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National College of Art and Design
Department of Craft Design (Ceramics)

***THE SPIRITUAL WORLD OF THE
INUIT AND THEIR MASKS***

by

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**Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor
of Design in Craft Design (Ceramics)
1997**

Department of the Interior

Geological Survey

Washington, D.C.

Report of the

Geological Survey

for the year 1900

Part I

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Nicola Gordon-Bowe for her encouragement and helpfulness with this project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

FOR THE STUDENT

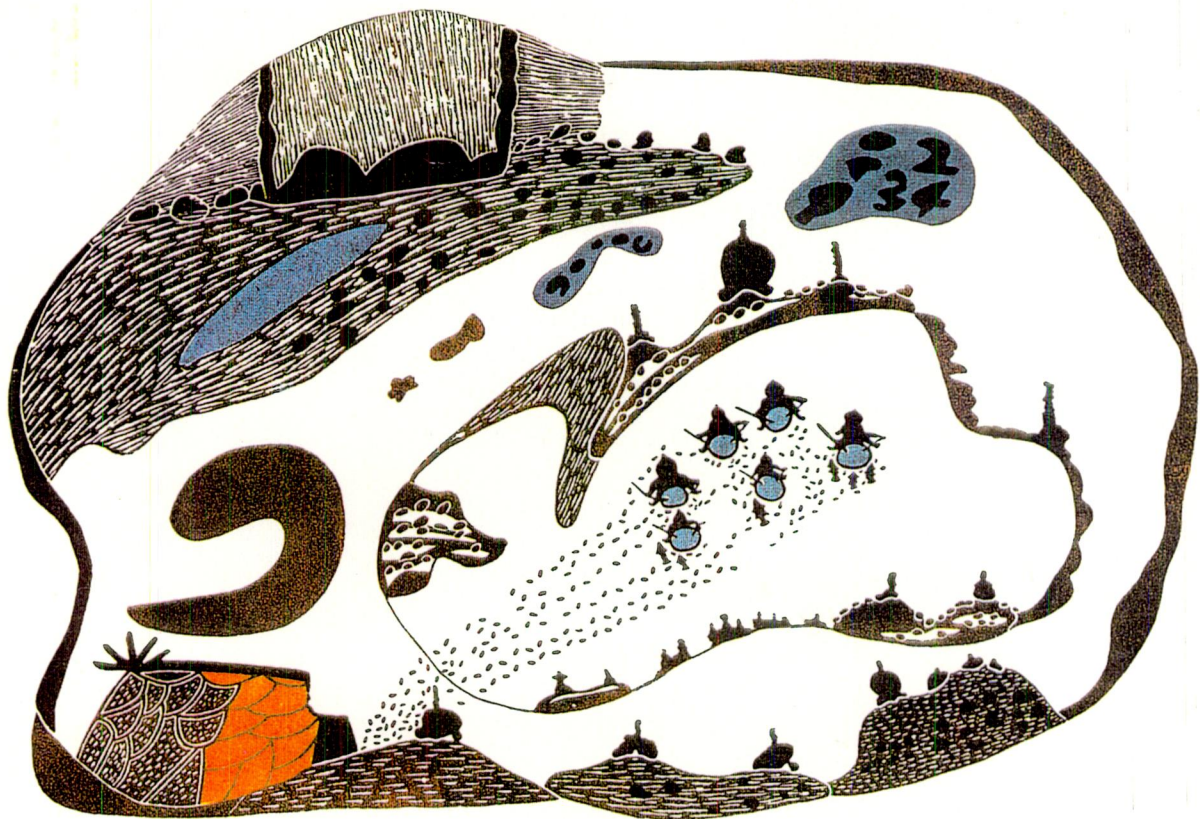


Figure 1
Spring Landscape, Stone Cut, Alaska, 1979



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Figure 2
Drawing of East Greenlandic Inuits from my Sketchbook

PROLOGUE

In civilised countries

we only learn

what the human being can become.

In non-civilised countries,

we learn what the human being is.

(Inuit saying, National Museum of Copenhagen).

It has been very important for me to write about the life of the Inuits and their masks. For many years the survival of the people of the fourth world has been my main concern and often the main inspiration in my practical work. My special interest in the Inuits comes, I think, from my being Danish and carrying on my shoulders the history of the Danish colonisation of Greenland. Part of my family have played an important role as well. My uncle married an Inuit and is still living in Greenland; also, my father's uncle wrote down his adventures in seven fantastic diaries during his stay on the Eastcoast of Greenland as a hunter from 1918 until 1921.

What fascinates me about the Inuit people is that they have, more than any other population, in an ingenious way been able to adapt and survive in an environment which is one of the toughest and most 'inhuman' on earth. To me the Inuits were the most inventive of the fourth world people. Through the wisdom and life of their forefathers they had, in spite of those harsh conditions, been able to create an

extremely strong culture which was reflected in their ceremonies, feasts, rituals and concept of life.

The Inuits were a people with no tribal organisation, or central government, no headmen or chiefs. Everything belonged to everybody. No one had special rights, only duties and obligations. Food and shelter were shared in their world.

My admiration for these people's lives is what I will try to describe in my thesis. First of all, I would like to write about the meaning of 'primitive' art and the way the Western world considers this art. Later on, I will briefly give an account of Inuit history, before my main points which will explain the spiritual world of the Inuit and the importance of Inuit ceremonies. In connection with this I will talk about masks, maskmaking and describe specific examples. I will furthermore write about the religion of the Inuit and their attitude towards death.

An idea of the rich cultural life of the Inuit is what I hope to convey in my thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS 'PRIMITIVE' ART?

When you look up the word 'primitive' in a dictionary, you will get a sadly wrong explanation, at least when it refers to people of the fourth world. The little Collins pocket dictionary printed in 1995, which probably any school boy or girl is familiar with, explains, primitive: 1. of an early simple stage of development, 2. basic, crude.

We like to consider ourselves in the western world as civilised, which the same dictionary gives as meaning, civilise: 1. bring out of barbarism into a state of civilisation, 2. refine. Civilization: 1. high level of human cultural and social development.

These two examples show where we place ourselves in a world hierarchy, that western man made himself, proving his attitude to all other people living differently from him. I definitely find the people of the fourth world some of the most civilised people on earth. I think 'primitive' is a very wrong term used for the minority of people, who ^{are} rapidly disappear, who are characterised as living in harmony with nature, being hunters or gatherers and usually animistic worshipers. The word primitive is loaded with negativity and therefore, I would prefer to use either the expression 'tribal people' (though all the people referred to might not live in a tribal social system) or simply people of the fourth world.

One of the ways Westerners characterise art is its 'uselessness'; we mostly consider only fine art, as real art. In the art of the Inuit Eskimos the function of art is not as simple as that; art plays a much more important role. One example I would like to give, which shows the importance of their art is this. Imagine a marvelously made amulet of walrus ivory, created by an Inuit carver, it could be seen in itself as a beautiful artpiece and as being completely nonutilitarian. Of course any Inuit would strongly disagree with that, because obviously being an amulet means it plays a very specific, special purpose. In this case it might help the Inuit to have good luck in his attempt to catch a seal. Western views reaction to this, with our socially scientific awareness, is of course to dismiss any such nonsense as being superstition and being quite sure, that the amulet will not help the hunter in his efforts. But a very important matter, which is forgotten while examining this incident, is to understand the psychology of auto suggestion (a situation where a person unconsciously influences his or her own beliefs or behaviour). This means that instead of the amulet actually giving the hunter the luck to catch a seal, it will give him the self-confidence and assurance that he is actually going to catch one. He is given an extra help in his 'hunt-belief'.

As Westerners, we tend to have two different reasons for doing something. "Either we do it because we want to or because we have to do it" (Anderson, 1979, p. 56). In the fourth world or even the third world, where life goes on much more slowly and where changes occur much more seldom than in the West, must people do things for traditional reasons, from an inherited code. People hunt, carve, etc. because that is what they always did. Everybody has a position in society and gets pleasure from

acting in a way which is meant traditionally to be appropriate. Their culture provides a guiding^e to the way activities should be performed.

I feel very sympathetic with Roy Sieber when he says that fourth world “governing aesthetic concept is not” art, for arts ask, but rather “art for life’s sake” (Sieber, in Anderson, 1979, p. 32). Tribal art is immediately impressive in its use of colours, materials, form, etc. But the very choice of these usually have a certain meaning. The maker of the piece might want to remind us of specific people, ideas or events which would be superior to the piece itself. It thereby becomes symbolic or of iconographic significance. In some societies symbolism plays a bigger role than in others. I would like briefly to explain what exactly a symbol means, as it is a word widely used but which few people know the very meaning of and origin of. The ancient Greeks used the word ‘symbolo’^s (put together) which means to rejoin a thing which has been broken into two halves. Two friends could break a token in two and only by joining again the two parts, could the token become a whole and thereby be a proof, of common bond between the two friends. Therefore, the token was symbolising friendship.

Symbolism is a huge subject, which you find in all human societies and cultures. Some writers have even claimed that “our ability to use symbols defines our very humanness” (Anderson, 1979, p. 52). And symbolism is exactly what Inuit maskmaking is all about.

