

FISHTAILS, ANCESTORS, AND OLD ISLANDERS: CHIRIKOF ISLAND, THE ALASKA PENINSULA, AND THE DYNAMICS OF WESTERN ALASKA PREHISTORY

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ABSTRACT

William Workman's 1962 Chirikof Island archaeological survey, and his 1,020-page master's thesis based on the collections from that expedition, marks a landslide event in the archaeology of the Gulf of Alaska. His interpretations and speculations about the cultures, behaviors, and regional connections that generated that unique collection have been tested and shown to be highly consistent with what is now known of the area over forty years later. His discussion of the concave-based endblades, now called "fishtails," and his initial descriptions of the four-thousand-year-old complex he named "Old Islanders," has in the last fifteen years become critical to our understanding of Peninsula Aleut ethnogenesis. Equally poignant, his early 1990s publication on the Kachemak ceremonial complex was the first in-depth treatment of religious beliefs characteristic of any archaeological culture in the western Arctic. Together, these two studies have set the stage for a reformulation of western Alaska prehistory, one that is dynamic, complex, and interconnected from the Western Gulf of Alaska to the Chukchi Sea and beyond.

KEYWORDS: archaeology, William Workman, cultural interactions

INTRODUCTION

In 1962, William Workman and Donald Clark spent eleven isolated days on Chirikof Island, undertaking an archaeological reconnaissance in one of the more remote landscapes in the central Gulf of Alaska region (Fig. 1). In the context of finding twenty-four sites (four were already known from an earlier expedition), they made extensive surface collections and completed a number of small excavations. The results of this foray are entombed in one of the largest (1,020 pages) archaeological master's theses ever produced, titled "Contributions to the Prehistory of Chirikof Island, Southwestern Alaska" (Workman 1969); it was also the basis of a widely distributed but unpublished manuscript on the Old Islanders complex from Chirikof

Island (Workman 1984). Working with no ability to date most of the material, Workman presents one of the classic comparative assessments of arctic archaeology, relying on dispersed and other poorly dated excavations from the Aleutians to Point Hope to place the Chirikof materials in a regional and temporal context. Fourteen intensive field seasons on the western Alaska Peninsula now allow us to place much of the Chirikof materials in a temporal and regional context, but also demonstrate clearly that Workman's conjectures were largely correct. Moreover, the seminal Chirikof study, at the boundary between Kodiak and the western Gulf of Alaska, allows the creation of a North Pacific and western Alaska archaeology

