

RASMUSSEN'S FIVE ENGRAVED WALRUS TUSKS FROM CHUKOTKA¹

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(With Comment by Igor Krupnik)

ABSTRACT

On his short visit to the Chukchi Peninsula, Russia, in September 1924, Knud Rasmussen was able to purchase (or received as gifts) five decorated walrus tusks with engravings made by local Chukchi and Yupik artists. Except for one tusk that was partly represented in Rasmussen's public account of his journey and is currently on display at the National Museum of Denmark, none of the other decorated pieces have been seen or analyzed since the time of their purchase. This paper compares Rasmussen's five tusks with the known objects from the same era in museum collections and assesses their artistic and ethnographic quality, the prospective location of their origin, and even the likely Indigenous artists who could have made them. The analysis illustrates that Rasmussen was very cognizant about acquiring objects that would offer the broadest possible representation of local art styles and cultural traditions in Chukotka at the time of his visit.

INTRODUCTION

The ethnographic collection gathered by Knud Rasmussen and other participants of the Fifth Thule Expedition (FTE) includes several pieces of artwork that Rasmussen acquired on his brief trip to the Chukchi Peninsula (Chukotka), Russia, or from Chukchi community members on their visits to Alaska (see Schwalbe et al., *this issue*). One of the most famous of these objects is an engraved walrus tusk that depicts scenes from the life of marine hunters and reindeer herders, now in the collection of the National Museum of Denmark (NMD) in Copenhagen. The tusk (Fig. 1) was included in Rasmussen's earliest popular account of his short visit to Russia and can currently be seen on display at the NMD (Rasmussen 1925–1926:390–391, 394; see also Schwalbe et al., *this issue*, fig. 4).

Since 2018, thanks to the studies prompted by the FTE centennial program, we learned that Rasmussen acquired not one but *five* engraved walrus tusks from Chukotka. In addition to the tusk displayed at NMD (Tusk 1), three tusks are currently held in the private collections of Rasmussen family descendants (Tusk 2, Tusk 3, and Tusk 4—see Igor Krupnik's comment at the end

of this paper). Another decorated tusk (Tusk 5) has been kept in the NMD collections (Schwalbe et al., *this issue*) but was never exhibited or studied.

The stylistic features of the walrus tusks in this small sample—and, in one case, the inscribed place names in Russian—indicate that the carvers were Indigenous inhabitants of Chukotka. From the turn of the twentieth century, Siberian Yupik (Asiatic Eskimo) and Maritime Chukchi carvers created engraved drawings or “thematic compositions” on tusks that included images of people hunting seals, whales, and polar bears; herding reindeer; racing; or dancing in the village. Although decorated tusks were made exclusively for sale to visitors and art collectors, the subject matter and techniques and skills for etching on ivory originated from the precontact artistic traditions of the Arctic people (Bronshtein and Shirokov 2008²).

It is hard to say where exactly Rasmussen acquired the five tusks. This could have happened in Nome, where he spent a relatively long time in September–October 1924 and where people from Chukotka commonly came to trade. But it was more likely he bought them in Chukotka



Figure 1. Tusk 1: Rasmussen's tusk from Chukotka on display at the National Museum of Denmark. Photo: Igor Krupnik, September 2019.

during his short trip to the Cape Dezhnev [East Cape—*ed.*] area, although he stayed less than two days (September 17–18, 1924) (see Krupnik, *comment*; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*; Shokarev, *this issue*).

As for the Indigenous communities where the tusks could have originated, at least one was made in Uelen—which Rasmussen visited on September 17–18, 1924—as indicated by the Russian inscription “Chukotsk Peninsula. 1924” and “v. Uelen” (Uelen village). It is more difficult to determine the communities of origin of the other four tusks because they lack inscriptions. However, one can rely on the stylistic characteristics of Chukchi decorative ivory carvings in the 1920s that might reflect a specific home community of individual artists. Because the photos that were at my disposal did not provide complete information, the following description is brief and, certainly, preliminary.

TUSK I

This tusk (NMD, K.817; see Fig. 1) is a thin full-size tusk (length 69.0 cm, width 7.5 cm, height 3.8 cm). It features a two-part composition common to the artwork of Indigenous carvers of Chukotka, with scenes from the life of marine hunters on one side and a reindeer herders' camp on the other. Similar illustrations are present on numerous tusks in museum collections (e.g., Bronshtein et al. 2002; Bronshtein and Shirokov 2008; Tishkov 2008). Based on the details of the herders' camp images (see below), the author was probably a Chukchi artist rather than a Siberian Yupik. This assumption—as well as stylistic similarity to the engraving work of the prominent Chukchi master artist Stepan Ettugi (Etugyi, ca. 1890–1940s; see *Dezhnevskaya shkola* n.d.), who resided in the village of Dezhnev (Dezhnevo or Kengisqun), where Rasmussen

landed on September 17, 1924—suggests the tusk originated in Dezhnev. In the 1920s, the Dezhnev population was primarily Maritime Chukchi, who maintained close connections with the tundra herders (Shokarev, *this issue*).