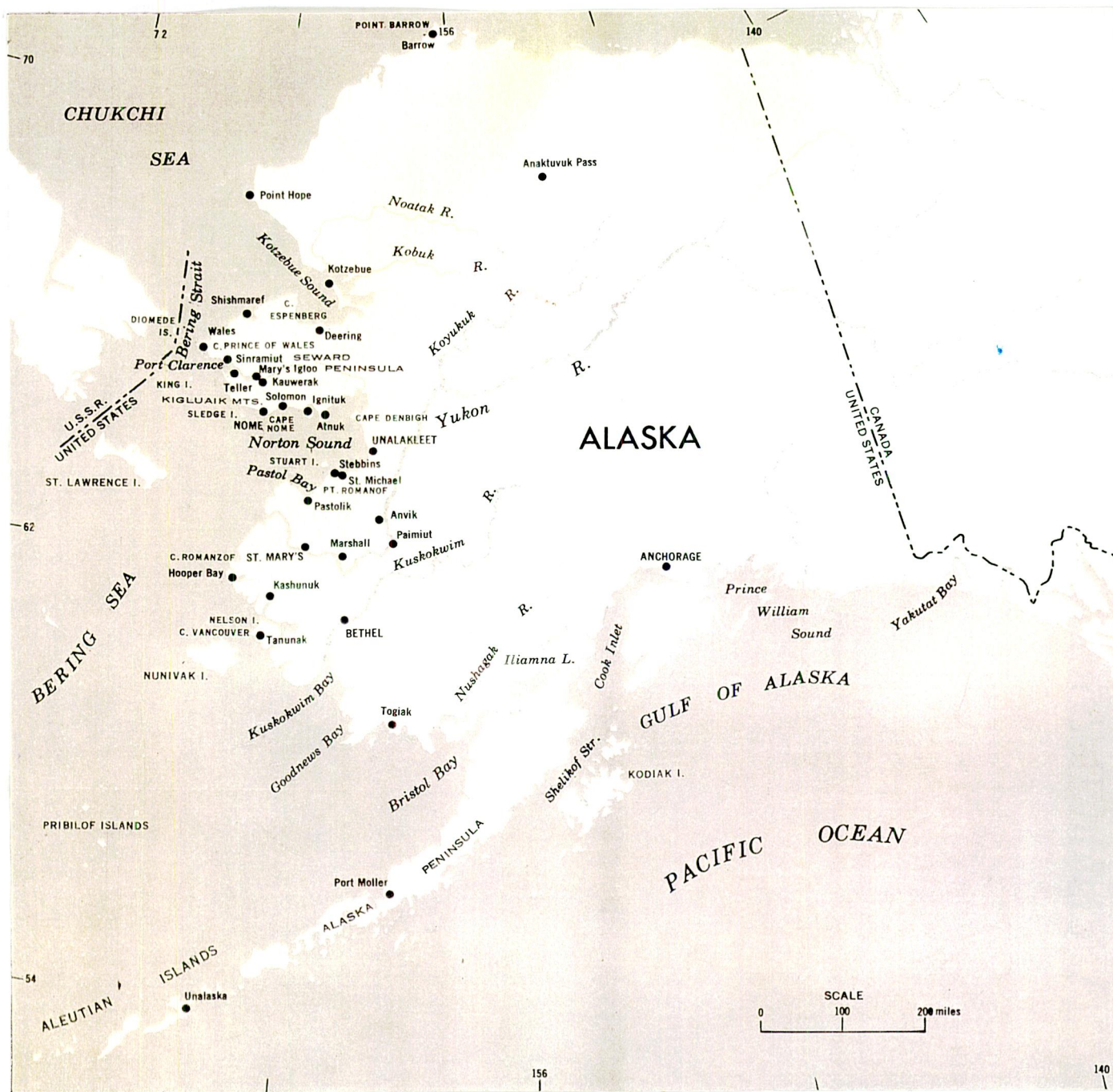


Figure 3
Map of Alaska, 1979



Map of Alaska, 1950

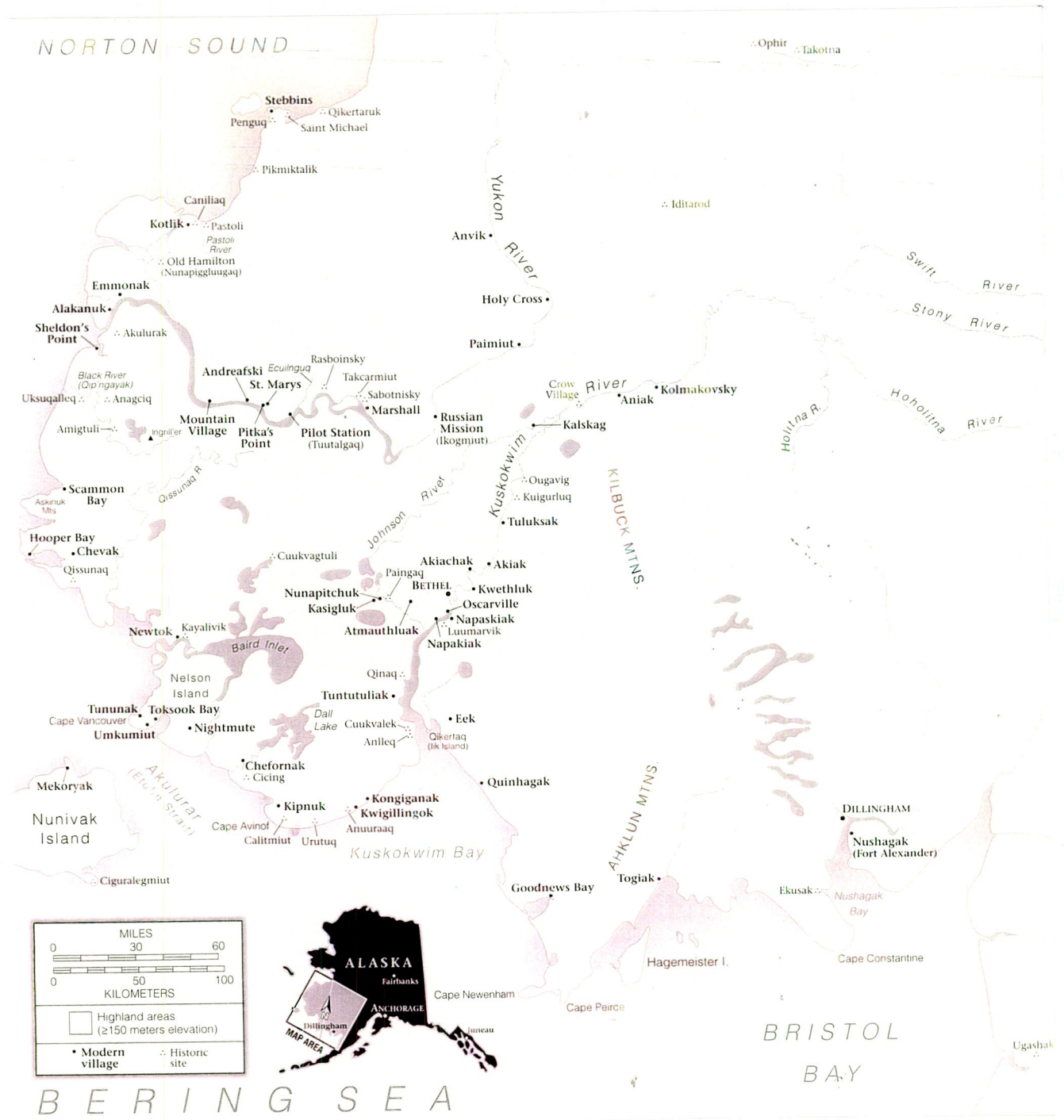


Figure 4
Map of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region



Figure 1
Map of the Lake-Abundant Area



Figure 5
Map of Greenland



Fig. 1
Map of the world

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF THE INUIT

*And I think over again
My small adventures
when with a shore wind I drifted out
In my Kayak
And thought I was in danger.
My fears,
those small ones
that I thought so big
for all the vital things
I had to get and to reach.*

*And yet, there is only
one great thing:
To live to see in huts and on journeys
the great day that dawns,
and the light that fills the world.*

(Kuillasar, in Jørgensen, 1979, p. 90).

The first time man appeared in Alaska was between 20,000 and 30,000 years ago, near the end of the last Ice Age. During these times the Alaskan Peninsula was connected to Siberia by Beringa (the large continental land mass, which was created during the late Wisconsin glacial period as a result of the extensive lowering of the world's sea levels). And therefore we nowadays find Inuit people as far as northeast as Siberia. Inuit is the word they rather use themselves which mean 'human being' in

their language. The word Eskimo is a name given to the Inuits by Indians around sixteenth hundred and its means 'those who eat raw meat' (Beaver, 1977, Autumn, p. 21-27).

Around eight hundred years after our time measure, the Inuit culture spread rapidly all over the Arctic to Greenland, North Canada and as mentioned, northeast Siberia (in winter the sea passage between the Canadian Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland can be crossed by food or dog sledge).

Where the Inuit people came from and their racial origin are both uncertain. Some anthropologists believe they are an offshot of the American Indians who crossed the Bering Strait from Asia, maybe 20,000 years ago (Furieux, 1975, p. 218). Other anthropologists believe they are a separate race and are Indians of Mongolian origin. However, the Inuit show no sign of connection to any Asiatic people known to us and also their language is completely different from any of the seventy-five languages which are spoken by North American Indian tribes. A third option on the origin of the Inuits is that, they might have been primordial Mongolians, a race which originated from an Asiatic 'shangrila' (Furieux, 1976, p. 216). This suggestion is the only one that agrees with the Inuits' own tradition, in which they believe that they came from an original homeland with snow burning on the ground and fire raining from the sky. These factors are obviously interpretable to a memory of a place with volcanic activity (Furieux, 1975, p. 223). The Inuits are probably the most far-flung single tribe in the world. The 50,000 Inuits are stretched out over an area of 4,000 miles.

The anthropologist N.O. Christensen states in his book 'Angmagssalik' (1985, p. 44), that Inuits were forced to move northwards by Indian tribes in Northern Canada and that the Inuit retain fearful memories of that clash to such an extent, that even nowadays one cry from an Indian world provoke terror in an Inuit, even though he had never seen his ancient enemy. I find this explanation not so realistic. I believe that the Inuits' rapid spread and habitation all over the Arctic is mostly the result of following animal flocks; another important reason is, I believe, the traveling nomadic spirit that Inuits have. The speed of their moving proves their deep interest in travel and adventure.

Living in Arctic offers some of the most difficult conditions for human existence on earth. The temperature and darkness makes it hard to survive in the wintertime. The vegetation is so sparse that the Inuit had to base their food and clothes almost entirely on fishing and hunting. To be able to live just on animals, a highly specialised hunting culture was developed.

There are and were always only a small number of Inuits. About 23,000 live in Greenland, 12,000 in Canada, 15,000 in Alaska and 1,000 in Siberia (Madsen, 1993, p. 19). They are all the same people, just talking different dialects of the same language. They use the same tools, live in the same kind of houses, and first of all, they share the same mentality. The only way you could categorise the Inuits is by dividing them into two types: the very few who live in the poor inland and those who live near the coast. Inland Inuit live mostly by trapping and tend to live a more difficult life because trapping is a poorer way of hunting. The 'sea' Inuit, on the

other hand, live with the richness and wealth that the sea offers them. These Inuits invented the fantastic kayak, the detachable harpoon and the dog-sledge.

The variations that exist in Inuit culture are few and without importance. These facts are the reason that I have chosen in my thesis not to pick out a specific area, but have had the possibility of writing about and studying all the Inuit tribes in this vast area on earth. For example the structure of a ritual on the west coast of Greenland would be very similar to one of the Nunivak Island in Alaska. When talking about the masks though, I will concentrate mostly on Alaska and Greenland.

In the Arctic, the earth is permanently frozen. Only during the summer months, which is a very short period, just the very top layer of earth is not frozen. Therefore, it is impossible to grow vegetables and the Inuits live from seals, walrus, whales, polarbears, reindeers, birds and fish. From this rich variety of animal food the Inuits can get all the necessary minerals and proteins. No deficiency diseases had ever existed. Today, however, when they get a mixture of foods, they suffer just as westernized people do from the same well known diseases - heart problems, diabetes, cancer and tooth decay.

From end of October until the middle of February the sun is not seen in the Arctic; this is the darktime, but from the end of April until the end of August the sun always stays in the sky, the midnight sun. The Inuits have adjusted their lives to this change from light to darkness, they do not become depressed and ill as other populations who live in similar conditions. The months of the year when they live in total darkness,

functions as a kind of holiday period where they have collected enough food to have, while it is too dark to do any hunting. I will later explain how feasts and ceremonies also played an important role in getting through the dark period.

In February, the temperature reaches as low as minus 45° freezing and in July only minus 10°. The Inuits have traditionally followed the animal flocks they live from, wherever they moved. The walrus follows the packice floating north every year and during spring. Reindeer move in big flocks to their summer pastures, where they calve. Inuit hunters knew all the details of these animals' migration. During the summer the hunting families would move out from their winter settlements into camps of tents, usually in the same places year after year.

During summertime there was an abundance of almost all hunting animals. It was also the time when birds settled in flocks in their nests to brood; seagulls, razorbill, guillemot, eider and little auk. The eggs were then collected from their nests and birds were caught in nets on big sticks. In the sea there were polarcod, seal, narwhale and trout. Probably the most important animal of them all being the seal. From seals the Inuits got clothes, food, hunting-bladders, etc. During winter, the sealer would



Figure 6
Eskimos by their Tent, 1896





Figure 7
Summer Tents



wait on the ice by a breathing hole and, whenever he saw movement, he would use his harpoon through the hole. When spring came and the ice would break-up, the sealer could catch seals with nets in the water. In the summer, when the seal was lying in the sun on the ice, the sealer would sneak up near it and use a harpoon and, of course, when the ice was mostly gone, the sealer would use his kayak.

Hans P. Egede, a Danish Lutheran Minister, was the first westerner who lived among the Inuit people on Greenland and on returning to Denmark he wrote about his experiences. He was the person most responsible for the colonisation of Greenland and worked from 1721 until 1745 hard to convert the Inuits to Christianity. His best known book called 'A Description of Greenland' was published in English in 1745 and he was the first to contribute to Inuit ethnography because of his detailed descriptions of the Inuits hunting and fishing methods. He furthermore gave an account of their daily lives (The Beaver Autumn, 1977, p. 21-27).

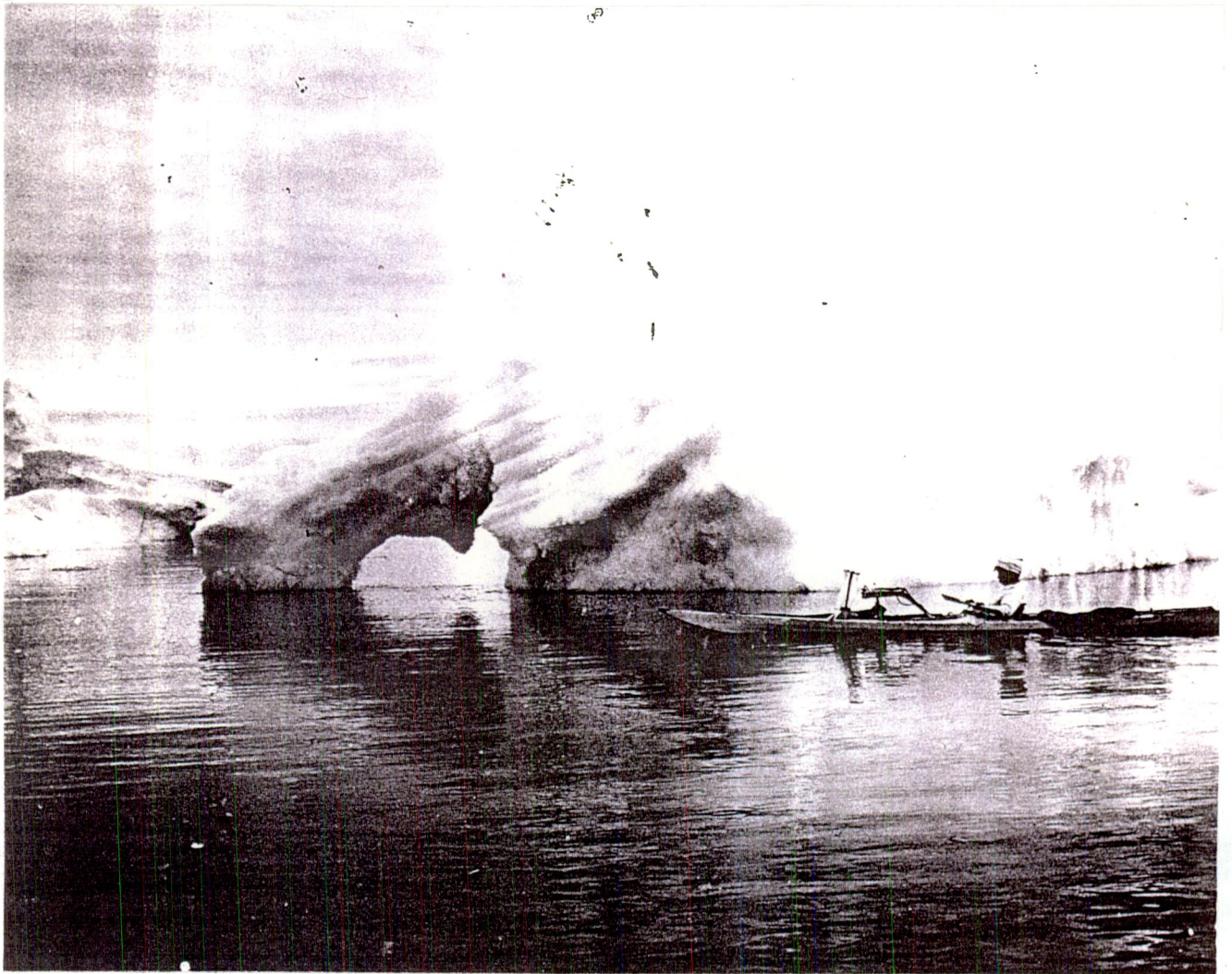


Figure 8
An Eskimo Hunter in his Kayak looking for a Seal



CHAPTER THREE INUIT RELIGION

Walk the wide and inner way.