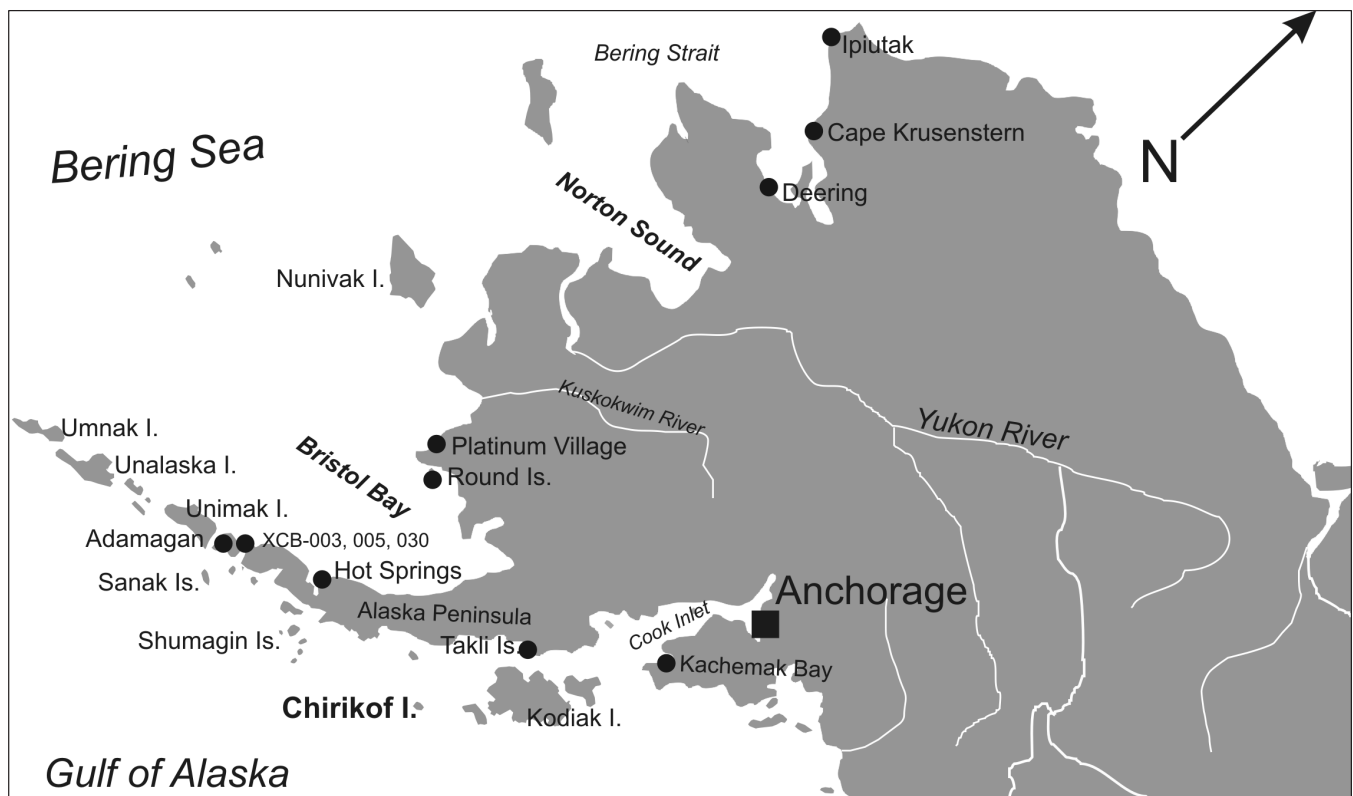


Figure 1. Map showing places of interest for this study.

that is connected, dynamic, and leads to a new view of the prehistory of the region.

Here I discuss three key elements of the prehistory of western Alaska that are either connected directly to Chirikof Island or are a product of those connections. Working backwards in time, I will begin with the classic “fishtail” projectile point, which was a key trait in Workman’s Chirikof thesis. I will then move to a discussion of small ivory figurines and small masks, first documented for the region at the Hot Springs Village site; while not preserved on Chirikof Island, their distribution appears to mimic the distribution of the fishtails, demonstrating broad regional connections first implied by Workman. I will then review Workman’s Old Islanders concept through what we now know about the distribution of similar culture types across the western Gulf region. I will conclude by demonstrating that four to five thousand years ago, the regional connections were east-west along the Gulf of Alaska from the Kenai Peninsula to the Aleutian Islands. From approximately three thousand to fifteen hundred years ago, however, the connections are more clearly north-south, with the Chirikof Island materials representing the eastern edge of a broad regional pattern that extends northward into the Bering Sea and beyond.¹

1 All dates in this paper are in calibrated calendar years using Oxcal 3.0.

“FISHTAIL” PROJECTILE POINTS

I remember being almost spellbound the first time I actually held one of the fishtail endblades from Chirikof Island (Fig. 2). Chipped from iron-rich and iron-hard andesitic basalt, the Chirikof blades are nearly 90 mm long but only around 10 mm wide and 4 mm thick, facially ground, perfectly flaked and symmetrical, with lightly serrated edges—clearly representing one of the finest stone technologies ever produced in Alaska prehistory. Part of a group of sites that Workman named the “Anchorage Complex,” these endblades were commonly associated with hafted knives, drills, and a number of other artifact types. He believed these to be arrow points, probably used for warfare, stating that “Non-human targets for the archers of Chirikof (Island) are, and presumably were, quite rare” (Workman 1969:123–124). The only comparable materials at the time were a few similar versions from the Hot Springs Village site, which Workman (1969:364–366) had examined in the context of writing up a sample of the 1960 Hot Springs excavations (Workman 1966a:138, 148), along with similarly shaped endblades found in the Ipiutak excavations (Larsen and Rainey 1948:Pl. 35) and