Two scenes of the life of marine hunters are depicted on the “maritime” side of the tusk (Schwalbe et al., *this issue*, fig. 4 bottom). On the left side, a skin boat (Russian *baidara*) with six hunters approaches two swimming walrus. One hunter stands on the bow with a spear in his hands; four are rowing; and another holds inflated sealskin floats used as buoys. The next scene takes place in a coastal settlement. This scene occupies the largest part of the tusk and is separated from the hunting scene by a wide, slightly curved vertical line. It features hunters butchering a walrus while men, women, and children sit and stand nearby. The rest of the maritime side shows dwellings (*yarangas*) and meat storage pits lined with rocks.

The other side of Tusk 1 features activities that take place in a herders’ camp (Schwalbe et al., *this issue*, fig. 4 top). On the left side two sled teams—a reindeer team in the front followed by a dog team—run toward the camp. The mushers are dressed in different types of clothing and are sitting differently on the sleds: one astride and the other on the left side. The latter is a maritime style of riding; it suggests a coastal dweller is riding on the sled following a reindeer herder. Reindeer figures fill the central portion of the composition and are seen standing, walking, and lying on the snow. Herders with lassos are nearby, and in the distance on the right side of the tusk are herders’ tents, sleds, and other camp dwellers returning from the tundra or standing near a dwelling entrance.

This type of narrative composition is the most common version of the “classic” Chukchi and Yupik two-part tusk engraving. Even in the beginning of the twentieth century, Indigenous artists depicted marine mammal hunting scenes on one side of a walrus tusk and tundra hunting for arctic fox, caribou, or bear on the other. Over time, this artistic style changed, and scenes of reindeer herders were used instead of inland tundra hunting. Decorated tusks with two-sided “hunter-herder” content were created until the last decades of the twentieth century.³ It has been argued that this theme appeared in Chukotka ivory carving art in the 1920s (Mitlyanskaya 1976:64). If this date is correct, Tusk 1 was created no later than 1924 and may be one of the first signs of this new artistic tradition, and perhaps a prototype for its use from the 1930s onward.

Russian ethnologist Valeryi A. Tishkov has an early engraved tusk in his personal collection of Chukotka

ivorines. It has an inscription that indicates it was created in 1926 by Stepan Ettugi and features the settlement of Dezhnev (Tishkov n.d.; 2008:36–39; see also www.culture-art.ru). When comparing Tishkov’s tusk with Rasmussen’s Tusk 1 the images of meat pits and skin dwellings are very similar, and the same can be said about people’s clothing and their knapsacks. The Tishkov collection also contains an ivory napkin ring, which presumably was engraved by Petr Pen’kok (1889–1944), Ettugi’s elder brother, also a talented artist from Dezhnev (Bronshtein 2018; Tishkov 2008:34; see also Shokarev, *this issue*). The images of reindeer on the ring resemble the reindeer engraved on Tusk 1. At the same time, Tusk 1, the Tishkov tusk, and the napkin ring have some notable differences. They are prominent enough that if we assume Tusk 1 was engraved in Dezhnev, then we should exclude Ettugi and Pen’kok as potential artists.

A decorated ivory ink stand, another object made by an unknown artist in the Tishkov collection, serves as indirect proof that Tusk 1 was engraved by a Dezhnev-based artist. The catalog indicates it was made by a “Dezhnev resident” in the 1920s, with no personal name provided (Tishkov 2008:32). Images of Native hunters chasing and butchering a walrus are engraved on the ink stand base. The images and style have much in common with Tusk 1. Some parallels can be drawn between the images of reindeer on the tusk and the sketches for the engravings dated from the 1930s by a Chukchi carver from Dezhnev named Roshilin (Efimova and Klitina 1981:10). These and other comparisons with objects created at Dezhnev in the 1920s and 1930s (or by artists descending from that community) corroborate that Tusk 1 originated in Dezhnev.

TUSK 2

This tusk from a private collection has a three-part composition on one side with the action unfolding from right to left.⁴ On the right side, where the name “Uelen” (in Russian) is inscribed, there is a line of skin-covered tents (Chukchi, *yarangas*) and wooden houses, one of which has a radio mast and a flag (Fig. 2, top). Uelen is located on a narrow spit, and in the beginning of the 1920s there were several wooden structures, including a prominent house with a mast, so there is no doubt that this is an engraving of the Uelen village.

A dogsled team with a man sitting on a sled is carved in the middle section. On the left portion a hunter (judging from his clothes, it is the same person sitting on the

sled) approaches a trap holding a wolverine. He has a club in his hands, and the hunter is ready to strike the animal, which has drawn back and bared its teeth. Above is a second inscription in Russian: “Chukotsk Peninsula. Year 1924” (Fig. 2, bottom). The letter “y” is absent in the word “Chukotsky,” which shows that the person who engraved it did not know Russian well. The front side of the tusk depicts the stages of the hunter’s tundra trip checking his traps. The reverse side of the tusk presents a different story—a walrus hunt unfolding from left to right (Fig. 3). A skin boat approaches two swimming walruses on the narrow (left) end of the tusk, and a hunter on the bow is preparing to throw a spear. The composition ends with an image of a six-person hunting crew butchering a walrus on the sea ice.