(Gunnar Ekelöf, National Museum of Copenhagen).

“The idea of magic challenges our basic concepts of reality and the natural order of things. But for native shamans and sorcerers magic is as tangible and ‘real’ as science in our modern ‘civilisation’. The Australian Aborigine, for example, will die if pierced by an arrow that has been ‘sung’ - no matter how superficial the wound” (Martino, 1972, p. 203).

“there is no such thing as unreality; there are only various forms of reality” (Eugene Ionesco, in Martino, 1972, p. 67).

The world was to the Inuit people called ‘Nuna’. Nuna was the world they knew, the one they lived in, and which was obvious to them. Around Nuna was a surrounding world inhabited by spirits and powers. Over Nuna was an ‘overworld’ where the moon was. Under Nuna, with the land and the sea, was an ‘underworld’. In this world lived the mother of the sea mammals. Everything which existed in the known world Nuna had a spirit. The Inuit did not distinguish between humans, animals, plants and dead things. Everything had a spirit.

The Inuit mentality and religion are closely connected and there exist no real boundaries between fantasy and reality: good is good by itself and does not need any cultivation but, on the other hand, evil is feared. The human being is very small and insignificant compared to big nature and is undermined by the inexplicable, mystical

power called 'Sila' (which means universe, weather and intellect). Everything alive has a soul and it is from this that nature's power arises.

In the spiritual world of the Inuit there also existed 'manmade' creatures which represented the moon, sun, sea, etc. It was these creatures' role to watch the humans, to be sure that they would keep their laws and taboos, so that the ecological balance of nature was not disturbed. The connective link between humans and these creatures was the Angakkog (Inuit expression for shaman) and his personal helping spirits. There were many taboos and ceremonies connected to hunting, birth and death. But there was no worshipping of Gods and therefore Inuits had no religion in the way the Western world sees religion, as a worshipping of one or more personified Gods which decide the destiny of people. It is difficult and complicated to get a total picture of the Inuits' mentality and religion. Therefore I will try to give some examples of hunting rules and taboos.

To be a great hunter it was not only important to be skilled in the art of hunting, it was just as important to have a good relationship with the spirits of the hunting animals. Before, during and after a hunt there were many rituals which should be carried out correctly. Otherwise the hunter would make the spirits of the hunting animals angry. Or, even worse, the big mother of the sea mammals could get angry and keep the animals of the sea away from the people who were hunting them. In such cases the Angakkog had to travel to the mother of the sea mammals to soften her by combing her hair so she would let the animals return to the people again.

Most of the taboo rules and rituals which the Inuits had kept over centuries had one clear function: to control hunting, so that not too many animals would be hunted and their population thereby threatened. A common hunting rule which was used in Greenland was to put the fish you caught in a circle around the hole in the ice where they were caught, so that their heads would turn inwards to the hole. In this position honour was shown to the spirits and also this ring of fish would attract even more fish. During the hunting of sea mammals, it was important to cut a piece of the caught animal and throw it back into the sea; by doing this it was believed that the spirit of the animal would find itself in another animal and would continue living.

The Inuits lived in small and for long periods, isolated societies where the fight against nature, just to survive, was a daily one. Their impression of the world as we know it through their mythology and songs is a result of the way they lived. For the Inuits the world was a 'whole'. The elements in nature and the powers within them made a total, a 'wholeness' whose harmony could only be broken by human acts. They believed the human being itself contained, apart from the physical body, also many 'souls' and some of them were 'name souls'. These souls were living in all the joints of the body, looking like small copies of human beings. They were invisible though, and only the size of a thumb except the three biggest which sat in the throat and groin. These big ones were half the size of a hand. Altogether, the souls created

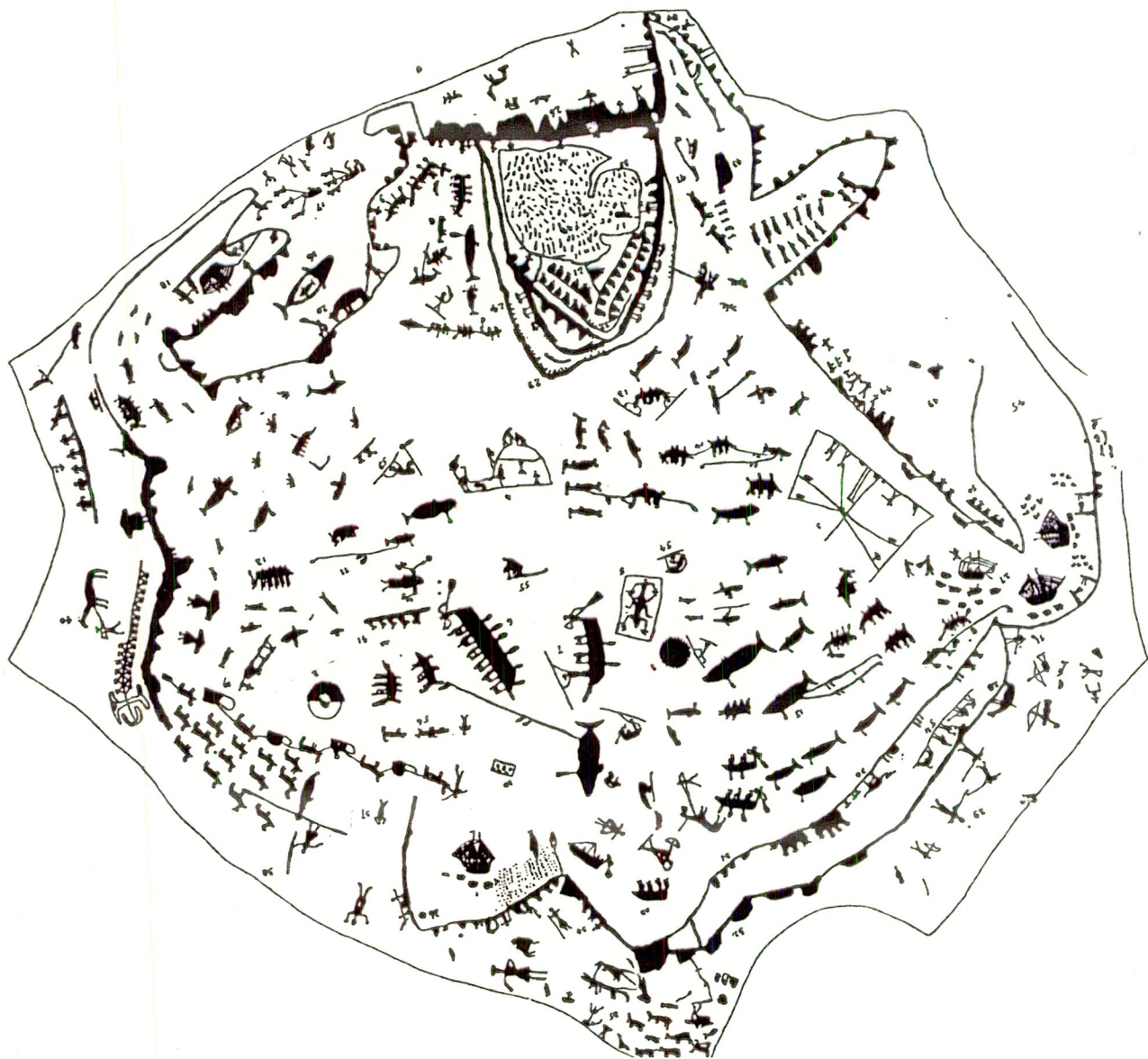


Figure 9
Life, the Hunt drawn on Skin, Alaska, 1880



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
1965

the lifepower which radiated through the breath. Each soul controlled a different part of the body and any kind of illness was seen as a soul missing from its position.

Death

The good relation Inuits have traditionally had with death is very impressive. They have no angry Gods to be propitiated, no sins to be expiated. They accept life seeking no explanation for its existence. When somebody died, the soul did not leave him until a child was given the same name. When a child was born it was important to find a good name. Sometimes the Angakkog was called if a big hunter was dead, his name would often be given to a number of boys so they would receive the same abilities that the great hunter had and also part of him would continue to live in these children.

The dead people lived either under the sea or in the sky, where they could be seen when they were playing ballgames - namely during the aurora borealis (northern lights)! Those who drowned during hunting and those who were buried by being put into the sea would live in the Kingdom of the Dead under the sea and those who were buried in the ground on land would go to the sky. Sometimes, maybe because of the practical sense Inuits have, it would be possible to be in both places; for example, if you had family both in the sky and under the sea. To achieve this you had to be buried during high tide.

The Kingdom of the Dead was seen as an extension of life on earth and therefore probably one of the reasons for the almost non-existent fear of death that Inuits possess. Fear for the dead ones was however, very big. It was hard to accept that people you had known and lived with would just pass away and be gone. This might be an explanation for the many imaginings of where the dead lived after death. On the other hand the dead were not there, so they had to be invisible, secret and therefore dangerous. Death was always surrounded by a lot of rituals. For instance, houses where somebody had just died were considered 'dirty' and everything in the house had to be cleaned. Sometimes, while people were dying, everything would be carried outside, so when the dying person died, they could just carry the things inside again and thereby avoid all the cleaning!

Families had to spend periods of grief. For women this lasted up to a year. During these periods, there were certain things you were not supposed to eat and men were not allowed to hunt. Basically the picture of the world which the Inuit had, involved a fear of all the unknown powers which controlled life and the world around them. This fear, as earlier described, was fought by establishing a connection between the activities of human beings and the powers of nature, amulets and taboo rules. This meant that people could act by themselves, as well as in connection with powers which they did not understand, or have any influence over. This basic feeling of being without control was countered in this way. It was an important condition for the Inuits to be able to live in surroundings which they could not completely understand and had no influence over.

Peter Freuchen wrote about the Inuits' attitude to death in 'Peter Freuchens Book of the Inuits' (Freuchen, 1961, p. 101). He described how when an old man watches the young ones going hunting, he gets sad, just as when he has to ask other people to give him leather and fur for his own clothes, or when he can no longer invite his neighbours to eat what he himself caught in hunting; then, life has no value for him anymore. Maybe he is ill as well and all he wishes is to die.

All over the Arctic the Inuit mentality was that if a man felt he was a burden to others, then he was forced to end his life both out of love of his family and out of sorrow not to be able to participate anymore in whatever makes life worth living. In some areas, the old people wished that their oldest son or favourite daughter would be the one to end their lives. Hanging was normal. This 'act' was usually done during celebrations when the feasting was at its maximum, when everybody including the one who should die, was in a good mood, had eaten and were happy. There was no cruelty connected to these facts. The Inuit people simply believed that now for them life was over. Peter Freuchen believed that the many suicides and murders among the Inuits must be seen in this light of the confident feeling the Inuits had about death.



Figure 10
Man wearing a Forehead Mask of a Bird Carrying a Fish in its Mouth, Alaska,
Beginning of the Century



1911
The following is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting of the Board of Directors of the University of California, held on the 1st day of January, 1911.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPIRITUAL WORLD OF THE INUIT AND THE MEANING OF THEIR MASKS

*"Dream and art are a magic hoard; they link man with the life of light and darkness,
with true life, with true spiritual collaboration."*

(Jean Arp, in Jensen, 1965, p. 4).

The Inuit people living under such hard physical conditions are probably the finest example and proof of how essential it is for people to create art.

The life of the Inuit, which had only experienced subtle changes in ways that the people could follow and comprehend, was changed irrevocably between 1896 and 1900 in Alaska. "Gold fever" had sent masses of people to the Arctic; everyone from gold diggers and speculators to prostitutes began to flood into St. Michael (the area around the Yukon River and the Seward Peninsula). During the summer of 1900, a larger number of people, more than that of the whole indigenous population of Alaska was desperately looking for gold on the coast, near Nome. This 'invasion' of the Inuits land had of course an immediate effect on the life and art of these people. In those years it became very profitable to make souvenirs for the Yankees, who wanted to bring back for their wives needleboxes of ivory, pipes, etc. They also liked any traditionally made pieces and they stole or bought every little bit they could find all

over the country. Westernised habits were invasive and the traditional way of life, as a consequence, could not resist.

Of course the masks which were closely connected with the Inuit religion could not be accepted by the missionaries who forced Christianity on the Inuits. The missionaries, with their most of the time destructive behaviour in the fourth world, saw the masks as evil pictures and priests would destroy all the masks they could possible find.

Inuit masks show some of the most imaginative tribal art that exists anywhere. They cover everything from surreal expressions to simple copying of the human face. They range from very fine masks which only covered the eyes, noses or tiny fingermasks, to enormous flat pieces of wood, which covered most of the body.

They are in themselves pieces of sculpture and reached a strong degree of artistic expression. They have never, however, received the same attention as Inuit carvings in ivory and antler have, maybe because of the fact that the masks disappeared as a living part of Inuit culture since the end of the nineteenth century.

Masks were made and used all over Alaska and to some degree in Greenland as well. Masks were made and were in use from the very beginning of Inuit civilisation, but it is only recently that their function, as an important aspect of the Inuits' ceremonial dances and feasts, has been fully understood, first through studies by anthropologists



Figure 11
'Confession on the Trail', Early 1930's



and ethnologists and, after that, more generally by western man.

