.G. Maschner at Madison in 1993), and Alaska

archaeologists are regular participants in arctic sessions in Canadian Archaeological Association conferences. Canadian archaeologists also serve on the editorial board of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*.

Despite this cross-pollination, there have, to our knowledge, been no venues (symposia or edited volumes) specifically devoted to researchers working in the Western Arctic. This special edition of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* brings together papers from eight researchers conducting anthropological and archaeological work in the Western Arctic; four working in Alaska and four working in the Mackenzie Delta region. The goals of this volume are simple: (1) to provide a (necessarily limited) “snapshot” of current research in the Western Arctic, and (2) to stimulate more “peeking over the fence” by researchers on both sides of border, in an attempt to provoke multi-regional approaches and collaborations.

The papers assembled here cover a broad range of topics, all of which should be familiar to those working in the Western Arctic. Friesen’s paper explores the early interaction between Euro-Americans and Mackenzie Inuit/Inuvialuit who converged on the traditional whaling village at Pauline Cove, Herschel Island, in the late nineteenth century. This type of scenario was played out multiple times in multiple places in Alaska, and Friesen’s paper provides an in-depth discussion of the archaeological evidence relating to these interactions, which are so well documented in historical and ethnohistorical accounts. Friesen proposes that direct evidence of such watershed “events” is likely to be rare in the archaeological record; instead many historical deposits are complex palimpsests of many events representing a “much broader process of reorganization... with all its complex and diverse interactions.” He contends the historical deposits at Pauline Cove represent not an “event,” but an historical “conjuncture” (Braudel 1980), which documents a broader series of Inuit

confrontations with the European world leading to their subsequent transformation into the modern Inuvialuit. In effect, Friesen's paper documents the archaeological evidence for the emergence of modern Inuvialuit identity.

Friesen's paper thus provides a bridge between the articles by Betts and Lyon, both of which also document the evolution of identities in the Mackenzie Delta region. While Betts documents the development of multiple Mackenzie Inuit (the ancestors of the Inuvialuit) identities prior to the historic whaling period, Lyons explores the continued evolution of Inuvialuit Identity in the modern era. Drawing on Burch's (1998) work on Iñupiaq nations in northwest Alaska, Betts contends that the prehistoric Mackenzie Inuit were similarly segregated into multiple socioterritories and that these differing identities developed through long-term connections with specific locations and the repeated sharing of experiences that occurred at these unique locals. Nevertheless, Betts demonstrates that the formation and mutation of Mackenzie Inuit identities was a result of creative responses to changing environmental, technological, and demographic factors.

Lyons' paper tracks the evolution of Inuvialuit identity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and details the complex processes involved. Her research is the result of extensive interviews with elders in Aklavik and Inuvik, bolstered by published oral histories, which she uses to trace the constant state of identity negotiation between Inuvialuit, Euroamerican groups, governments, and neighbouring Inuit populations. Similar to Betts, Lyons proposes that the modern Inuvialuit "have perpetually asserted their ability to survive, renew, and redefine themselves," a process of creative negotiation that has been continuous from the time Neoeskimos first settled the region, nearly eight hundred years ago.

Reedy-Maschner's paper reveals the commercial relationship that modern indigenous peoples across the Western Arctic have with their subsistence species. As she notes, "most anthropological depictions of Native peoples deliberately omit or downplay their participation in the modern economy, preferring instead to document more 'authentic' relationships." Her work outlines how wild resources such as salmon, crab, and berries are, for indigenous Alaskans, foundations of both a traditional way of life and a modern commercial economy. Yet, as she points out, despite anthropological criticism of the artificial subsistence/commercial division employed by state and federal managers, anthropologists continue to perpetuate this dichotomy by actively omitting the role of cash and other commercial aspects of

the subsistence economy from their ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological work. Instead, Reedy-Maschner argues, it is time to explicitly expose the complex, entangled, and mutually supporting nature of subsistence and commercial hunting and fishing in the Western Arctic and recognize its central place in indigenous culture.

Griffin's paper also highlights an often ignored and underplayed aspect of indigenous resource use in the Western Arctic. His paper documents the use of plants by the Yup'ik of Central Alaska, revealing an intricate relationship between plant resources and traditional subsistence practices. On Nunivak Island alone, the use of sixty-nine separate species has been documented; Griffin proposes that people of the Western Arctic potentially had a much more complex relationship with plants than in areas of decreased floral diversity.

Dumond's paper addresses the issues of labret use, or labretifery, a traditional aspect of material culture absent from much of the Eastern Arctic. As Dumond notes, the presence of labrets has been used with various success by archaeologists to define the presence of people of "western heritage." His paper tracks the use of labrets across the Western Arctic, noting that they appear earliest in Kodiak assemblages (ca. 1500 BC) and then spread northward, reaching the Mackenzie Delta region in Canada by ca. AD 1400. Crucially, Dumond demonstrates that once labret use appears in the archaeological record of an area, it can wane in popularity and even disappear from the record at various points throughout sequence. The most notable of these absences occurs in north Alaska, where labrets disappear between AD 800 and AD 900, only to return sometime after the eastward Thule migration. Dumond proposes that this decline may be related to an Asian migration across the Bering Strait—as he states, labret use may be "a reasonable shorthand identifier of northeast Asian proto-Eskimo peoples."

Houlette re-examines a "legacy" archaeological collection excavated nearly a century ago. His paper outlines the importance of re-examining such collections, especially when these were critical to early interpretations of the complex culture history of western Alaska over the last two millennia. Houlette describes a reanalysis of the "Thule" meat cache at Kukulik on St. Lawrence Island from multiple perspectives, including a new typological classification, recently submitted radiocarbon dates, and a reanalysis of site spatial data. Houlette demonstrates that the purported Thule occupation at Kukulik is not fully consistent only with a Thule attribution; instead he states

“the initial settlement at Kukulik might date from the last centuries BC; the strongest evidence for occupation is from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries AD.”

Finally, the paper by Dawson et al. confronts a methodological issue common to all archaeologists who study sod and driftwood houses (one of the defining traits of Neoeskimo culture in the Western Arctic). Their paper outlines a new method, three-dimensional (3D) laser scanning, for documenting the complex architecture of a buried sod and log structure. As Dawson et al. demonstrate, this technique may provide a solution to the delicate, time consuming, and often frustrating process of recording and dismantling such preserved architecture. The 3D models produced by laser scanning provide a means to record the minute 3D relationships so critical to understanding the complex architectural arrangements (and subsequent deterioration) of these unique structures. While Dawson et al.'s work is still preliminary, the further development of this technique may greatly increase the speed and accuracy of recording these structures and provide a comprehensive virtual record that mitigates the (often) complete destruction of these features during excavation.

The articles presented in this volume reveal critical commonalities linking the research conducted by Alaska and Canadian scholars, such as the study of the complex archaeological record relating to the evolution and migration of specific ethnic groups (Betts, Dumond, Friesen, Houlette), and the ongoing negotiations endemic to the evolution of prehistoric and modern aboriginal identity (Betts, Friesen, Lyons). Still others focus on specific technologies (labrets and sod and log architecture) and resources that have for centuries defined a western way of life (Dawson, Dumond, Griffin), and how these resources are continuously being (re)appropriated as aboriginal groups fully integrate with the world system (Reedy-Maschner, Lyons). We hope that these papers expose just a few of the myriad commonalities that unite archaeological and anthropological work in the Western Arctic. Our wish is that the present volume will further contribute to a growing dialogue among scholars in the Western Arctic and motivate collaborations and connections that dispense with modern geopolitical boundaries.

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