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REPORT

OF THE

CRUISE OF THE REVENUE MARINE STEAMER

CORWIN

IN THE

ARCTIC OCEAN

IN

THE YEAR 1884.

BY

CAPT. M. A. HEALY, U. S. R. M.,

COMMANDER.



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EXPLORATION OF THE KOWAK RIVER, ALASKA.

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ETHNOLOGICAL NOTES.

BY

THIRD LIEUT. J. C. CANTWELL,  
U. S. Revenue Marine.

1884.

(ILLUSTRATED WITH NINE PHOTOGRAPHS AND FIVE PLATES.)

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*Ivory dipper.*—Carved from fossil ivory, which is common on the Kowak and Selawik Rivers. Used in dipping up water, bailing out boats, etc.

*Wooden spoons.*—I saw one specimen of a wooden spoon evidently made in imitation of a metal table-spoon which had been seen by the maker on the coast.

*Forks.*—I saw no forks, but shortly after our advent into the river country one of the natives accompanying our party made a very good imitation of our metal ones, of bone with a wooden handle. This he used, much to the amusement of himself and the other natives of the party.

*Fire.*—Among these natives the flint and steel will probably never be supplanted by the more modern invention of matches, although the latter are used to some extent during the summer season by the coast natives and others who visit the whale-ships. They are not considered as desirable for their uses as the more compact flint and steel. Several plants indigenous to the region furnish an abundant and easily obtained supply of material to make tinder. Among the natives of the interior there are a few old people who have retained the art of making fire by the use of the fire-drill, but the younger generation apparently do not practice it.

*Lamp.*—Shallow bowl carved from soap-stone. Used for heating and lighting the winter houses and for cooking. There are several sizes, but the ones most commonly seen are about seven inches long and four and one-half inches wide, outside measurement. The space carved out is oblong in shape, and there is a margin of about an inch between this space and the edge of the lamp. In use, the hollow space is filled with oil, and moss is placed around the margin to serve as a wick. The lamp produces a dense smoke, but throws out considerable heat.

*Oil bags.*—For holding oil used in lamp and in food. They are made of the entire skin of the hair-seal. A small aperture is left, through which the oil is poured when wanted. This is closed by a cord of deer skin or sinew.

*Stone axes.*—Two specimens of stone axes were seen, one of which was *jade*, and the other a dark brown stone of slaty nature. Neither was hafted. They were exhibited as curiosities with a view to sale to our party. On the lower river I saw one stone adz hafted and in use. The blade was four inches long by two wide, wedge-shaped, and had been chipped to its present shape. The handle was a short piece of wood, to the end of which the adz was lashed with a rawhide thong.

#### PERSONAL ADORNMENT.

The hideous custom so prevalent among the males of the coast Eskimo of wearing "labrets," disks or knobs of stone or glass, in incisions made in the lower lip is rare among the natives of the interior. A few of the old men had incisions in their lips; but either they were too poor to have them or the custom is dying out, for I saw very few labrets on the Kowak River. Small pieces of beautifully polished jade, of a light green color, were seen on several occasions and are greatly prized by the owners. They are worn as pendants on strings around the neck. As a mark of special favor one of our native guides, who was the fortunate owner of one of these charms, allowed me to wear it on my watch guard for a while, but I could not induce him to sell it.

The women tattoo the chin with three vertical lines on arriving at the age of puberty and increase the number of lines after marriage. I observed on several occasions women whose skins were marked with a broad mark of soot under each eye, but I could not ascertain whether this was for ornament or the observance of some custom in regard to their superstitious belief. All I could learn from André on this subject was that they marked themselves in this manner at certain times because "they liked to." Ear-rings made of bright-colored beads strung on sinew are common with the women, and most of the younger girls have their hair neatly braided and the ends wrapped with strings of small beads. I observed many of the women with finger-rings made of brass or iron, and a few with bracelets made of a piece of rawhide on which was strung a large bead, a brass button, or a round piece of ivory. The ornamentation of the clothing is not so elaborate as that of some of the coast tribes, and rarely shows anything more than a narrow fringe of fur around the edge of the "parka."

All these tribes are universally addicted to the use of tobacco, and the pipe is always an article upon which considerable work in the way of ornament is spent. There were seen so many

PLATE V.—LABRETS AND ARTICLES OF PERSONAL ADORNMENT, NATIVES OF NORTHWESTERN ALASKA.

1. Stone "plug" labret, common, natural size.
2. Jade "plug" labret, rare, natural size.
3. Ivory and colored glass labret, rare, natural size.
4. Bracelet (woman's) with button and glass bead, natural size.
5. Ornament for the nose.
6. Ear-rings, different-colored glass beads.
7. Inlaid ivory and whalebone seal, natural size.
8. Carved ivory handle.