The purpose of the artist who created the mask was to interpret an idea, which could come from an Angakkog's vision during trance, or the artist could be inspired by wellknown traditional spirits or mythological creatures. The final expression of the mask could be purely abstract. A facemask could represent a bubble in the water and a fingermask maybe a star. They could also be loaded with abstract symbolic meanings. For example, if the important part of the mask showed a fish, then it represented the sea. To put a fish or another animal in the mouth of a mask meant, all over the Arctic, the wish for many hunting animals and luck during hunting them.

A gigantic mask with impressive moving excrescences could be worn by the Angakkog as an illustration of his singing and dancing, thereby making the deeply moved spectators participate in his experiences on his latest journey to the world of the spirits which, for instance, could show a good moonlanding.

The strong individually made masks are difficult to classify though there are 'styles' and main types which can be recognised. No masks have been made in order to exist just to be a woodcarved object, but always to be a part of a dance, a song or storytelling, being performed either during a feast or, as most of the times, for religious reasons.



Figure 12
Mask representing a Bubble in the Water



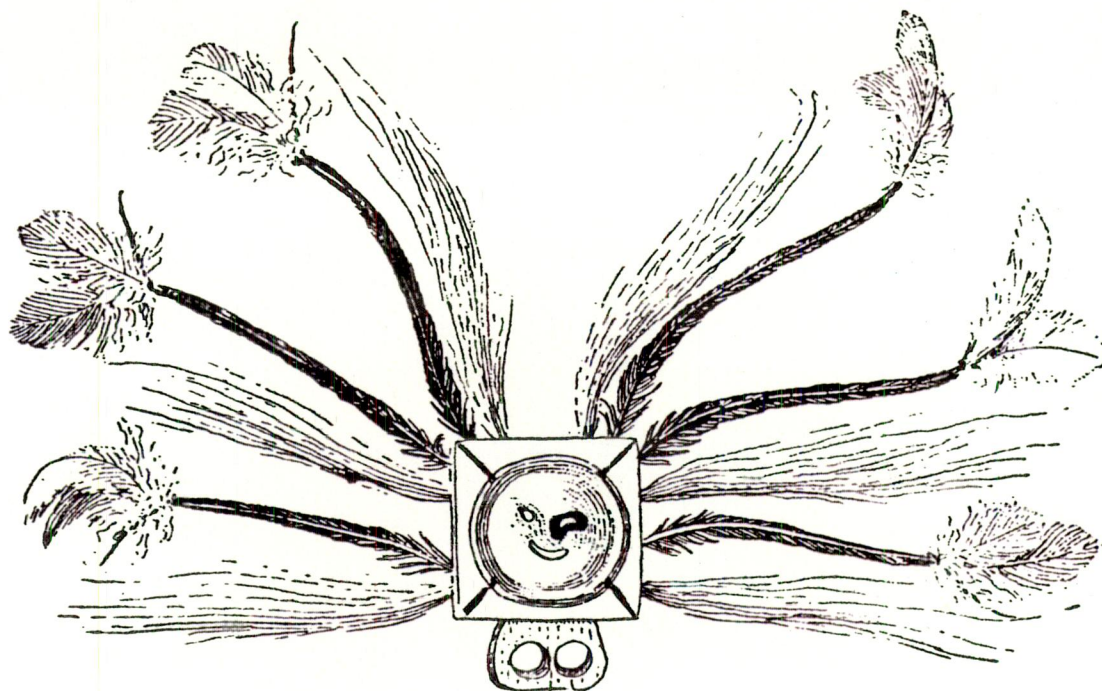


Figure 13
Fingermask representing a Star





Figure 14
Mask representing the Evil Spirit of the Mountains,
‘The Masters of Plastic Surrealism is to be found among Inuit Mask History’,
Sonne, 1988, p. 7



Figure 14
Aerial photograph of the level part of the mountain.
The history of the mountain is to be found among the
Sons of 1982, p. 1.

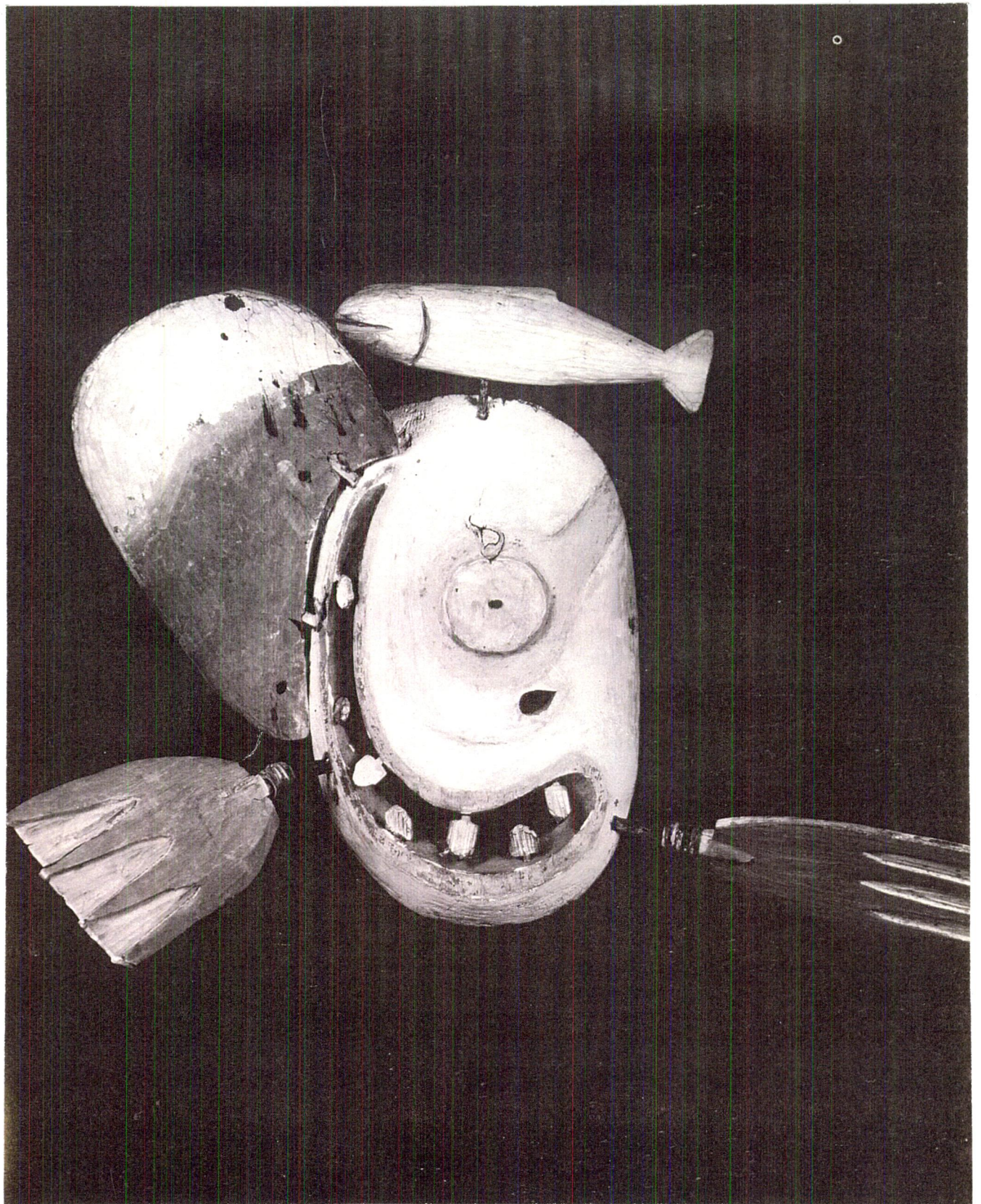


Figure 15
Abstract Mask from Beringa with Fish representing the Sea





Figure 16
Abstract Mask from Point Hope. The angle of the lines on the Mask suggests that the Carver wanted them to resemble the Tail of a Whale

Many different kinds of spirits were known all over the Arctic area but every single spirit was explained and faced in almost the same way by the different groups of Inuits. However, the ways in which they expressed the spirits in their masks were very different.

Feasts were held to honour the spirits of animals or birds which in some way had an influence on hunting in a magical sense. Because the dances were performed to influence the animal spirits and thereby the animals' behaviour, it was not only important that the masks were beautiful, impressive and interesting, but it was also very important, that only the best dancers would wear them. The norm was that women only wore 'fingermasks' and only men wore facemasks.

The masks, representing the Alaska Inuits' whole idea of the world, represented the good and the evil mythological creatures which created man, the animals that man depends on, man's ceremonies or that which, on the contrary, tried to destroy all this. The masks included the divinities, especially the moon and the sun, which were elements that controlled some aspects of human existence and a whole variety of spirit masks which were taken out and used for different purposes. Most religious masks belonged to this group of spirit masks. These spirits could be categorised as being masks representing the spirits of animals, those of lifeless objects, 'things', helping spirits and the protecting spirits of the Angakkog.

The shaman or Angakkog was the most important person to help the Inuits to understand the world. He, very rarely she, was able to create contact between humans and powers of nature.

The Inuit Angakkog, wiseman and philosopher could live in seclusion, but in times of difficulties and crisis it was he whom everybody would consult, so he could give an answer as to how harmony and balance in life could return. He was the doctor who with the help of his powerful protective spirits could cure illnesses. The Angakkog was also the spokesman for all the enormous unknown powers that controlled the availability of food. He was furthermore the one who decided which dances should be performed in order to connect the people with the spirits. Sometimes an ordinary person was also able to experience the sight of spirits and mythological creatures, but it was the Angakkog who saw them most often and most clearly.

The training to become an Angakkog began usually while the 'student' was a child or very young. Once in a while the decision was already taken for certain children when they were born, to become Angakkogs, for instance if more than one of the child's siblings had died as babies, or if the parents has suffered lifes threatening situations during the woman's pregnancy. Also the Angakkog could be chosen from somebody who as a child had shown non-typical or psychotic behaviour. These early signs of abnormality were treated positively and nourished to become even stronger through a period of training of spiritual and magical acts. Thereby, the psychotic or abnormal



Figure 17
Angakkog with Ill Child, Alaska, 1906



Page 17
Landscape with a Church and a Tower



Figure 18
Angakkog, Alaska, 1906



Figure 18
Continued from Figure 17

behaviour of a child was channelled into an acceptable role in the society. An older Angakkog was always the adviser and master. The child would be taught to seek lonely places, often by a lake inland. By this exercise of solitude, he both gained clearer insight by coping with loneliness, but also he managed to bring himself into a state of ecstasy through hunger and the monotonous rubbing of a small stone against a bigger one for hours. In some cases an adult could become a shaman even late in life, but only if he had been through exceptional situations or had had a very special experience.

While the Angakkog was exercising his abilities he would use, apart from masks, and clothes, many kinds of accessories and stage requisites - things such as traps, clay, a ring to show the sky, water, etc. He also used very well made mechanical dolls and animals made from either wood or skin. The Angakkog would use odd sounds, a special 'spirit language' and ventriloquism. For instance, he would call his protective spirits in a badly lit room, while playing the drum himself and singing. He could be wearing a intestine skin parka with a hood which would rattle during any moving around. When the Angakkog moved, the parka would make so much noise that nobody could hear what was said between the Angakkog and the spirit but it was also an important noise which helped the discussion between the two.

Near Bristol Bay there was a tribe which used stuffed animals and full size birds carved in wood, which could flap their wings and would move around with the use of invisible strings, like marionettes dolls. Many of the masks had flexible moving jaws and eyes. The magic 'tricks' the Angakkog used to start a séance with, for example

to liberate himself from the ropes, he used to be tight with was not a secret, even children used it in their games. But the act only took on real meaning when it was done by the Angakkog.

All the dances were held usually in the 'feast building', the Inuit call this the 'kazgi'. In some villages the kazgi could be quite small, in others enormous, sometimes holding 3,000 Inuits inside. Any kazgi would have an extra entrance through the roof and one through the floor. Both of these entrances functioned as stage entrances for the dancers or the Angakkog, when they wanted to give a sudden scary impression to spectators.

Sometimes a shaman would disappear completely while visiting the world of the spirits. Everybody knew that the greatest and cleverest Angakkogs would survive any danger or 'test' that the spirits would make them go through. An Angakkog could even survive having a spear pierced through his stomach, or being thrown under the ice with hands and feet bound, or being buried alive. Surprised spectators would see the Angakkog arriving from his journey having not just survived, but without any sign such as a hole in the stomach or a bit of burned hair!

The Angakkogs were known to be able to make themselves metamorphosise into animals or have the ability to kill somebody, just by looking straight into his eyes.



Figure 19
Harpooned Angakkog, Contemporary Carving, Spence Bay, 1988



Report of the Committee on the Status of the American Indian, 1953

The Angakkogs were able to see into the future and there are legends of an Angakkog from sledge Island who foresaw the arrival of the first European ship to the island (Sonne, 1988, p. 201).

Knud Rasmussen, the Danish Polar scientist (1879-1933) who visited all the Arctic tribes, was half Greenlandian and half Danish and spoke Inuit language fluently. Fortunately he recorded the Inuits mythology, rituals and songs during his travels. Otherwise much of this cultural inheritance would have been lost. During one of his many visits to Point Hope, he was told that the shamans were more active when winter was coming and darkness was beginning to set in. At those times people were able to see one ball of fire after another racing through the sky, "but now that we have been christianized, we never see them anymore" an old man said (Ray, 1970, p. 17).

During a shaman's trance and his travels to the world of spirits, he had the possibility of actually seeing all the mythological creatures and spirits of the Inuits' religion. Creating a mask was one of his personal ways of interpreting those beings.