This Uelen tusk is a classic example of Chukotka maritime hunters’ art, using the shared Chukchi and Yupik style of narrative engraving. It demonstrates the main composition principles that Chukotka artists followed at that time and continue to follow today. One of these principles is to depict events taking place in a coastal setting separately from those in an interior reindeer herding camp (as in Tusk 1). The second principle is to feature themes that are most important from a cultural perspective, such as marine hunting and reindeer herding. The third principle is to show people and animals together in one com-

position. And, finally, the most important principle is a multi-element narrative showing successive events.

Tusk 2 was created almost one hundred years ago, when the Yupik and the Chukchi were still developing their decorative art on ivories for commercial purposes. Thus, Tusk 2 may be considered one of the earliest pieces demonstrating the evolution of Chukotka Native art in the twentieth century. The author of the tusk was a true artist, as evidenced by his commitment to tradition as well as by his highly skilled creation. In a masterly fashion, he builds the composition on a curved, thin walrus tusk. He finds the optimal place for each component of the storyline. A settlement depicted on the front side is on the narrow portion of the tusk. The carver lines up the dwellings in a row, which ends with a Russian language inscription “s. Uelen” [“s.” is a common abbreviation for Russian *selo*, village—*ed.*]. The artist was most probably not familiar with the concept of linear perspective; yet he was able to simulate distance by creating an image of a settlement stretched in a line via the placement of skin houses and wooden structures in relation to each other, and via their various sizes and colors. The houses closer to the composition centered in a wider part of the tusk have a more intense color and are carved closer to each other than the dwellings in the distant part of the village. As a result, the drawing conveys the depth of space, i.e., perspective.



Figure 2. Tusk 2, tundra hunting side. Top: the town of Uelen; bottom: hunter and wolverine. Private collection.



Figure 3. *Tusk 2, maritime hunting side. Private collection.*

By placing an image of a hunter on a dogsled in the central section, where the tusk's curve is most noticeable, the artist was able to make him the main character of the story. Hunters pushing a boat into the sea are depicted on the reverse side at the same point of the curve. The curved surface helps show the people's dynamic movements. A scene of a walrus being butchered is placed in the widest portion at the tusk's base, where it was possible to create an image rich in detail. On the other side of the engraving, on the tusk's widest part, is the most dramatic scene, a story of a hunter and a wolverine.

These well-thought-through details that add an emotional tinge attest to the mastery of the creator of Tusk 2. In the wolverine hunt scene, the dogsled is shown as stationary. The dogs are frozen in strained poses, looking forward. Their heads are raised, and their mouths are open. The dogs themselves are shown differently, with the leading pair having the most intense appearance compared to the rest. The wolverine image is just as expressive. The artist carved a bloodied reindeer carcass (torn by the wolverine) that served as bait. According to the stories of northern people, the wolverine is a strong and dangerous animal; it is also highly prized for its fur. It is also considered to be smart and cautious and rarely gets into a trap. It is likely that the artist purposefully included a scene with a wolverine because it was an unusual event.

There is another key geographic element to the scene in which the hunter is checking his traps against the backdrop of an easily recognizable landscape—a flat plain with a mountain range that has a tall mountain descending steeply into the sea. This view depicts a valley a few kilometers south of Uelen with mountains to the west. I remember seeing old, rusted hunting traps when visiting this area in the early 2000s.

The more artistic merit we find in Tusk 2, the more disappointing it is that we don't know the author's name. The oldest ivory carving workshop in Chukotka, in existence in Uelen for 90 years, was only established in 1931

(Mitlyanskaya 1996), seven years after Rasmussen's visit. The names of the first professional Indigenous Chukotka artists are known, but they mostly carved figures and animals from walrus ivory and did not engrave on tusks.

Generally, Tusk 2 is unique among other Indigenous compositions created during the first decades of the twentieth century. Stylistically, it is somewhat close to the carving style of the "Dezhnev school" (see Tusk 1); however, it is notably different in composition as well as in its images of skin dwellings, people's clothing, and other objects. Perhaps certain correlations can be found between this tusk and the works of early professional ivory engraving artists in Uelen of the 1930s–1950s, like Ichel', Mikhail Vukvol (1914–1942), and Vera Emkul' (1919–1985) (see Bronshtein 2018). Still, it would be difficult to discern direct continuity in stylistic techniques.