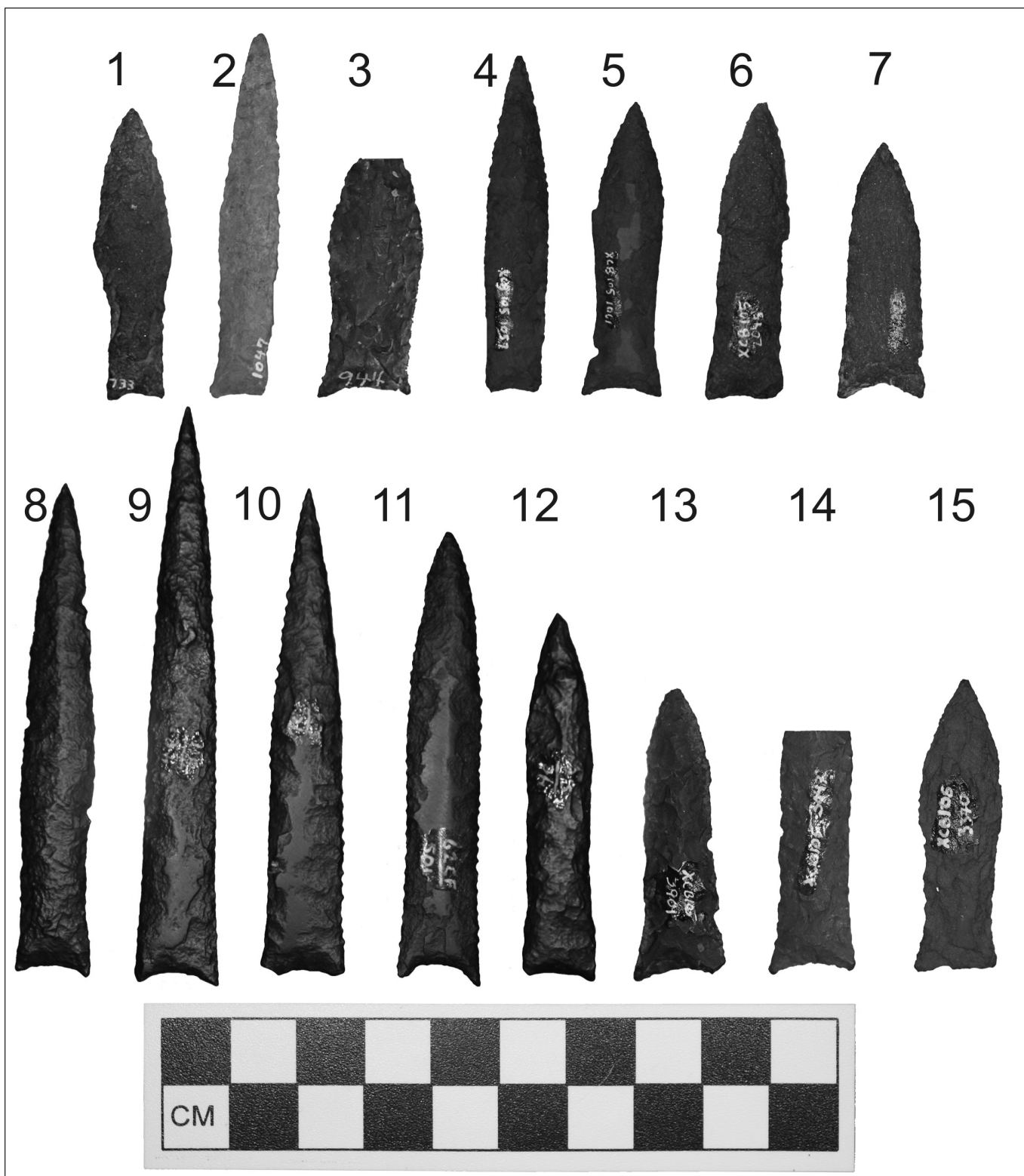


Figure 2. Fishtail projectile points from throughout the region: Nos. 1–3 from XCB-003 excavated by McCartney (1974), Nos. 4–6 and 13–15 from XCB-105 Adamagan, No. 7 excavated by Okada et al. (1984) from the Hot Springs site. No. 8 from Sanak Island, Nos. 9–12 recovered by Workman (1966a) from Chirikof Island.

items from the Norton deposits at Platinum Village on the north edge of Bristol Bay (Larsen 1950:Fig 56B). Undated on Chirikof Island, Workman interpreted these projectiles as “reflecting an indigenous Southwestern Alaskan culture of probable peninsular origin and ultimate Aleut affiliation” (Workman 1966b:190). But he expanded on the lithic similarities throughout the region by writing:

[I]t appears that we have clear indications that there was contact between the lithic technology of Chirikof ... and the late (?) Norton/Ipiutak' stone technologies more at home further north. Probably this contact took place late in the First Millennium B.C or early in the First Millennium A.D. (Workman 1969:366; see also Workman 1980:86–87)

The next major find of fishtail points occurred in 1971, when a crew led by Allen McCartney (1974) excavated a whale-bone house at site XCB-003 in Izembek Lagoon on the western Alaska Peninsula, in the exact region where Workman had predicted that they would find the ultimate origin of these points. However, the reported dates between AD 800 and 900, and the association of the points with an assemblage containing polished slate, ceramics, and other items of clear eastern Bering Sea origins called into question some of Workman's conclusions—at least as far as dating was concerned. At nearly the same time, however, the Okadas and colleagues were excavating at the Hot Springs Village site and finding, much like the previous excavations at the site (Weyer 1930; Workman 1966a), that fishtail points were not only present (although rare) but were certainly earlier than those in Izembek Lagoon, with new dates placing them in either the first millennium BC, the early first millennium AD, or both (Okada et al. 1984:24, Pl. 4). This was around the same date that had been suggested by Workman (1966a) based on his comparisons of Alaska Peninsula with Norton and Ipiutak materials.

This is where things stood throughout the rest of the 1970s to the mid-1990s. In 1995 when, as part of a growing Lower Alaska Peninsula archaeological project, I visited site XCB-005 in central Izembek Lagoon (previously recorded by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey team in 1979), we began to add more data on the temporal and spatial range of fishtail endblades. Site XCB-005 had undergone a considerable amount of erosion, and two fishtail-style endblades (out of thousands of artifacts) were found on

the beach. Over the next few years, a series of dates were run on the site, mostly ranging between AD 100 and 400 (overlapping a part of the Hot Springs sequence), but no fishtail-style projectile points were ever found in stratigraphic context. At other sites that were eroding, such as XCB-028 in Moffett Lagoon, thousands of artifacts were collected from eroding deposits, but no fishtail endblades were found, even though these sites apparently dated to the same period as the reported dates from McCartney's (1974) whale-bone house. The dating of the classic fishtail point, and its ultimate use as a diagnostic temporal marker, has now been settled through three interrelated research efforts during the last eight years.