The majority of masks represent an animal spirit (or 'person') and these were called spirit masks. The soul of the Inuits was not mortal, but the spirit was mortal. The spirit of the mask was not the individual mask of the individual animal, it was rather all the individual spirits of that specific animal species, which had ever lived, which were already living and which would live in the future. To give an example, one could imagine a human face or a part of a human face placed on a mask showing a

seal, called a seal spirit mask, this mask did not represent an individual seal but worked as a symbol for the seal spirit of all the seal species.

In connection with non-religious feasts and celebrations, the Inuits did not make masks which were pure imitations of animals. The masks could be used in dances, portraying, for example a mythological being, typically an eagle or a raven. In such cases the mask was always meant to show a very specific animal, but if the animal portrayed in the mask had the slightest 'abnormality' on it, Such as an extra beak or eye or two eyes looking different, then the mask was meant to represent the spirit of the animal species it was showing. An Angakkog decided what the mask should look like, either through a clear vision he had during an entranced condition, or by using any of the old traditional forms which had already been used. He would choose a good wood carver who would be skilled enough to work from the Anakkog's descriptions. In certain circumstances, a good wood carver was allowed to make his own masks without the directions of a shaman just by being guided by the shaman's personal protecting and helping spirits, or through his own spiritual experience.

The Angakkog could also carve masks for his own use. These masks usually portrayed his very personal protecting spirits and were only carved after he had a clear vision, only in this way could such an important act, which theoretically belonged to the shaman, be done. The creatures being portrayed were rarely hostile spirits. They were usually animal spirits which could help positive powers and which were spirits the Angakkog would like to contain himself. Furthermore they could be spirits which belonged to a famous, no longer living man, which could bring good

luck to the shaman. Some Angakkogs who were able to have many and clear visions could, during a life-time, collect maybe twenty masks just for their own personal use.

To the audience, the masks looked as if they had been sucked into the face of the Angakkog or as if they were growing out of his face. This impression was given probably because most of the masks had a little grip on the inside for the mouth. It was forbidden for the audience to examine and touch the masks. They were holy objects and the dances which were performed with the masks were religious explanations of the cosmos. But they were also very important as pure entertainment. A few years ago, when there were still Inuits living who remembered the dances, before they had been banned by the missionaries, they would talk about the dance as one of the best parts of Inuit culture which had been lost (Jensen, 1965, p. 74). Dance played an immensely important role to an extent that Western man cannot probably understand.

Masks were used during all the festive occasions, except during memorial celebrations for the dead, and masks were never worn during dances performed out of doors.

Some dancers were very famous and known over big areas of the Arctic. Women were seclusive (private) in their dancing style. They would often dance a story in a group of eight. This was a quiet dance with subtle movements. In the north of Alaska, women were sometimes seated on a bench, one beside the other, dancing with just their hands, heads and upper bodies, but with their feet steady on the ground. An

interesting detail is that dancers always wore gloves, but the reason for it has been forgotten (Jean Ray, 1970, p. 30).

The Importance of the Drum and Singing

The drum or tambourine has always been an important aspect of most Inuit feasts and ceremonies. Originally, the beat of the drum symbolised the heartbeat of the holy mother eagle in the mythological story when her son was killed. Performing a 'drum dance' was a demanding skill which needed many years of intensive training and musical talent. Apart from the mask, the drum was one of the most important tools for the Angakkog to have during ecstasy or trance, when he would travel into the world of spirits and souls, to examine the reasons for bad weather, illnesses, bad hunting seasons and quarrels. The drum dance was for the East Greenlandian Inuits their main entertainment. Both men and women could perform a drum dance. It had developed into a way for the East Greenlandian people to, in certain situations, function as a kind of 'administration of justice' between men. During these challenged 'singing fights', the disputes and dissension could be settled so that opponents could end up being 'singing fight' friends. In this sense, singing had a neutralising effect and played an important role at the end of the nineteenth century when population numbers were diminishing because of murders and vendettas (Jørgensen, 1979, p. 28).

In the old days, big feasts were held every autumn for the soul of the whale and these feasts were always opened with new songs which were made up only by men.

The spirits had to be called with new songs and 'fresh words'. Old and much used songs should never be repeated when the Inuit people sang and danced to celebrate the biggest hunting animal, the whale. An old Inuit explains that the custom was while the men were making up the words for the hymns, all lamps should be turned off. Nothing should disturb them and during this great big silence they would sit in the darkness and think, all men both young and old, even the smallest boys if they were just big enough to speak. This silence was called 'Qarrtsiluni' which means 'while waiting for something to burst' (Jørgensen, 1979, p. 59).

The Inuit believed that songs were 'born' in silence and if the songmakers had beautiful thoughts then the songs would be created in the minds of people and rise from the depths of the sea like a bubble which searches for air to burst. That was the way holy songs were meant to be created (Jørgenson, 1979, p. 60).

"My breath - this is what I call this song for it is just as necessary to me to sing it as it is to breath", and then again "I will sing this song, a song that is strong."

"Songs", he added, "are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like an ice floe sailing here and there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels sorrow, thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his blood come in gasps and his heart throb. Something, like an abatement in the weather, will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves - we got a new song" (Malaurie, 1979, p. 109).

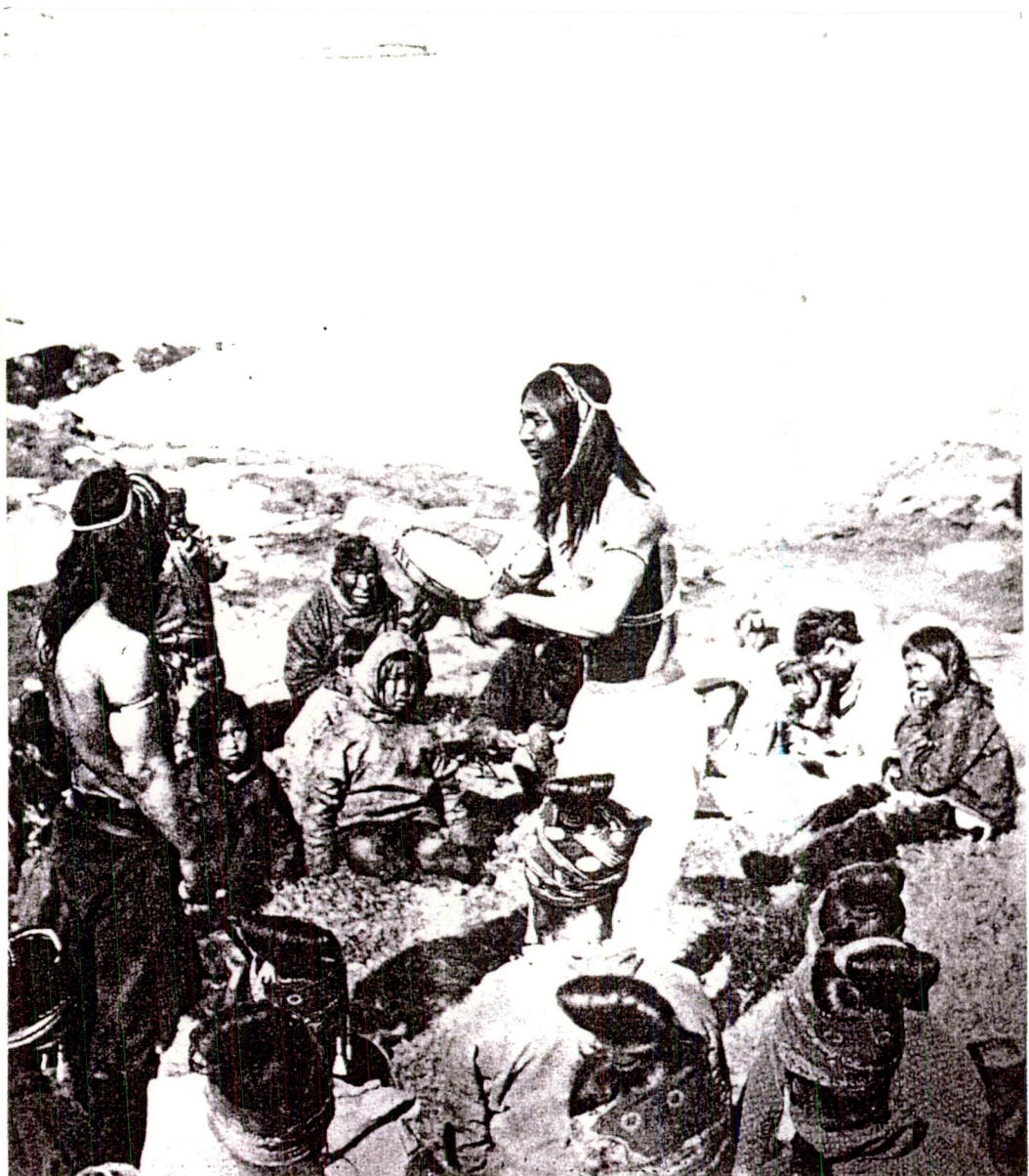


Figure 20
Drumdance, East Greenland beginning of the Century



Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C. 20492



Figure 21
Drumdance, East Greenland



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The Bladder-feast

The Bladder-feast was held as a memorial celebration for all the animals which had been hunted the previous year and the main reason for this was to secure good hunting seasons in the coming year. The aim of the masked dancers was to honour the inner spirit of the animal in a way that the animal would be so proud and flattered that it would 'give' many of its species to the Inuits when they were hunting them. The animals which were honoured at the Bladder-feast were mostly seals, reindeers, the white whale and sea-lions. The Inuits believed that the soul of the animal was inside the bladder. Therefore the bladder of a killed seal, reindeer or walrus was always kept until the following Bladder-feast. During any celebrations, secular or religious, the bladders were blown up like balloons, painted with patterns in strong colours and hung under the roof in the Kazgi. On the last day of the Bladder-feast, all the seal bladders were carried in a respectful way back to the sea and as they were floating away under the ice it was believed they would be reborn as seals and tell all the other seals how well they had been treated by the Inuits.

The Bladder-feast was celebrated all over the Arctic, but there was one local celebration just in Alaska which was the big 'Messenger feast'. This feast was characterised by a continuous beating of drums. The drums used during the Messenger feast had pointed pieces of black wood added to them on their edges, symbolising the peaks of mountains in Alaska. This feast was a big celebration of hunting animals, pure entertainment, trading and of course a chance for young men and women to meet.

Secular Masks

The main reason of using masks for non-religious reasons was to make guests feel comfortable, relaxed and to make them laugh. It was very normal to wear comical masks and to parody someone among themselves who would be disabled in some way. This was never considered as an insult but as a positive thing because laughing and the act of making fun was such a basic value among the Inuits, and a strong characteristic of Inuit culture.

The Accomplishment of the Masks

All masks were made from light driftwood. South of Norton Sound, the masks were always painted in many different kinds of materials but further south they were just wiped with graphite or not painted at all, except for red colour on the lips and the nostrils. The masks from King Island were painted with many colours, dots and geometrical patterns. Some very old masks from Point Hope are decorated with red and black patterns on the cheeks, jaw and around the eyes. The Inuits used natural colour pigments which were soft, subtle and worked with the form of the mask. These colour pigments were easy to apply, because they were absorbed into the wood beautifully in a way that commercial paint would not have been and that is why mask-makers rejected commercial paint. The colour pigments were found in their surroundings. The basic colours could be found everywhere - black, red, white, blue, green and the natural colour of the wood. The red colour was made from ochre (found in the ground) and alder tree bark soaked in urine. Black came from ashes, graphite (and 'gunpowder' in later years); white from ballclay (which is a very white

clay) and blue they got from copper oxide found in rock exposures and which was easily crushed by hand pestle and mortar.

The wood carvers would keep their colours in small beautiful, laboriously made boxes which were decorated with inlaid ivory or tiny carvings representing animals. The paint was applied to the mask with either a cloth or the hands. Dots and details were applied with the fingertips. While creating the mask, the maker would use any materials available which he found decorative such as beads, copper, brass, lead, iron, animal teeth from dogs, bleached intestine strips coloured red or black, willow tree bark and root, hair from reindeer and dogs, hedgehog quills, swan down, large feathers from eagles, ducks, seagulls, swallows, owls and small feathers from grouse and sea-swallows, etc. all those decorative objects attached to the mask also served as rattles while the dancer moved.

The most commonly used geometrical patterns painted on the masks from the Bering Sea were a thin rhombus and a cylinder. Animal teeth were used on human looking masks representing real teeth, rarely just as decoration.

Different kinds of little carved figures were attached to the masks. They were used as a kind of accessory whose purpose was to complement the body of the animal, human-being or spirit represented on a specific mask. These little figures could also represent whole figures of the Angakkog's protective spirits or of hunting or travel tools, such as a spear or kajak, which were supposed to be used during journeys to the

world of spirits. The small attachments could really represent anything which the shaman found important in interpreting his ideas.

The use of these attached figures was more widespread than the separate objects used during dances. Masks from Port Clarence and Point Hope often has^{re} little figures of birds, foxes and other animals on them. Those figures were made delicately with carefully carved facial and body features and were sometimes very realistic, such as a little walrus sitting in the beak of a big bird with a neck made from cloth so that it could move its head during the dancers' movements. (See figure 22).