A comparison of Tusks 1 and 2 reveals noticeable differences: the choice of scenes, the scale of images, the nature of the composition, and the use of color dots to convey the size of the objects. On Tusk 1, the dwellings as well as the people and animals are much larger. In general, the "Uelen" composition is not as densely filled with details as the images on Tusk 1. Also, on Tusk 1 the artist used a combination of dark and light tones to make objects more believable, whereas the creator of Tusk 2 hardly used this technique at all. On Tusk 2 the narrative unfolds from right to left on both sides, while on Tusk 1 both narratives proceed from left to right.

Can these differences be explained only by the individual styles of two artists, or were they products of artists from different communities? I prefer the latter explanation. In my opinion, Tusks 1 and 2 were created by craftsmen from two nearby villages—one living in Dezhnev and the other in Uelen. The comparison also supports the assumption that Tusk 1 was made by an artist from Dezhnev or one who lived in that community with its unique artistic tradition.

TUSK 3

Tusk 3 also comes from the private collection of a Rasmussen descendant. Unlike the first two tusks, its graphic composition is simpler. One side shows a polar bear hunt (Fig. 4, top) and the other, flowers and the inscription “1923” (Fig. 4, bottom), which we assume is when the carving was created. The bear hunt unfolds from left to right. The left side of the narrative shows a comical situation: a hunter falls from his sled, loses his snowshoes and gun but manages to hang onto the sled, while the dogs drag him along through the snow. The tusk’s right side features two hunters with guns shooting two polar bears, one of which is dead and the other, wounded, falls on its back.

Tusk 3 differs from Tusks 1 and 2 in artistic style, although there are similarities in the storylines of Tusks 2 and 3. In both cases, the events pictured are unusual: a wolverine rarely gets caught in a trap, and a hunter rarely falls from his sled and loses his gun. However, certain details are similar, such as the way the numbers—1, 9, and 2—are written on Tusk 3, matching the numbers

of the date “1926” on the abovementioned tusk from Dezhnev by Stepan Ettugi in the Tishkov collection (Tishkov 2008:36).

An attempt to find matching images to the hunting scene on Tusk 3 did not yield obvious results. The only parallel comes with an ivory tobacco pipe in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE, St. Petersburg) that depicts a polar bear hunt. The bear stands on its hind legs, and two hunters are armed with spears while the third hunter has a gun. This pipe dates to the late 1800s or early 1900s (Mitlyanskaya 1976:39, 205). The hunter with a gun shoots the bear “from his knee,” just like the hunter on Tusk 3. Based on many engraved tusks I have seen in the collections, Chukchi artists rarely depicted hunters shooting while kneeling; rather, the shooters stand upright or shoot from a sitting position.

An engraved tusk from Chukotka in a collection of the State Museum of Oriental Art (SMOA, Moscow), dated to “the beginning of the twentieth century” (according to the catalog record), also features hunters and polar bears (Fig. 5). On one side, three polar bears feed on a walrus carcass while two hunters approach. On the reverse side,



Figure 4. Tusk 3. Left: polar bear hunting side; right: “flower side.” Private collection.



Figure 5. Tusk from the State Museum of Oriental Art collection, Cat. #173. Left: hunters and dogs chasing three polar bears; right: polar bear hunt.

a hunter sneaks up on the bears while the other shoots them from a sitting position. One of the bears stands on its hind legs, as on Tusk 3 (Bronstein and Shirokov 2008:97). However, there are differences between Tusk 3 and these images in the way the composition is constructed and how the drawing is executed.

A polar bear hunt is shown on another item in the SMOA Chukotka collection: an inkstand carved from a walrus tusk (Fig. 6) also probably dating to the 1920s (Bronstein and Shirokov 2008:122). Among its images are two hunters and two polar bears, one of which is dead (as on Tusk 3). Other details of the hunt vary significantly; however, the flowers look very much like those on Tusk 3, having long stems and arrow-shaped leaves, and painted in similar pinkish and green tones. Other similarities include using well-defined outlines and small strokes to fill in the outlined areas. Flowers were rarely used as motifs in Chukchi and Yupik engraved tusks, so it is not just the narratives that coincide but also their manner of execution. The inkstand is believed to have been made in Uelen and was probably intended as a souvenir for one of the “administrators.” In Chukotka in the 1920s, these people were located only in Uelen, the administrative hub for the Chukchi District (see Shokarev, *this issue*).

However, one notable detail supports an assumption that the inkstand originated in Naukan, rather than in Uelen or Dezhnev like Tusks 1 and 2. There are no rein-

deer in the inkstand decor. Instead, it contains images of polar and brown bears, walruses, seals, and a bird, and two hunting scenes—a polar bear and a whale hunt—but neither reindeer herders nor reindeer. Artists from the Yupik community of Naukan rarely placed reindeer on their engravings, since their contacts with herders were less intense than those of people from Dezhnev and Uelen, who almost always featured reindeer and herding camps on their objects. If the inkstand with a bear hunt scene and flowers was created in Naukan, there is a high probability that Tusk 3 with similar images was also created in Naukan.