In 2000, the Adamagan site excavation was begun. Adamagan, in Morzhovoi Bay near the southern tip of the Alaska Peninsula, is a massive village covering nearly 150,000 m², and has over nine hundred surface depressions and perhaps thousands of buried house floors. There are four occupations at the site, with a brief occupation around 1700 BC, a small village between 800 and 500 BC, a massive village between 400 BC and AD 100, and a small, brief occupation around AD 1000. The deposits, for the most part, are spatially distinct, with the bulk of the occupation becoming the type site for the Adamagan phase, dating between 400 BC and AD 100. The drills, side-notched hafted knives, bifaces, and other tools are so similar to Workman's Anchorage Complex that, even without paying attention to the endblades, one would instantly relate the two assemblages. But the fishtail endblade is the type fossil for the Adamagan phase, in which dozens of these were found (Fig. 2).

The second project to clarify the fishtail endblade's position in regional prehistory was the re-dating of the Hot Springs site (Maschner 2004a). Don Dumond (2002) noted that many of the Hot Springs dates run from excavations in the same deposits undertaken in different years were over a thousand years apart. I then ran a suite of new AMS radiocarbon dates on charcoal curated in the Hot Springs site collections. The scattered fishtail endblades in the Hot Springs collection all dated to what I term the Hot Springs 2a occupation, or approximately AD 100–300, exactly the same date as at site XCB-005, and in similarly low frequencies.²

The third project was instigated by Allen McCartney, who asked me to re-date his Izembek excavations with

2 L. L. Johnson (1988:155) has also published a drawing of a fishtail endblade from the Shumagin Islands, dating to about 100 BC. The significance of this find was not apparent to me until these other studies had been completed. I have also seen a private collection made in Stepovak Bay on the mainland coast north of the Shumagin Islands which has a number of classic fishtail endblades.

new AMS determinations, organize and catalogue the collections, and write a new report. In the context of going through the collection, especially in reevaluating the finds from site XCB-003, two things became clear. First, the dates on the whale-bone house, rather than being in the AD 800–1000 range, were actually in the AD 1350 range. Second, in going through the fieldnotes it became apparent that none of the fishtail endblades found in the excavation were from the house floor; all were in the fill around the house, making their association with the AD 1350 materials dubious at best (Maschner 2004b).

Thus, Workman's estimated dates on (at that time) poorly dated comparisons with Ipiutak and Norton have turned out to be dead on. The fishtail endblades in the Adamagan phase, and from all adjacent regions, appeared to date between 400 BC and AD 100, with a few lasting until approximately AD 300—exactly the same time period when they occurred in Nowak's (1982) Norton Duchikmiut Phase on Nunivak Island! This further substantiated Workman's more controversial assertions that this style of projectile point, showing up at exactly the same time on the Alaska Peninsula, in Bering Sea Norton assemblages of Platinum and adjacent east Bering Sea mainland shorelines, on Nunivak Island, and even in the Ipiutak of Point Hope indicates a widespread north-south region of interaction and influence extending from the Gulf of Alaska to the Arctic.

SHAMANS AND ANCESTORS

In 1992 Workman published *the* major work on Kachemak tradition religion and ceremonialism. Building on data from Kachemak Bay and the greater Cook Inlet region, and making strong reference to the Kodiak Island materials known at the time, Workman clearly demonstrated that about two thousand years ago, there was a powerful ancestor-based belief system in the central Gulf of Alaska. This belief system resulted in the disarticulation and defleshing of human remains, the curation of body parts, the rearticulation of skeletal remains, and perhaps the display of dead relatives in houses and communities (Workman 1992:19–25).

Interestingly, this is exactly the same time that the Aleut appear to have begun to use mummification to preserve the dead for display in houses, for elite burials in caves and shelters, and to preserve the remains of dead children (see Laughlin 1980). Bettinger and Baumhoff's

(1982) important paper on Numic culture change made it clear that one of the most resistant elements in culture change is the belief system. The fact that both the Aleut sequence and the Kachemak sequence have ancestor worship in the early first millennium AD, and that Aleut societies as late as AD 1800 did as well but Koniag apparently did not, has monumental implications for Aleut-Eskimo ethnogenesis, migration, and regional developments. The recognition of this pattern has resulted in a reformulation of Aleut-Eskimo prehistory (Maschner 2007, and in progress) that argues for a strong Aleut-Kachemak connection, but a less obvious Kachemak-Koniag connection. While the comparison between Kachemak and Aleut sequences will be discussed in great detail in a forthcoming paper, these patterns raised an obvious question: how far back in time can one trace ceremonialism in this region and what might it look like?