An interesting example of a sea scorpion mask is the one showed in figure 23. Though a sea scorpion is flat, this fact was neglected and instead the face of the fish is seen from the front, so it is made broader and longer. In this way the mask becomes a piece of interpretative art. The mask is 19.5 cm high and is made from simple

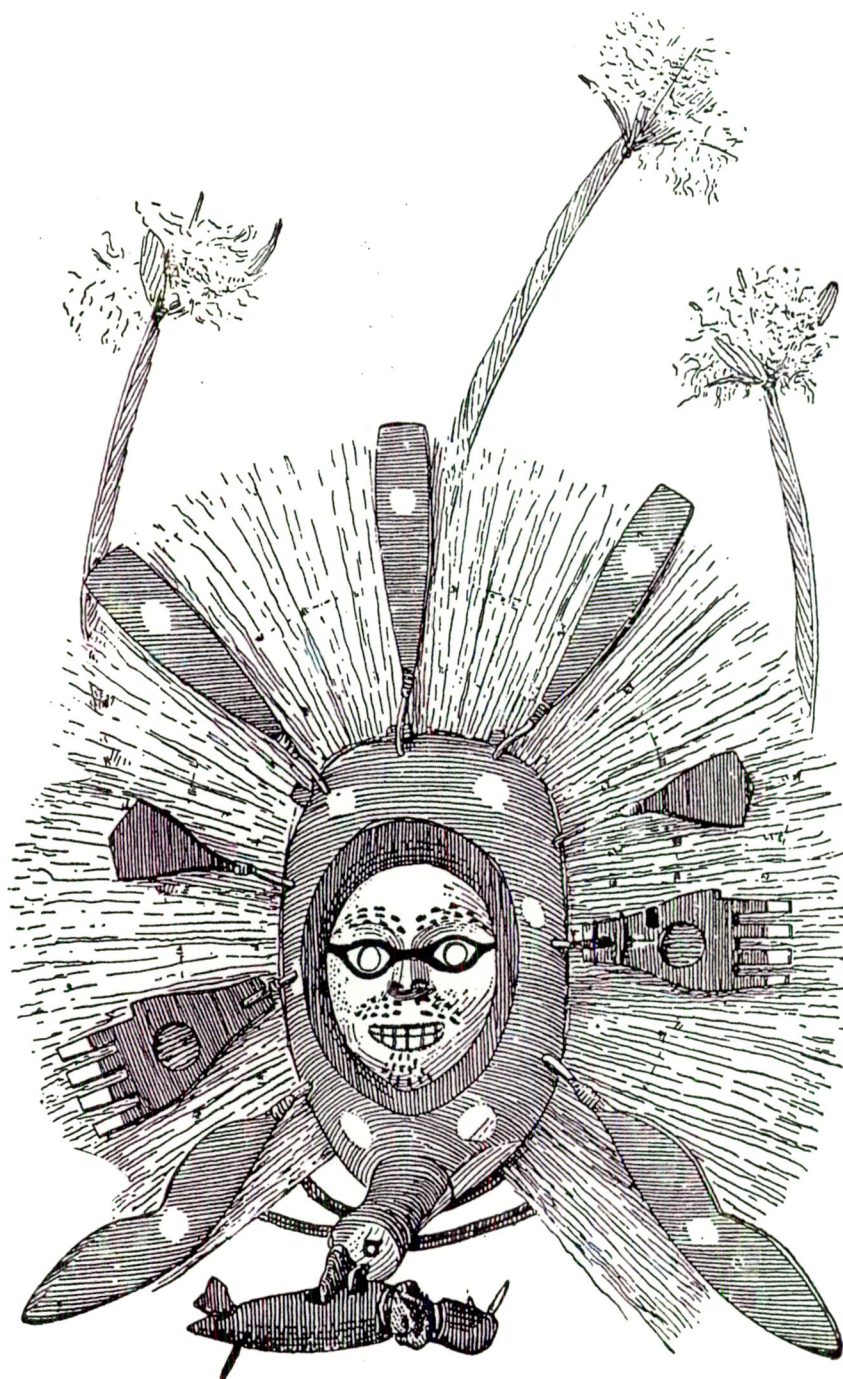


Figure 22
Mask with Walrus sitting in the Beak of a Bird



driftwood. The dots painted on it are blueblack and the edge around the mask and the lips are painted red. Wooden sticks are used as teeth. The round pupils have been cut out and the carefully made corners of the eyes have been pressed into the wood. A small wooden stick keeps each of the split feathers steady on the top of the mask and on top of them a mountain grouse's down has been added. On the back of the mask there is a red line painted around the eyes and mouth.

There are a lot of sea scorpions living in the low water of Norton Sound and in the old days, the Inuits used to make special hooks for fishing them. The Inuits in this area used to call the sea scorpions 'rain-makers' and believed that if a human being held the fish in his hands, then heavy rain would come.

The wolfmask showed in figure 24 is 20 cm long and not painted except for the forehead and the nose, which are red with blue and black dots. The nostrils and mouth are red. Originally it also had nine goose feathers decorating the top of its head. The mask was worn standing up so the wearer could look out through the eyes.

Wolfmasks were common all over Alaska and Greenland. Sometimes even wolfheads were used. Knud Rasmussen wrote about a wolfmask that belonged to an Angakkog, who by wearing it assumed the strengths of the wolf, its ability to run fast, its sense of smell and of course its most important characteristic, its cleverness in attacking other animals (Rasmussen, in Stahlschmidt, 1978, p. 226). The basic purpose of the mask was, through the mask, to ask the wolf to share with the Inuit its skills in hunting. The Inuits explain this by their belief that the shaman does not get

his power from the animal, but from a mystical 'power' which is in the air. This power is always near people but at the same time is so far away, that it can not be described. It is a power which exists in the air, in the earth and in the sea. Only the Angakkog knew about these powers because the Angakkog worked with his mind and thoughts to a degree that normal people would not.

In the mouth of the wolf there is an 'apagssuk' a seahorse (can not be seen very well on the illustration). The Angakkog wishes and asks that the Inuit will hunt with the same ease with which the wolf carries the seahorse in its mouth. The wolf and the eagle were the animals to be celebrated more than any others during Messenger feasts.

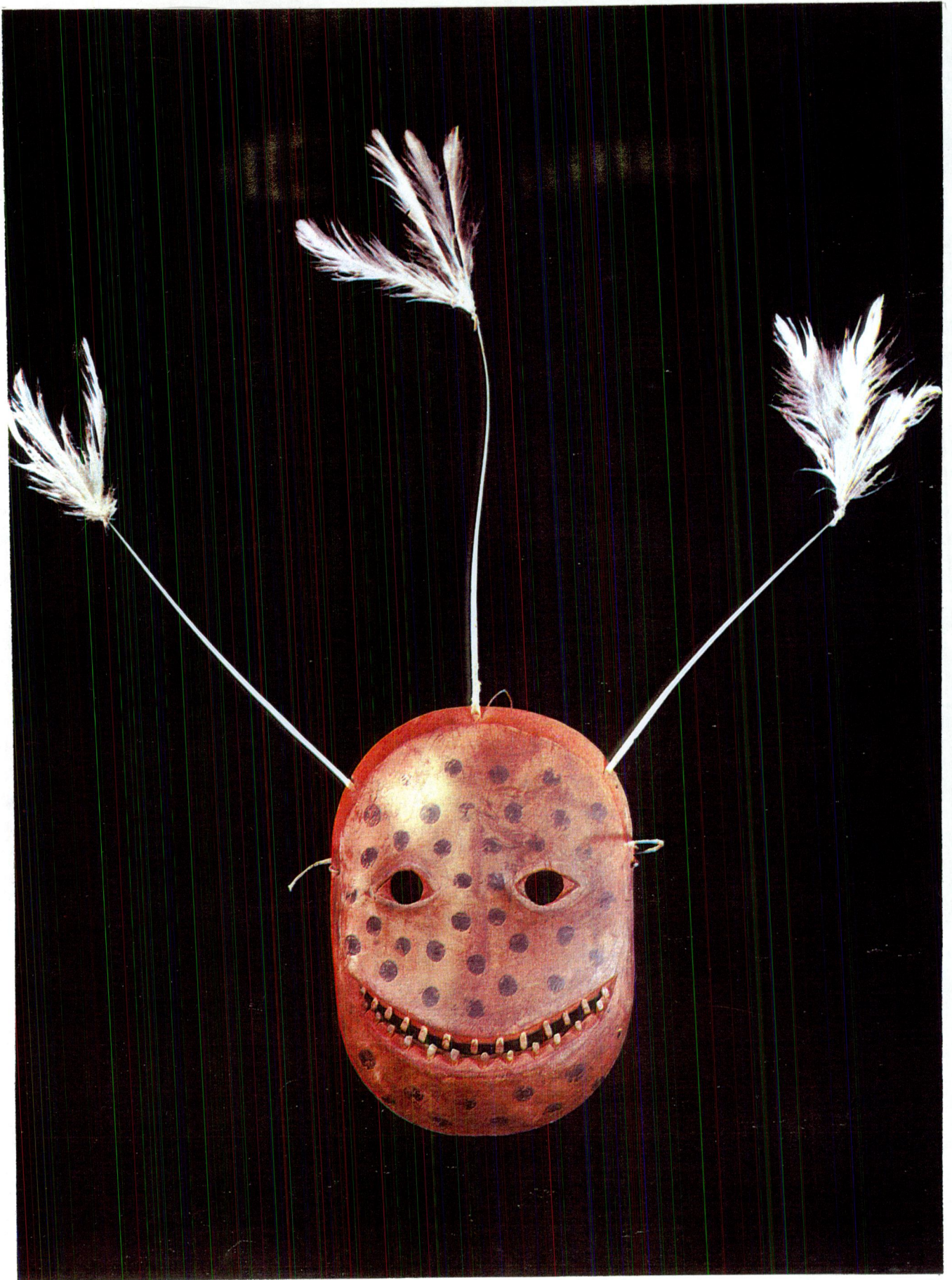


Figure 23
Sea-Scorpion Mask





Figure 24
Wolfmask from St. Michael, between 1890 and 1899





Figure 25
Wolfdance with Real Wolfheads, King Island, Alaska, 1924



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
1974

Fingermasks

These small fingermasks were only worn by women and only used locally in the area between the Yukon River and Nushagak (Fort Alexander). They were made in pairs and worn on the third and fourth finger of each hand. They showed either human or animal faces and had many geometric patterns on them. They could also be richly decorated with feathers and reindeer hair. Instead of wooden fingermasks women would sometimes wear rings of skin or feathers.

The widetooth mouth often found on fingermasks could represent an animal spirit. Sometimes the fingermasks were tiny copies of facemasks and were then worn during the same dances as the facemasks would be. Finally, they could represent an amusing variant showing smiling faces with toothless mouths. These were used in a kind of puppet show where the fingermasks would 'discuss' different important matters.

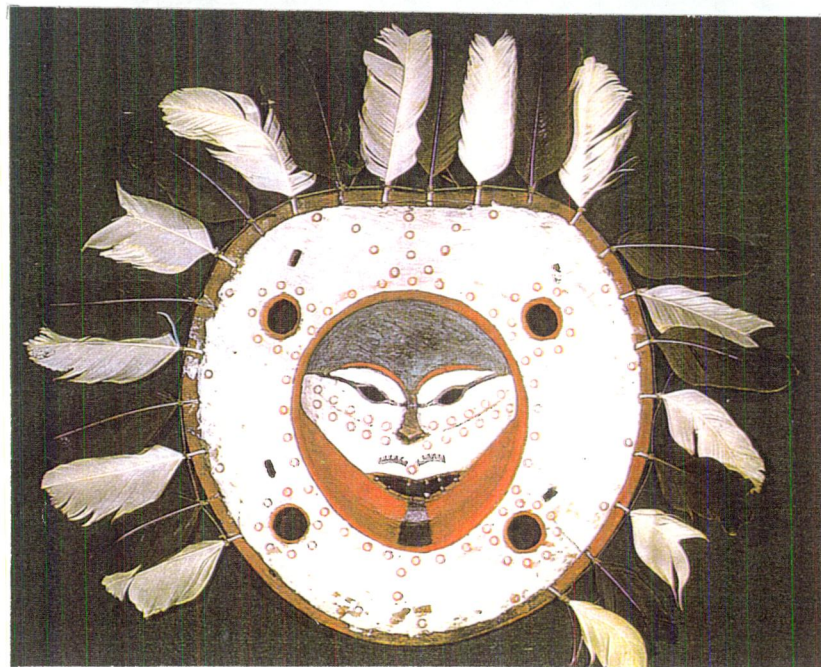


Figure 26
Paired Fingermarks, Miniatures of the Larger Mask used by Men during
Dances