During his 1924 trip to Chukotka, Rasmussen specifically wanted to visit Naukan, the only Siberian Yupik settlement accessible directly from Nome (see Schwalbe et al., *this issue*). Since Soviet authorities did not allow him to reach Naukan, perhaps for this reason it may have been important for him to acquire in Uelen or Dezhnev any artwork produced by Naukan Yupik craftsmen, like Tusk 3. Another indirect argument is the level of artistry on Tusk 3. Today, almost one hundred years later, this tusk is of great historical value even if it is not as refined in terms of storyline, composition, image detail, and harmony of its color scheme compared to the other tusks Rasmussen brought from Chukotka. Rasmussen could not help but see these differences and probably acquired this tusk because it was made in Naukan (which he could not visit—see Shokarev, *this issue*; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*).

TUSK 4

Tusk 4 is also held in a private collection of Rasmussen’s descendants and, like with Tusks 2 and 3, I only had access to a few photographs featuring its two sides (Fig. 7). Hardly any other information is available regarding its history and provenience, except that it is 55.8 cm long and approximately 8.9 cm in diameter and has blue and red pigments along with the usual black-colored engraving grooves. Nevertheless, the photos confirm that Tusk 4 was almost certainly created in Chukotka, most likely in the community of Dezhnev, where Rasmussen’s visit began and ended. We may even guess the name of the artist or the family group to which he belonged (see below).

On one side (Fig. 7, bottom) there is a marine hunting scene, while the other features two Native villages on the shore and a boat sailing along the coast. One settlement is a reindeer camp with reindeer grazing by the skin tents, while the other, judging by the bowhead whale jaws, is a village of maritime hunters. The dwellings of the coastal



Figure 6. Ivory inkstand. State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow, Cat. #210.



Figure 7. Tusk 4. Bottom: maritime hunting side; top: herders' camp side. Private collection; photo by Kaitlin Campbell.

people and herders are separated by a wide river, suggesting the artist was depicting two different settlements, but it is also possible that the river is an accurate representation of an existing village (Fig. 7, top).

My belief that Tusk 4 originated from the community of Dezhnev is based on its stylistic features. The combination of blue and red colors with black pigment is typical of many engraved ivories from Dezhnev in the Russian Ethnographic Museum (REM, St. Petersburg) (Mitlyanskaya 1976:56–57, 60–63, 66–67, 205). The tusks made by Uelen artists in the 1920s and 1930s usually used fewer and less vivid colors (see Tusk 2). The large size of the walrus images also points toward Tusk 4 belonging to the “Dezhnev school.” The animal figures appear disproportionately large compared to those of people and boats. Such an exaggeration of proportion was a strong feature of the Dezhnev artistic tradition (Mitlyanskaya 1976:60–63; Tishkov 2008:38). It is also worth noting the angle in which the two walruses lying side-by-side are depicted on Tusk 4: one is drawn in profile and the other *en face*. This was often the way Dezhnev artists portrayed groups of walruses (cf. Mitlyanskaya 1976:60–62; Tishkov 2008:38).

It is less likely that we may identify the *individual* artist from Dezhnev who authored Tusk 4. Yet our choice is rather limited. In the 1920s Dezhnev had a small family carving workshop (see Shokarev, *this issue*). A Chukchi carver named Petr Pen'kok (1889–1944; see Tusk 1 discussion, above) is considered its founder. His younger brother, Stepan Ettugi (Ettugi), as well as their sons, Kalyat and Laivy'yat, worked in the same workshop. The peak of the

Pen'kok-Ettugi family's activity was in the 1920s–1930s (*Dezhnevskaya shkola* n.d.). Perhaps other active carvers lived in the village, but they would have been few in number, since there were no more than 15 to 20 adult men in Dezhnev at that time, or even fewer (see Shokarev, *this issue*). Women were not engaged in ivory carving at that time. Laivy'yat, Ettugi's son, was reportedly born in 1912 (Mitlyanskaya 1976:196), therefore he can be excluded from the list of possible artists. Kalyat, the son of Pen'kok, was several years senior and theoretically could have been the artist.

It is possible that the artist was Petr Pen'kok himself. On the abovementioned napkin ring he engraved (Tishkov 2008:34), the herder tents and reindeer are etched in much the same way as on Tusk 4. However, I lean toward naming Stepan Ettugi as the artist. His works, even if relatively few survive today, displayed features now considered “typical” of the Dezhnev art tradition, like the combinations of red, blue, black, and white colors, large-scale images, and depiction of characters both in profile and *en face* (Mitlyanskaya 1976:65, 68–71). This is exactly how Tusk 4 is executed. Some other details of Tusk 4 bear similarities to works attributed to Ettugi. On the abovementioned tusk with the Russian signature “Stepan” in the Tishkov collection, the dwellings in the coastal village are drawn in almost the same way as on Tusk 4 (cf. Tishkov 2008:36–37). The tusk from the REM collection, which reportedly was created by Ettugi, depicts a hunter butchering a whale in the same pose as a hunter bending over a walrus carcass on Tusk 4 (cf. Shokarev 2020).