The basic answer to this question is around 1400 BC, but the connections are not as obvious as in later times, and they go in a completely different direction. In the analysis of the Hot Springs materials, it has become clear that there was a powerful religious aspect to Aleut life over three thousand years ago. This is seen in the artwork, which is dominated by small masks made of whalebone and small ivory figurines, many with human faces carved on them (Figs. 3, 4). The masks are not unique to the Hot Springs site, as they have been found at Izembek Lagoon (one is in the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and one is in a private collection). Both the masks and similar figurines have been located near Unalaska, dating to the same time period (e.g., de Marban 2008; Michael Yarborough 2007, personal communication) and in the "Pre-Aleut" levels from the Chaluka site on Umnak Island (Hrdlička 1945:464–465), which we now know encompass the same 3000–3400 BP time period. The mask with secure context from the Hot Springs Village site (shown in Fig. 3) is bracketed stratigraphically by dates of 3030±90 and 3100±40 yrs BP, yielding a calibrated date of ~1350 BC). The figurines from the Hot Springs site occur right at the disconformity between the early and middle Hot Springs occupations. Of the eighteen small figurines found there, thirteen are in contexts dated to between 1300 and 900 BC. While one was found out of context, four others are from a single house floor that dates in the middle of the first millennium AD. Since this house sits in the middle of deposits dating fifteen hundred years earlier, I must consider the association suspect. For the sake



Figure 3. Left: Whalebone mask from the Hot Springs Village Site excavated by Okada et al. (1984). Right: Norton sculpture from Round Island indicating a probable explanation for how these small masks were worn (courtesy of Robert Shaw).

of this study, I will assume that the earlier context is the more secure.³

The small masks are interesting with a range of styles and features. One from the Hot Springs site excavated by Weyer had inset human teeth (Weyer 1930:258, Fig. 12), some have eyebrows or other features, some are flat-faced. However, of the eight that I have seen in publication, museums, presentations, or collections, all are remarkably similar. I want to stress that they are very small, so small in fact that Hrdlicka (1945:464) reported that his find

was “evidently for a child.” I do not believe that they were masks for children. Those samples that are well preserved have a carved groove around the outline, behind the face, as if it were hung from the neck, perhaps against the chest. As such, they were never meant to be worn on the face.

A similar case can be made for the figurines. Much like the small masks, these small carvings also have a groove carved behind the face, again as if they were tied with a string and perhaps hung around the neck (as do the few I have seen from the Unalaska region). Many of these figu-

³ I would like to leave open the idea that these small figurines occur in both the 1000 BC and the AD 600 deposits. I have spent considerable effort attempting to identify differences in the form or style between the two time periods, and no real differences exist. This implies to me that the deposits must be mixed, because I find it hard to believe that exactly the same form of sculpture would endure across a fifteen-hundred-year period, which includes a thousand-year break in the site sequence. This is especially true since, 120 km to the southwest, the massive excavations at Adamagan, dating to the break in the Hot Springs occupation, failed to produce anything even remotely similar to these items. On the other hand, the Okadas were excellent excavators, and probably would have noticed if these items appeared out of context. What I do know is that nearly 70 percent of them were found in the 1300–900 BC deposits.



Figure 4. Left to right: No-face variant from the Hot Springs Village Site, full-face variant from the Hot Springs Village Site, dot-face variant from the Hot Springs Village Site, full-face variant from the Choris houses on the Choris Peninsula (adapted from Giddings 1967:Fig. 77, where it is mistakenly listed as from Cape Krusenstern).

rines have eyes, noses, eyebrows, tattoos, or other facial features; some have blank faces, and some appear as simple expedient outlines, with no features at all.⁴

The masks and figurines appear to be quite time-sensitive. Barring the few at the Hot Springs site that have what I believe to be spurious stratigraphic association, all of these masks and figurines date between approximately 1400 and 900 BC. This is the one time period for which I

have done no primary excavation. However, in all of the extensive excavations on the lower Alaska Peninsula and adjacent Sanak Islands dating 2000 to 1600 BC, and in the extensive excavations dating between 600 BC and AD 1, there are no examples of these masks or figurines. The lone example directly from my excavations is from a test pit on Elma Island in the Sanak Archipelago, where a rough outline of a figurine was found in a 1200 BC deposit. The

⁴ Laughlin and Marsh (1951) make an argument, which is reiterated in Laughlin's *Aleut: Survivors of the Bering Land Bridge* (1980), that these small figurines are "Images of the Deity," although it is never clear to which deity they are referring. Based on informant interviews, the groove around the back of the head was to hang it by a string from the house beams. Laughlin never discussed why a society with a clearly animistic belief system would have an anthropomorphic image of a deity in the first place, or why informants would refer to these images as such, when there is no evidence of them in the archaeological record after about AD 800—over twelve hundred years before his informants were born. As we will see shortly, there is circumstantial evidence that these figurines were worn around the neck.

mask from XCB-030 in Izembek Lagoon (Anchorage Museum) is without dated context.

Unlike the ancestor worship of the early first millennium AD, I have been unable to find a direct connection between early Aleut spiritualism as manifested in these masks and figurines and anything happening in the early Kachemak phase thirty-four hundred to three thousand years ago. Of course, so little is known, and less is published, about this time period on the Kodiak Archipelago and Cook Inlet that perhaps comparisons are not prudent anyway. But other than the clear regional similarities stretching from Hot Springs on the Alaska Peninsula at least as far west as Umnak Island, there are connections to the north that mimic the distribution of fishtail endblades. Perhaps the most interesting example is the figurine from the Choris site on the Choris Peninsula (Fig. 4) that looks identical to those from the Hot Springs Village site (Giddings 1967:Fig. 77; see also Giddings and Anderson 1986:Pl. 109). Also dating to approximately three thousand years ago, the large oval houses (without entries) of Choris are identical to the Alaska Peninsula houses of the period, and the typological similarities between Choris and Aleut harpoon forms three thousand years ago was noticed by Laughlin (1962:123) nearly forty-five years ago. In fact, except for the pottery, entire Choris assemblages could be lost if placed within an Eastern Aleutian or Alaska Peninsula assemblage of the same time period.