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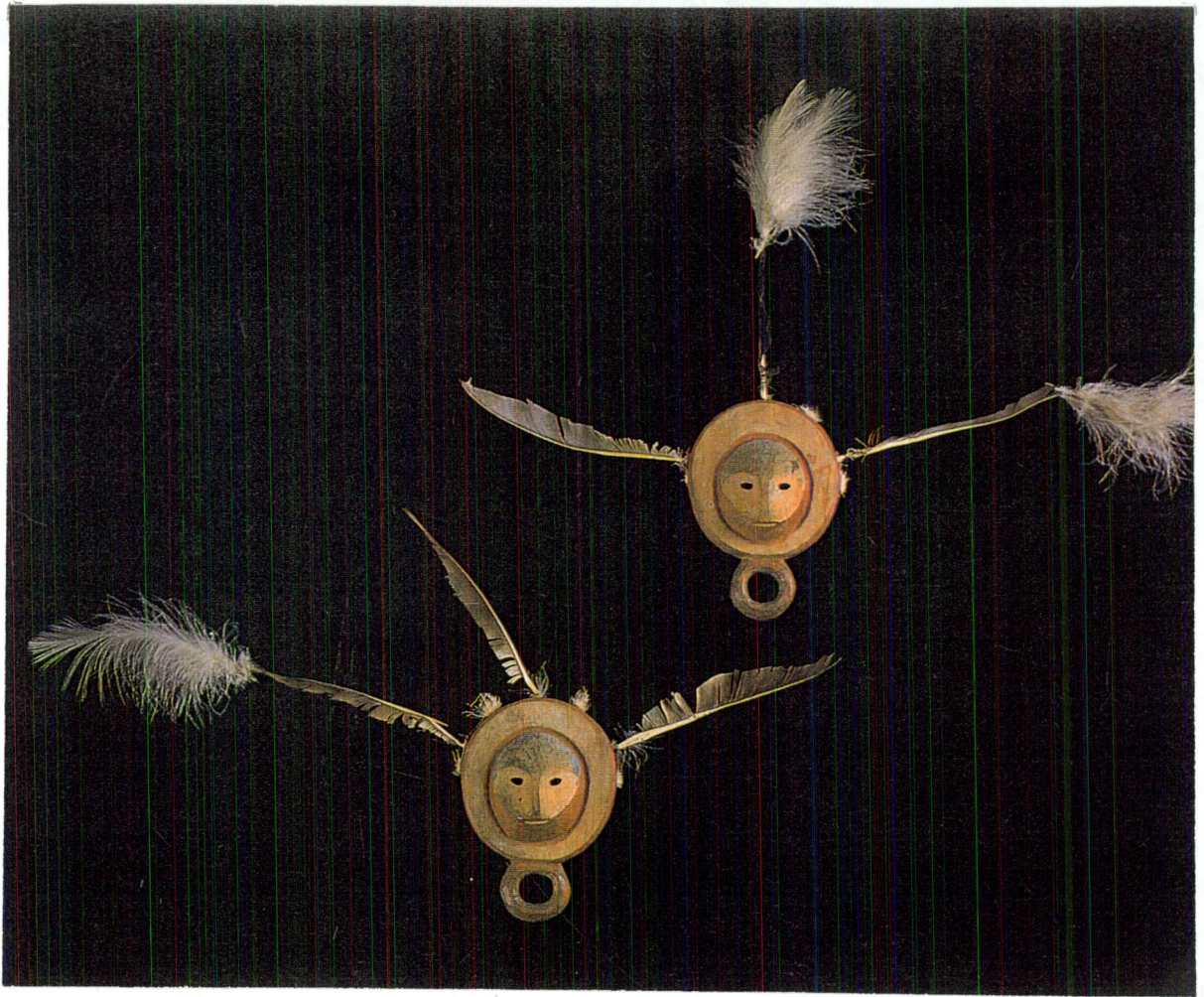


Figure 27
Finger masks, Pair of Finger masks supposedly depicting the Walrus Spirit



1997
The University of Michigan Library
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-1500

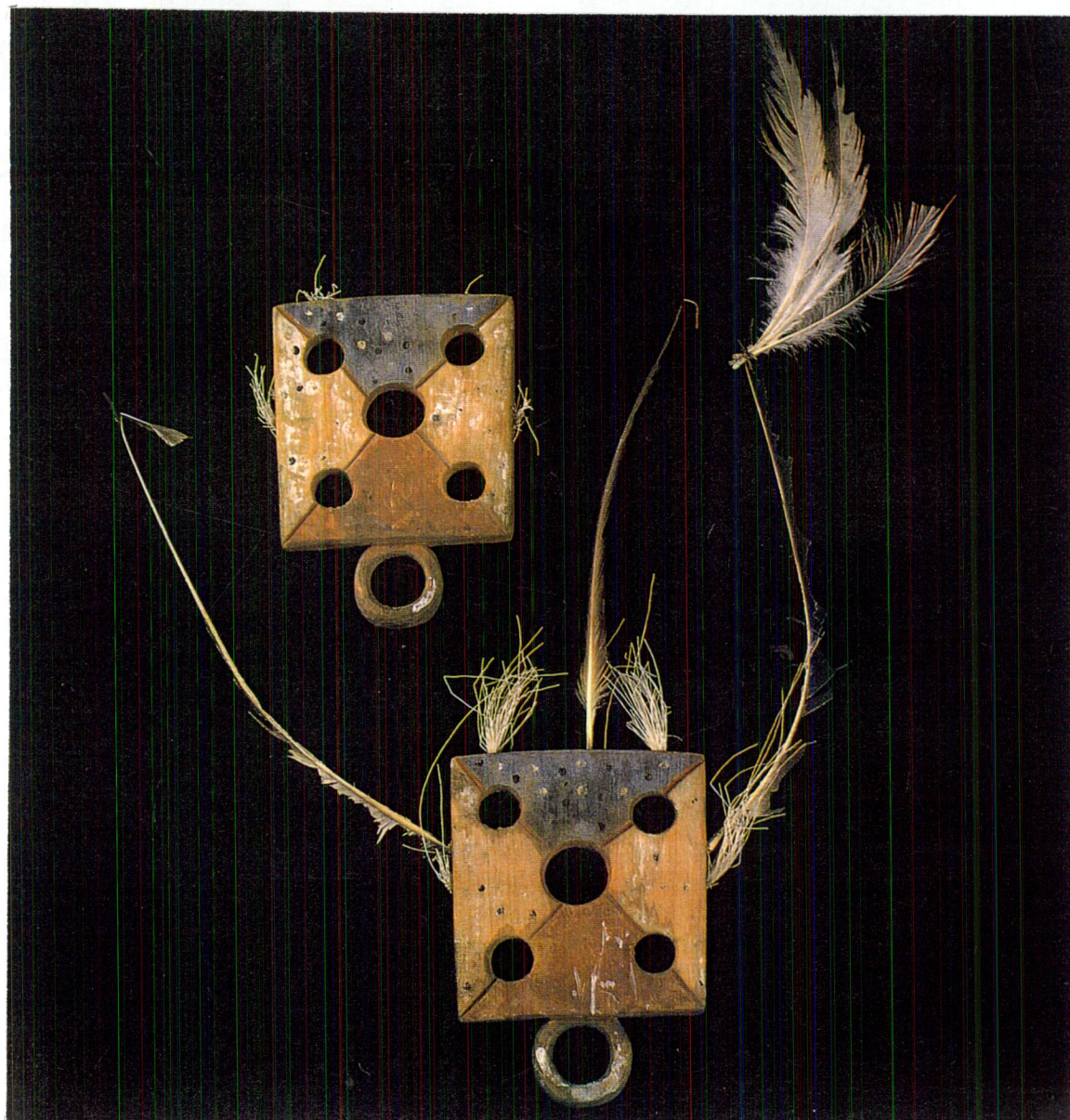


Figure 28
Fingermasks with five holes. The five holes in these paired Fingermasks recall numerous ritual acts such as pouring water at each corner and the centre of the square hole in the ice, before the bladders are sent away at the close of the Bladder-feast



Figure 37
The figure shows a cross-section of a lake or pond. The water is represented by a light blue area at the top. Below the water is a layer of sediment, shown in a darker blue. At the bottom is a layer of rock, shown in a light grey. The sediment layer is labeled 'Sediment' and the rock layer is labeled 'Rock'. The water level is indicated by a horizontal line. The sediment layer is shown to be thicker in some areas than in others. The rock layer is shown to be composed of different types of rock in different areas.

CHAPTER FIVE

ESKIMO MASKS IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF COPENHAGEN

*Up the stream
oft do I return
to my little song
and patiently I hum it
above fishing hole
in the ice
this simple song
I can keep on humming
I, who else too quickly
tire when fishing
up the stream*

(Ikinilik, Old Copper Eskimo, National Museum in Copenhagen).

In November 1996 I was so lucky to get the chance to visit the ethnographic collection, which is not on public display in the National Museum of Ireland. Though the museum does not have examples of ... Inuit masks, they do have some examples of Inuit hunting and fishing tools, clothes and a few carvings representing mostly seals. To visit the collection in store was an experience, to feel the intensity of the

things all packed in piles, stacks or in boxes; to have the freedom to search yourself to actually touch the pieces, feel their lightness or heaviness and study all the detail.

Over Christmas I went to see the collections of Eskimo art in the ethnographic collections on public display in the National Museum of Copenhagen. These collections also include a collection of masks that Knud Rasmussen brought back to Denmark from one of his many expeditions.

Unfortunately the masks were not displayed as well as they could have been. They were set too high behind glass, so you could not get close to the pieces and exposed with very dramatic lighting which made it difficult to see details, but still it was important for me to actually see the masks (in real and not just as reproductions) and to get a better idea of scale and colour. Furthermore, the rest of the collection was very interesting, with masterpieces of Inuit art. I was especially impressed by the many examples of kayaks and umikas (women boats) suspended from the roof of the museum.

In the following piece I will try to give an account of three of the five masks from Nuniak Island which were brought to Denmark at the beginning of this century and which now are on display in the National Museum of Copenhagen.

Figure 31 shows a round wooden mask, 0.20 m in diameter with a human face painted red and encircling the face is a raised bluish border. It has no mouth but a cut-out open space for a nose and very narrow eye slits. On top of the nose there is

placed a figure which is painted white with a red face, hands and feet. It holds in its left hand a red bucket and in its right hand a white dog, with a leash of sinew thread. Outside the blue raised border around the mask, there is a red painted ring and onto this ring have been attached (by using black feathers) many small carved wood objects. At the top, there is a blue eiderduck, its wings spread, with a white head and tail. Below the bird on the right side, there is a blue seal with a fish tail, a red human hand, a blue fish, a red fish, a red fish-like animal, a red human leg and the last feather on this side is missing a top figure. On the left side of the ring there is a warus with a red forebody and black rear-body, a fish painted red, one red human leg and a red walrus.

This mask represents the moon, the face being the face of the moon. The figure in the middle is the 'moon-man' with his water bucket and his dog. The moon-man was called 'Tunkimtarria' and this mask was probably used by the Angakkog during his trip to the moon with the purpose of seeking assistance in obtaining more hunting animals, namely the ones shown around the ring. The mask is very beautifully made, a strong piece of art and my favorite of the five masks.

A quite similar mask to the 'moonmask' is the one in figure 32. This mask is also made of wood, circular and the circumference of the face is 0.205 m in diameter. It shows a human face painted white, around which there is a red raised border.

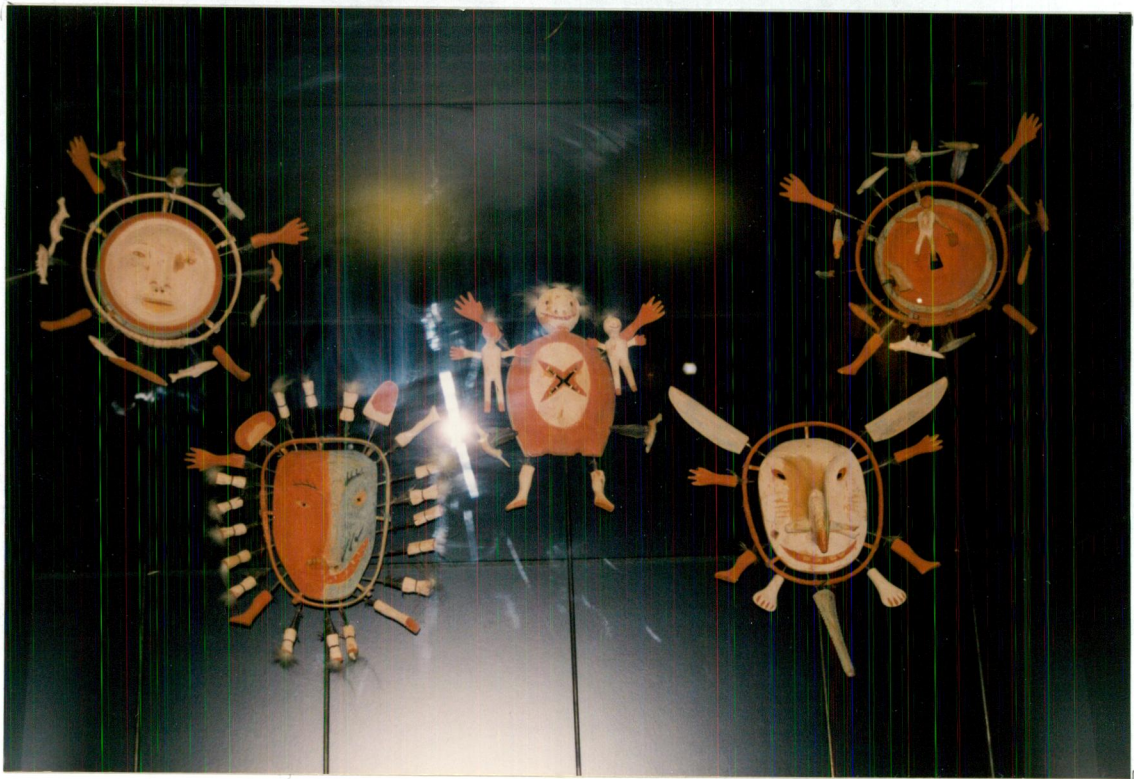
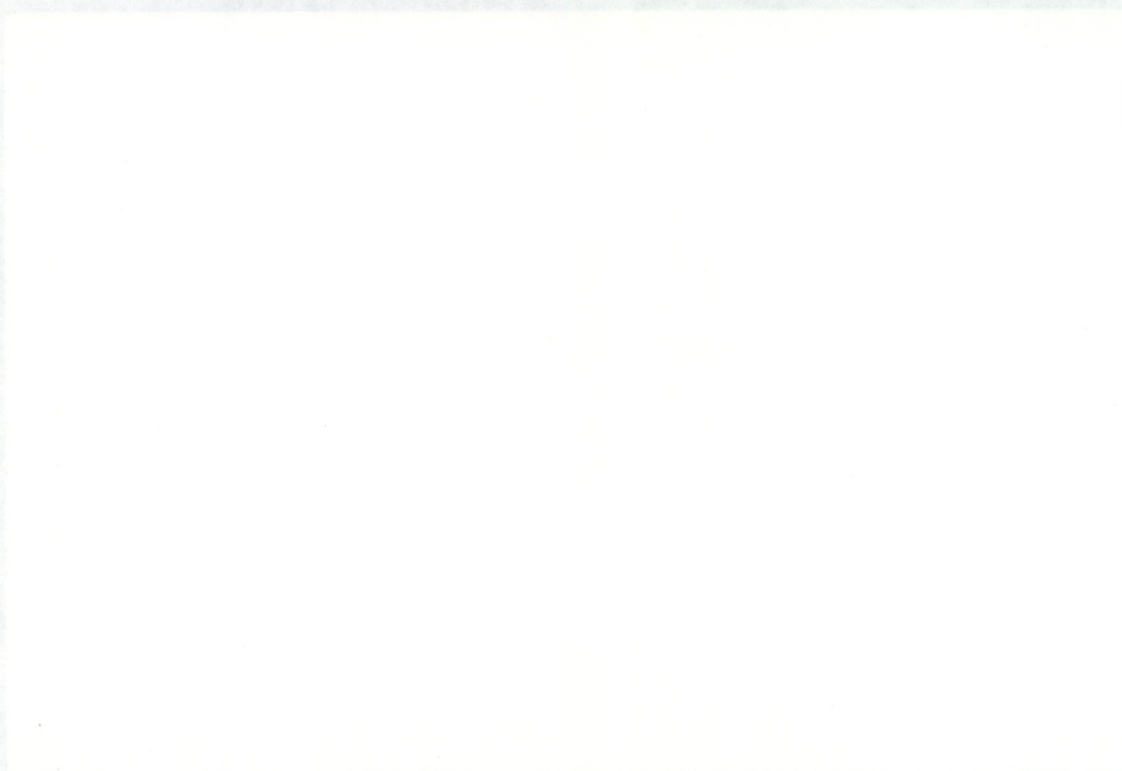