The abovementioned image of a boat on Tusk 4 passing the villages of marine hunters and herders separated by a river may have special significance because it is in the center of the composition. A man is standing on the bow with his arm stretched toward the reindeer herders' camp; the boat is clearly heading toward the camp. A sail suggests the hunters have traveled from a great distance, not from a nearby settlement; otherwise they would have been paddling.

The elongated island near the mouth of the river is worth noting. Neither Dezhnev nor Uelen have islands or large rivers. The only large river with an island offshore is 100 km northwest of Dezhnev, near the former Chukchi village of Chegitun, which existed until the early 1960s. Therefore, I venture to suggest that Rasmussen acquired a tusk with an image of a "trade expedition" of coastal hunters sailing to a herder camp to exchange goods. Trips involving exchanges between coastal and tundra people was a regular occurrence in Chukotka in the early twentieth century and persisted until not long ago (Krupnik and Chlenov 2013).

TUSK 5

It is hard to say much about the last tusk from Rasmussen's collection, which is now at the National Museum of Denmark (K.816). It is not a full-size tusk but rather a portion cut off the wide side of the tusk (20.9 cm long, 7.5 cm wide, 5.0 cm high) with engravings (Fig. 8). This tusk, once again, features marine hunters on one side and reindeer herders on the other. This classic two-element composition indicates it was almost certainly created on the Asian side of Bering Strait. The character of its images differs noticeably from other Rasmussen tusks in general composition and details of people, animals, boats, and dwellings. There are also notable differences in the types of boats and the way the dog and reindeer teams are depicted.

The frieze-like composition is the main feature. The image is divided into 10 horizontal segments, five on each side. In some cases, this division can only be guessed, but more often it reads clearly, thanks to the thin straight lines drawn between each scene. The mixture of scenes is the most notable feature of the images. As noted, on most of the Chukotka tusks of the 1920s and 1930s, the themes of sea and tundra occupy different sides, as on Tusks 1 and 2. To the contrary, on the side of Tusk 5 where the marine theme predominates, tundra hunting images are also included. It also features many more images of people than the other tusks. The "flatness" and sketchiness of the carving is another distinguishing feature. The artist was not trying to convey the objects' volume or to create realistic images. People, marine mammals, reindeer, and sled dogs look more like schematic drawings or pictograms.

Differences in skin boats and dog teams are also noticeable. Several boats are shown under large rectangular sails on Tusk 5, while on the other tusks a boat under sail appears only once (on Tusk 4), and the sail is depicted differently. On Tusk 5 six dogs are harnessed to one sled, as on Tusk 2, and eight dogs are harnessed to another, which is more than on other tusks acquired by Rasmussen. Also, on Tusk 5 reindeer are harnessed to a cargo sled, which is absent on other tusks.

Of course, Tusk 5 has many similar features with other tusks from Rasmussen's collection: for instance, the Chukotka "classic" choice of themes like the dichotomy of the sea and the tundra; and the resemblance of many subjects, like a hunting boat approaching swimming walrus- es, a hunter at the bow with a harpoon, reindeer breeders and hunters walking across the tundra with walking sticks in their hands, etc. These differences in style and composition are due to the different time of the tusk's creation. Obviously, Tusk 5 should date not to the early 1920s (like Tusks 1–4) but perhaps to the early 1900s, if not to the late 1800s.⁵



Figure 8. Tusk 5. Left: sea and shore side; right: "reindeer" side. National Museum of Denmark K.816.

Several details support such a date: for example, a similar frieze-like structure of the composition, and its saturation with details like images of people and “flatness” with extreme schematic rendering; presence of geometric ornamental motifs; and a multitude of images of humans are featured on an ivory tobacco pipe in the MAE collection dating from the late 1800s or early 1900s (Mitlyanskaya 1976:39, 205). Several ivory handles of ritual buckets from Chukotka in the MAE collection dated to the same period are covered with drawings depicting reindeer and boats under sail in much the same way as Tusk 5 (Bronstein et al. 2002:26). There are also similarities between Tusk 5 and two walrus tusks from the early twentieth century in the SMOA collection (Bronstein and Shirokov 2008:97), as well as numerous ivory objects in collections from Alaska dating to the late 1800s (Fig. 9), including from Seward Peninsula, located directly across from Chukotka and Cape Dezhnev (East Cape). These drawings were made primarily on ivory drill bows (see Chan 2013; Collins et al. 1977: 88–89; Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982:256, 258–265; Nelson [1899] 1983). The stylistic resemblance of Tusk 5 to the traditional images created by Alaskan Inupiat in the late 1800s is an additional argument in favor of the tusk’s earlier origin compared to other Rasmussen pieces.



Figure 9. Bone tobacco box acquired by Sheldon Jackson, Alaska, late 1890s. NMNH #E316801.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing this description of five engraved walrus tusks collected by Rasmussen in Chukotka in 1924, it seems that despite his brief visit, he acquired objects representing different artistic traditions. It is highly probable that the tusks originated in three different communities: Dezhnev, Uelen, and Naukan. The tusks were executed in different artistic styles, and at least one, Tusk 5, is noticeably older than the other four based on its style and subject matter.