Thus, small figurines, which were probably amulets worn around the neck, were being carved with similar shapes and faces that may have symbolized a shared system of beliefs that spanned the eastern Bering Sea. Perhaps a belief system was in place that located ancestors or spirits in the chest area, providing spiritual power from within. Or, perhaps, the masks may have reflected an outward display of an early form of ancestor worship, in which the figurines represented actual past individuals. Regardless, this was apparently such a powerful and entrenched belief system that, a thousand years later, when the Aleut and Kachemak peoples were experimenting with mummification and body part curation, the Norton culture was still associating masks with the chest (Fig. 3), and the Ipiutak people were burying their elite dead with masks placed on the chest, both at Point Hope (Larsen and Rainey 1948:Pl. 54) and at Deering on the Seward Peninsula (Mason n.d.; Steinacher 1998). This suggests the existence of a strong Aleutian-Choris connection, one that influenced both the Norton tradition and Ipiutak, perhaps reflecting an eastern Bering Sea-wide shared system of spiritual beliefs

(and maybe even shared styles of spiritual artifacts) that endured for over fifteen hundred years.

OLD ISLANDERS

Returning now to Chirikof Island, one of the more interesting discoveries by Workman (1969, 1984) in his brief foray and detailed analysis was the identification of an archaeological assemblage referred to as the “Old Islanders.” Combining charcoal from two stratigraphically separate levels, a 4044 ± 63 yrs BP date was received, which calibrates to the mid-2000s BC. Here flaked tools outnumbered polished tools in about 2:1 ratio, and the flaked tools were the most interesting, with large, contracting-stem endblades with ground edges. While some effort was made in later decades to relate these finds to the growing body of knowledge about the Ocean Bay tradition on Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula (1984), Workman recognized that the relationship was not clear, and appeared to lay more with the similarly dated Takli Birch phase of the Alaska Peninsula (Clark 1977), which was considered a mainland descendant of the Ocean Bay culture.

In the greater Gulf of Alaska region, Dumond recognized the connection between the archaeology of the eastern Aleutian Islands and the Ocean Bay tradition of Kodiak Island and its upper Alaska Peninsula variants, before there were even any obvious data to allow making such a connection (e.g., Dumond 1987a, 1987b; Dumond and Bland 1995). However, when excavations at Margaret Bay and related sites started producing what were clearly Ocean Bay-style endblades (Knecht et al. 2001), the relationship became impossible to deny. What was missing were archaeological materials from the area between Kodiak and Unalaska, and ten years of research on the western Alaska Peninsula had failed to produce them, although there were some tantalizing finds. A small slate endblade dating to 2800 BC in Izembek Lagoon—perhaps a toy version of an Ocean Bay II slate blade—as well as a Takli Birch-style harpoon with a T-shaped base found at the Hot Springs site and dating to around 2000 BC, and a scattering of large lanceolates in isolated finds from a number of locales across the region, all testified to at least some connection with cultures both east and west.

It was on Sanak Island, however, that clear evidence of an Ocean Bay continuum, and a further connection with the Old Islanders of Chirikof, was finally uncovered. In 2004 we found a deeply buried deposit on the southeastern end of the island. Subsequent testing in 2006 and

2007 revealed a midden dating to 2400 BC and containing well-preserved harpoons with T-shaped bases (Fig. 5), which we now recognize as a signature artifact type for the entire central and western Gulf of Alaska and eastern Aleutian region for the time period from 3000 to 2000 BC (see Clark 1977: 225–226; Figs. 52, 53; Knecht et al. 2001:66–67). While few stone tools are present in this deposit, a number of microblades, small bifaces, and other items look more like the Unalaska assemblages than those of either the Hot Springs or Takli Island sites. However, it is also clear that, as both Workman and Dumond have stated, while the Ocean Bay I looks much like the Takli Alder phase on the Alaska Peninsula, the subsequent Takli Birch phase looks little like Kodiak's Ocean Bay II culture. It appears that, in this 5000 to 4000 BP window, while Ocean Bay II on Kodiak was making a huge investment in polished slate technologies (the island has extensive natural slate deposits), those areas without polished slate diverged into a suite of regional patterns, with broad macroregional similarities but increasing local variation. This is why early Takli Island, early Hot Springs, and early

Sanak Island cultures from the Alaska Peninsula, along with contemporaneous assemblages from Unalaska and Umnak Islands in the eastern Aleutians, have broad similarities in harpoon styles but local differences in amounts of polished slate, presence or absence of microblades, and styles of large bifaces. It also appears that the one controlling factor in the use of slate is simply distance from the source area on Kodiak Island, implying that slate is not a good measure of regional interactions or cultural connections.