Figure 30
Photograph of the Selection of Masks in the National Museum of Copenhagen



Source: *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1964, 190:1000-1001.



Figure 31
The Moon Man



Figure 11
The Moon March

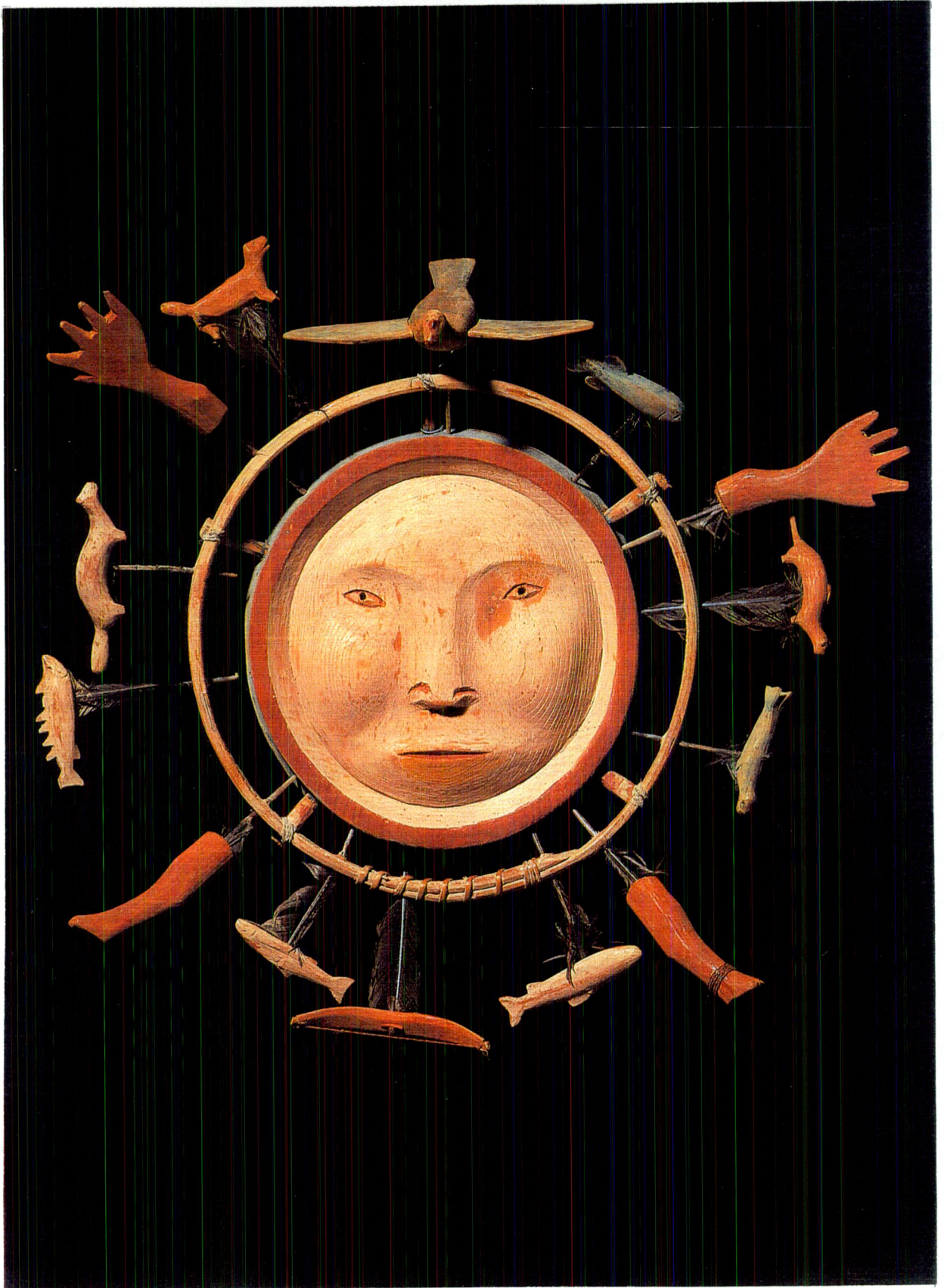


Figure 32
The Sun encircled by the Species of Fish and Animals Hunted during Summer

The sides of the mask are blue and red and on the reverse the mask is red. Around the face is a white ring and on to it have been placed with black feathers many little figures: an eiderduck, a blackfish, a white land otter, a spotted seal, a salmon, red human hands and legs, a bow and a marten. This mask had a mouth-holder on the reverse (now broken). It represents the sun and was made for the same purpose as the moonmask was. The representative of the sun was called 'Pooklunik' but to get assistance from him was considered very difficult, much more so than getting assistance from the moon-man, because of the sun's great distance from the earth.

The third mask I would like to describe is the one in figure 33. It depicts a human figure whose oval body and head are carved out of one piece of wood. The face is white with carved holes for nostrils and eyes. It has a broad red mouth and white teeth, white woollike hair and the body itself is red with an oval white painted belly in the middle, on which there is carved an X, with red edges and white teethlike sticks. The arms are red and the legs painted white with red footsoles. On the sides of the mask two smaller human figures have been attached with outstretched arms. The figure on the left is female with white hair, red hands and feet while the male figure on the right has hands, feet and face painted red. Beneath each figure there are two blue figures looking like ermines.

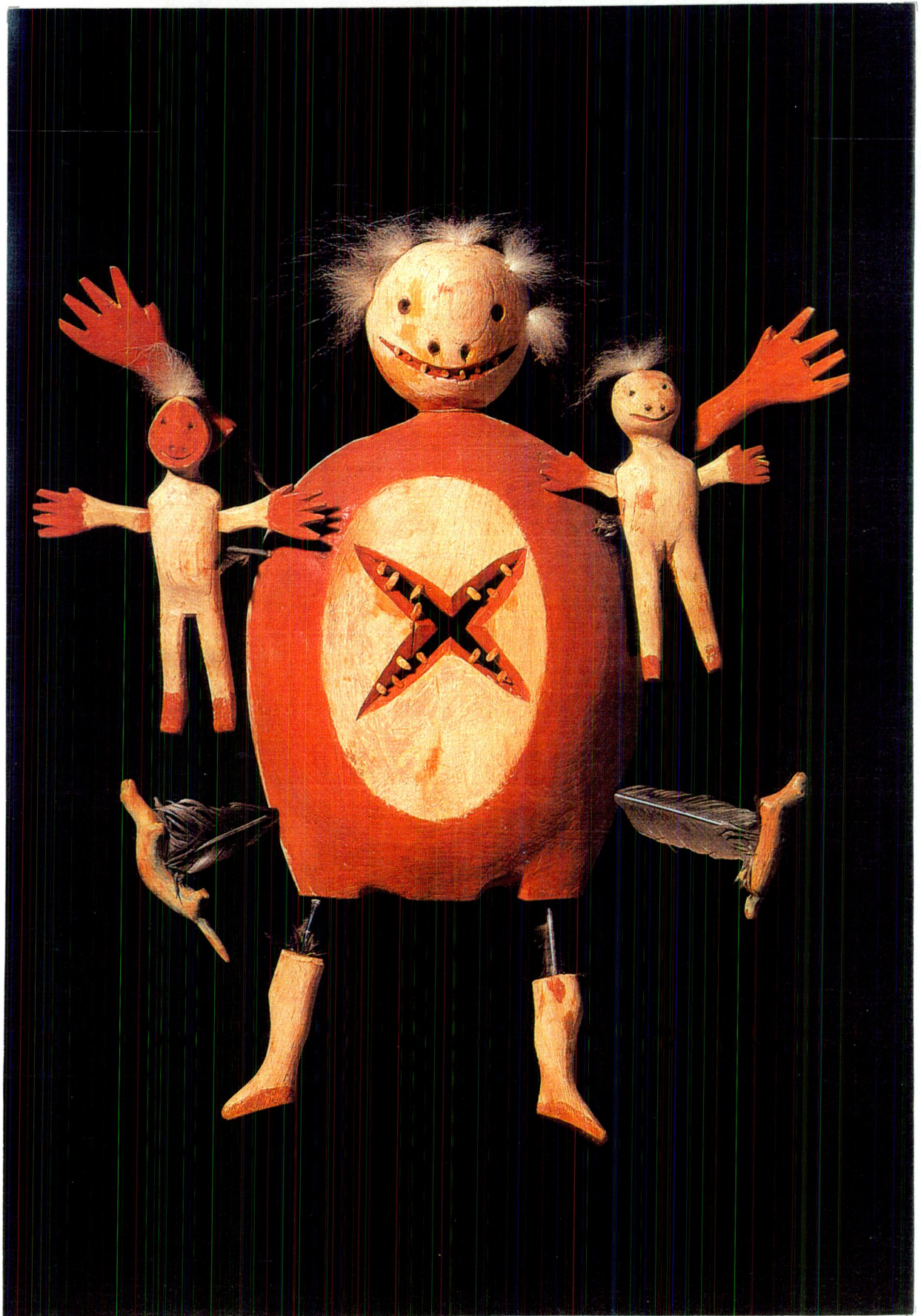


Figure 33
Mask with 'Spirit Helpers' used at the Messenger Feast



This mask has been interpreted by Hammerich (Hammerich in Sonne, 1988, p. 211) as being an ogre-like creature with two mouths crossed on the chest. Maybe the two human figures on each side represent the moon and the sun. Or the main figure could be an ocean being and the two small human figures his spirit helpers. A third interpretation of the masks meaning is, that it could very possibly represent an old Inuit legend which is about a boy, who had a hole in one of his kamiks. His mother cut out the piece with the hole in it, threw it aside and mended the kamik. As the boy grew up, one day he went out for a seal hunt and in front of him he saw a spirit walking towards him with a crosswise double mouth in its belly. The young man quickly shot an arrow towards the spirit and hit it in its crosslike double mouth. The spirit fell dead on the ground and when he went near to see, he saw that it was the old piece of sole, with a hole in it, that his mother had thrown away when he was a boy (Christensen, 1985, p. 138).

Therefore the Inuits, when mending objects of skin as footwear or boats for example, never throw away a discarded piece but always put it into the ground away from human habitation!

"The country, which has no legends is doomed to die from cold...."

(Poulsen, 1993, p. 63).

EPILOGUE

The last hundred years have brought the Inuits from the Stone Age into the Space Age. During this relatively short period of time, both their culture and tradition have been threatened and have almost died out. Some parts of the Arctic have been recognised as belonging to the Inuits, like Greenland, which achieved self-government and independence from Denmark in 1979. However, the civilised world still refuses to recognise the territory of Alaska, which the Inuits have inhabited for several thousand years as theirs. The Inuits are still subject to laws and customs alien from those they have evolved themselves over this vast time.

In spite of these facts, a few Inuits have managed to maintain a traditional life living in small settlements, surviving mostly by seal hunting. Unfortunately this very last remnant of their culture is now even more threatened than ever, not by foreign intruders, missionaries, fur hunters, etc. as in the past, but by an even bigger enemy - pollution. The very basis of Inuit life, namely the wealth of hunting animals, will eventually disappear. Hunting will stop in the next twenty or so years because by that time the Arctic sea will probably be so polluted that the animals that can survive will not be suitable for human food (Poulsen, 1993, p. 20).

One more great culture will disappear for ever and the world will be left even more homogenous.



Figure 34
'Umeerinneq' East Greenland, 1905



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