The introduction of these masterpieces of early Indigenous art dating to 1923–1924 (Tusk 5 was evidently produced slightly earlier) may help determine the age of many decorated objects in Russian and Western museums, as well as in private collections. More accurate dating will expand our understanding of the evolution of the Yupik/Asiatic Eskimo and Chukchi decorative ivory carving, making our knowledge of their artistic development more complete. The publication of the tusks brought by Rasmussen from Chukotka will also help contemporary Chukchi and Yupik artists better understand the artistic traditions and find inspiration from engraved walrus tusks of the past.

Analysis of the Rasmussen Chukotka tusks also adds a new dimension to our understanding of Knud Rasmussen himself, whom we now see possessed a fine artistic taste and a deep appreciation of Indigenous Arctic art. I would like to express my admiration for this man, who while under an extremely stressful situation managed to assemble an informative collection of Chukotka Native art in a short period of time.

NOTES

1. Translated from Russian by Katerina Wessels.
2. The art of walrus tusk engraving and sculptural carving has existed for centuries also among the Alaskan Inuit and Yup'ik people (see Collins et al. 1977; Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982). In the early twentieth century, the folk craft (carving) developed in Alaska where local artists engraved graphic compositions primarily on objects that had practical or souvenir use, such as pipes (e.g., Stein 2018), cribbage boards, letter openers, etc., but rarely on whole tusks, as was a preferred practice in Chukotka.
3. Today, Chukotka artists continue to produce engraved tusks showing scenes with reindeer and reindeer herders

but generally just replicate earlier prototypes and do not create new styles or compositions (Bronshtein et al. 2002; Bronshtein and Shirokov 2008).

4. In accordance with their request, the names of the tusk owners are kept confidential. Tusks 2 and 3 are in Copenhagen; Tusk 4 is in the U.S.—*ed.*
5. “Tusk 5 fits squarely in the style of engraving being produced across the Bering Strait for the emerging tourist market during the 1880s–1890s; specifically it relates to similar carvings with small sketchily engraved figures crowded onto tusks, pieces of bone, etc. that were coming out of Port Clarence where Inupiat and Chukchi community members were camping and trading with whalers (see Chan 2013:85–86, 370–371, 408–409; VanStone 1976). What might have prompted Rasmussen to acquire or purchase this earlier carving (Tusk 5)? Perhaps he had wanted to illustrate the stylistic development of pictorial engraving from the region: from the earlier pieces to the origins of a tourist market for engraved ivory, and the ability for that market to evolve and endure, along the political and economic changes” (Amy Phillips-Chan, pers. comm., 9 October 2020).

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NEW INSIGHTS TO AN OLD STORY

A Comment by Igor Krupnik

Michael Bronshtein's meticulous assessment of five decorated ivory tusks that Knud Rasmussen presumably brought from Chukotka on his visit in September 1924 warrants a short postscript. Thanks to this and other papers that explore Rasmussen's journey to Chukotka (Nielsen 2007; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*; Shokarev, *this issue*; Michelsen, *this issue*; Nielsen, *this issue*), besides the high artistic quality of the tusks, we know much more today about the conditions under which they were acquired; from whom, even if tentatively; and why they ended up in the Rasmussen family's possession. In fact, we have a better vision of his short trip than at any time since September 1924, when he returned to Nome, thwarted by the Soviet authorities who expelled him at the doorstep of his long-coveted dream (cf. Mathiassen 1945:105–107).

I share Bronshtein's praise for Rasmussen's achievement in Chukotka. Being restricted in his movement, certainly watched (if not followed) most of the time, he expressed his frustration in his diaries and writings (Rasmussen 1925–1926, [1927] 1999). He was also wise to soften certain details, and he never disclosed any names of Chukotka Native people from whom he obtained information, something he duly noted during other segments of the expedition (Griebel et al., *this issue*). Nor did he ever report the names of those who provided or sold objects to him. All the people he listed by name in Chukotka were Russian administrators and local traders, Russian- and foreign-born (Shokarev, *this issue*). Because of this discretion, we have no names of Chukotka people who produced the five decorated tusks or narrated the legends he recorded (Ostermann 1952), contributed more than 150 words in Naukanski Yupik (Ostermann 1941), or procured the 168 archaeological objects Rasmussen reportedly purchased at "East Cape," i.e., from Naukan (Mathiassen 1930:72–78). Thus, we know little about his local sources during his two-day Chukotka trip.

As Schwalbe et al. (*this issue*) noted, Rasmussen was prudent while in Uelen *not* to make any purchases of ethnographic objects, so that he could preserve his image as a "scientist" (rather than a "trader") in the eyes of the Russian authorities. It probably explains why the National Museum of Denmark has hardly any ethnographic objects

from Chukotka from that trip, but also why Rasmussen was keen on making additional purchases of ethnographic items from Siberia *after* the expedition. Nor did he take any pictures in/of Uelen and of its people. Instead, he made good use of some commercial Siberian ethnographic photographs at the Lomen Brothers' studio in Nome (Rasmussen 1925–1926; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*).