The Old Islanders assemblage dates to the very end of the Ocean Bay II period, so perhaps it was never appropriate to find connections there. If the above scenario is correct, then we might expect Chirikof to have already diverged significantly from the Ocean Bay culture on Kodiak Island by forty-five hundred years ago. The regional significance of Old Islanders came to the forefront when, in 2002, James Jordan and I discovered a massive eroding village site on Sanak Island and collected a few large lance-shaped endblades. In 2004, a greater exposure and a number of AMS dates showed that these large blades dated to approximately 2100 BC and, thus, were nearly contemporaneous with the Old Islanders of Chirikof.

The eroding house floors of the earliest deposits at the Sandy Dunes site on Sanak Island were not depressions but rather more tentlike floors with charcoal-stained surfaces, flake and spall tools, and fire-cracked rock distributed over approximately a 4 m x 3 m area, although the extensive erosion of the land surface made house outlines difficult to determine in this area of the site. The lanceolate endblades were identical in shape, but somewhat smaller than those from Chirikof Island (Fig. 6), but when combined with the assemblage as a whole, the Old Islanders construct could now be extended far to the west, although a few hundred years younger. What was not present on Sanak Island was the polished slate part of the Chirikof Island collection. I must reiterate, however, that with increasing distance from Kodiak, the natural source of the region's slate, the amount of slate in collections dropped off dramatically.

Further afield, I think that many of the characteristics of the 2500 BC deposits at Margaret Bay level 4 (Knecht et al. 2001:65–66) would also fit into the Old Islanders construct, but with the addition of microblades and other features of the eastern Aleutian Island sequence. Moreover, the recent excavations by Schaaf et al. (2007) at Round Island on the northern edge of Bristol Bay revealed an earlier, but no less related, manifestation of the

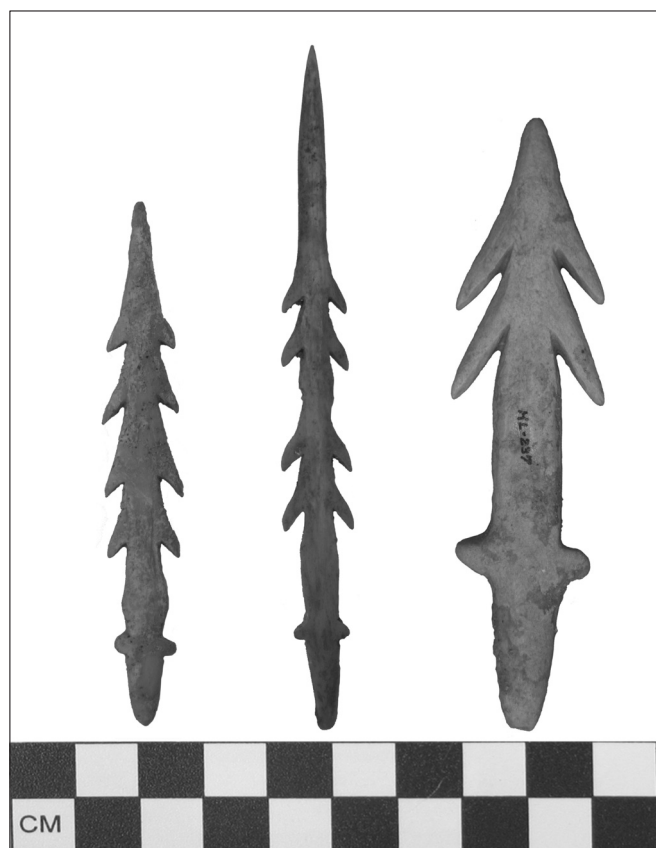


Figure 5. "T"-shaped or crucifix-based harpoons (two on left from XCB-111, Sanak Island; one on right from Hot Springs Village site).



Figure 6. Lanceolate endblades: two on left from the Old Islanders Complex, Chirikof Island; three on right from XFP-054 Sandy Dunes site, Sanak Island.

Old Islanders construct, one in my opinion with clear ties to the later Takli Birch phase on the Alaska Peninsula.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is easy to be blinded by academic traditions, such as being constrained by the historic culture boundaries of the Aleut-Alutiiq frontier on the central Alaska Peninsula. However, technologies can be equally blinding, such as the overwhelming influence of polished slate on the chronologies of the Kodiak Archipelago, when, in reality, these materials may be simply a reflection of geography, and might be irrelevant in measuring variations in culture,

society, and ethnic interactions, much less chronological trajectories. With these caveats in mind, three important trends allow the reconstruction of a dynamic north Pacific and Bering Sea prehistory that crosses phases, traditions, archaeological cultures, and historic ethnic boundaries. Working from oldest to youngest, I will attempt to put these topics in a spatiotemporal context that may have relevance for delineating variation in the development of western Alaska societies. This builds on Workman's (1980) substantial synthesis in which he described his construct entitled the "North Pacific Maritime Co-Tradition." Given new data from the last twenty years of research on Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Unalaska region, the

co-tradition concept is perhaps outdated today, but the basic themes described by Workman (1980) are still relevant, as they are founded in macroregional interaction and local variation.

Stretching from Cook Inlet to Kodiak Island, to the Alaska Peninsula, out to Unalaska and Umnak Islands, and also northward to Bristol Bay, an early northern maritime tradition certainly existed between around 3500 and 4500 BC. With strong elements of the better-defined Ocean Bay tradition, regional and local variation was already being manifested by 3000–2000 BC. In terms of stone projectile points, the hallmarks of this early tradition include either large lanceolate endblades (on Round Island, on Takli Island, at Margaret Bay, and at various Kodiak Island sites) or the better-known shouldered and stemmed varieties (for which Sitkalidak Road Cut is the type site, but they are also present at Takli Island, Margaret Bay, Sandy Beach Bay, and perhaps Sanak Island). One of the more widely spread elements of these early traditions is the presence of bilaterally barbed harpoons with a “T-shaped or crucifix-shaped base for line attachment, which are found in numbers at Takli Island, Hot Springs Village, Sanak Island, and Unalaska.⁵ By 2500 BC there was increasing variation in this tradition, with Ocean Bay II and Takli Island quite different on opposite sides of Shelikof Strait; a use of microblades in Unalaska; use of smaller, lance-shaped endblades at the Hot Springs site; and use of large, symmetrical lance blades on Chirikof and somewhat smaller ones on the Sanak Islands (Old Islanders Complex). I believe it is now clear that, since there is a continuous sequence in the eastern Aleutian Islands over this time range, we may assume given the described similarities that the entire north Pacific may have been occupied by some form of ancestral Aleut population between 3500 and 1600 BC.⁶

With increasing population levels and time, there is growing subregional variation. Some trends are more widespread, however, and while there appears to be an early break between Kodiak Island and all groups to the west in relation to material remains, a number of mac-

roregional patterns are identifiable. Since one of the more enduring aspects of any society is its belief system, it is important to note the strong similarities between the Kachemak ancestor beliefs and the ancestor worship system of the Aleut in the first millennium AD. These must have a historical connection. It is unfortunate that the Kodiak peoples had such little access to ivory, because if they had, we might see the presence of small figurines in that area at 1000 BC, just as we see everywhere else where there were ivory and people at that time. Exactly what these figurines and the contemporary small mask-like sculptures actually mean will be open to endless debate, but the most important point is that, much like the expansion of Aleut peoples seen in early Ocean Bay times, the distribution of these materials in time and space indicates macroregional interactions stretching from the Aleutian tradition of the Hot Springs site to the Choris culture on the Choris Peninsula, and suggests evolutionary relationships spanning from the Aleutian tradition/Choris time frame to later Norton and Ipiutak occupations of the eastern Bering and Chuckchi seas.

These interactions and relationships are further manifest in the distribution of fishtail endblades. Above I argued for an evolutionary relationship between the western Gulf of Alaska/southern Bering Sea at 1000 BC, and the 100 BC cultures of the eastern Bering Sea and Bering Straits. In the case of fishtail endblades, however, I am arguing for a complex interaction sphere stretching from Chirikof Island on the southeast to Unimak Island on the west (but apparently not into the eastern Aleutian Islands), then northward to Bristol Bay and Nunivak Island, and on to Ipiutak at Point Hope on the northwest Alaskan coast. If a macroregional tool type is seen at 100 BC across the entire region, then that lends much more support to the notion that these societies have a long history of interactions and co-developments, especially in the area of belief systems.

It was William Workman who first argued that fishtail endblades could be compared with Norton and Ipiutak, and it was Workman who made the Chirikof connection to the Alaska Peninsula for the ultimate derivation

5 Popov and Yesner (2006) have noted that the same cross-shaped base, bilaterally barbed harpoons are diagnostic artifacts for early Neolithic coastal cultures in Primorie in the Russian Far East, dating to the same time period (i.e., from 4000 to 3500 BC). Human remains associated with these materials, as well as with ground slate bayonets, from the Boisman II site have been characterized as “proto-Chuckchi-EskAleut” based on cranial morphology (Popov and Yesner 2006).

6 Workman (1979) has made a powerful statement about the role of volcanism in Alaska prehistory, and my arguments presented in the current paper have omitted one critical event in the history of this region—the massive eruptions of Aniakchak and Veniaminov volcanoes in the mid-second millennium BC. Both Richard VanderHoek and I have argued in a number of independent presentations that this event was probably responsible for the initial split of the Aleut, and the ultimate development of an independent Eskimo line after 1600 BC. Indeed, it is at this time that the eastern and western Gulf regions take independent trajectories in technologies (but not necessarily in belief systems).

of his Anchorage Complex (arguing against Kodiak as the source). It was Workman who inspired me to take a serious look at belief systems in the western Gulf of Alaska. It was Workman's Old Islanders that helped place the newly discovered Sanak materials in context, bridging the geographic gap between the Kodiak Archipelago and the eastern Aleutian Islands, and tying the entire region into a coherent package. In the folklore of Alaskan archaeology, William Workman is famous for his intellectual investment in the artifacts of the different complexes found across the state. One might often hear in regards to Workman that "he really knows his rocks." It was Workman's keen interest in the material remains of these past societies that inspired this study. Without his observations about the relationships among and between things, it would not have been possible to reconstruct the social, political, and religious relationships among the societies defined by those material remains.

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