This background helps explain why Rasmussen eventually purchased at least five (?) walrus tusks in Chukotka engraved by Native carvers. The tusks were quintessential ethnographic objects, each telling multiple stories with great details, as Bronshtein describes. They were easy to carry in Rasmussen's specific circumstances, unlike bulky skin clothing or fragile archaeological objects. They required minimal procurement information while being "authentic" illustrations of Native life and art styles. This high information value of decorated ivory tusks, compared to other ethnographic objects, should not be underestimated.

Yet, while Rasmussen was detained and taken to Uelen, two of his travel companions—Capt. Joe Bernard and a Native youth from Nome called Roy—evidently stayed behind in Dezhnev ("Emmatown"). They could have gone ashore, mixed with the locals, and performed certain actions on behalf of Rasmussen or upon his instructions. Bernard, a seasoned Arctic captain (see Bockstoce 2018), who knew literally everyone on both sides of Bering Strait, certainly had connections among traders and Natives alike. He was also an avid collector of Indigenous ethnographic objects that he later sold to various museums (Amy Phillips-Chan, pers. comm., October 8, 2020). Rasmussen never acknowledged Bernard's contribution to his scholarly mission, except for references to some Chukchi stories he reported were obtained from him (Ostermann 1952:146–147). Bernard could have been the very person who purchased the tusks for Rasmussen, certainly in Dezhnev (Tusk 1 and Tusk 4, per Bronshtein's assessment).

The young man Roy, who highly likely was Robert Mayokok (1903–1983) a twenty-one-year-old Inupiaq man born in Wales who later became a renowned artist (see Nielsen, *this issue*), served as the expedition photographer in Chukotka and took most of the photos on that voyage (Nielsen, *this issue*; Schwalbe et al., *this issue*).

Roy might have served as Rasmussen's interpreter during a short interaction with the Naukan people aboard the *Teddy Bear* on September 18, 1924, when a few local young men marched over drifting ice to the boat and interacted with Rasmussen off the East Cape (Ostermann 1952:96). Again, his contribution was not acknowledged, yet we should not discount his input, including potentially in securing the tusks in Dezhnev.

Additionally, there was the possibility of gifts. Rasmussen might have been cautious not to purchase anything under the watchful eyes of Russian policemen, but he could receive gifts or claim certain objects as gifts. The decorated ivory tusks would indeed have made perfect gifts—sturdy, easy to carry, high-value, and known to function as the best local souvenirs, even at that time. My guess is that at least some tusks from Chukotka were given to Rasmussen as gifts. The rather indirect evidence is that Rasmussen was conscious about depositing the ethnographic and archaeological objects from the FTE at the National Museum of Denmark. Nevertheless, out of five Chukotka tusks, three ended up with his family and are in the possession of his descendants, and the other two were donated to the museum by his wife, Dagmar, in 1934, after his passing (Schwalbe et al., *this issue*), thus also being originally held in the family. I have no explanation for this trajectory other than that Rasmussen viewed the tusks as his personal gifts.

Two local men were particularly suited to give such gifts to Rasmussen and to select the best objects for such gifts: Charley Carpendale in Dezhnev and Petr Kosygin ("Cosigan") in Uelen. The former was expected to serve as Rasmussen's host in Chukotka; the latter befriended him in Uelen and acted as his guide and interpreter (Ostermann 1952; Shokarev, *this issue*). Both were local holdovers married to Native women, with deep knowledge of the area and its people. Most of what Rasmussen recorded in Uelen about Native traditions and lore, both Chukchi and Yupik, he learned from Kosygin or via his translation, obviously from Chukchi into English (Ostermann 1952:88–94, 144–145). Both Carpendale and Kosygin knew the best local carvers (e.g., Stepan Ettugi, Petr Pen'kok) and could have selected, even paid for, their artworks to be given to Rasmussen. They also had special reasons to seek Rasmussen's favor: Carpendale as a sign of gratitude and apology for being unable to assist him, in spite of Rasmussen's carrying a photo of Carpendale's daughter Camilla and a letter from Amundsen from Norway (Ostermann 1952:86;

Yetreberg 2019; Shokarev, *this issue*), and Kosygin seeking a potential source of support in a remarkable foreign man who happened to come to his doorstep.

Again, Rasmussen never acknowledged how he obtained the tusks or from whom. Nonetheless, the unquestionable artistic quality of the tusks from Chukotka supports the view that they had been selected by a knowledgeable local hand. I salute Michael Bronshtein on his excellent analysis and thank other authors of this collection—Bent Nielsen, Sergei Shokarev, Daria Schwalbe et al., Knud Michelsen—and also Amy Phillips-Chan, whose writings offered critical evidence and insight to this comment.

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