UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

Module 3
Coastal Dwellers: Peoples of the Sea

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Key Terms and Concepts

- Arctic
- prehistory of the Arctic
- ethnography of the Arctic

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

The objective of this module is to introduce the student to the major ecozones of the Arctic and the coastal regions of the circumpolar world. The module will describe the environment, flora and fauna, and the principal geographic and geological features of the Arctic. Having reviewed the physical geography and natural environment, this module will review the archaeology of the region in order to better understand the unique human adaptations to the Arctic and the northern coasts of the Arctic Ocean. Finally, the module will review the major indigenous populations that peopled the Arctic prior to contact and will present their traditional cultures, subsistence methods, and religious beliefs.

Upon completion of this module you should be able to

1. identify the area considered the Arctic, and describe the environmental features that determine its extensions on a map of the northern hemisphere.

2. identify several misconceptions of the Arctic and give examples to illustrate its true nature.

3. given a map of a region of the Arctic, identify its ecozones and describe their geographic and ecological features.

4. describe the common features and resources of the coastal regions.

5. describe the locations and history of human adaptation to living on the coastal region of the Arctic before the “Little Ice Age.”

6. describe the locations, names, and history of various peoples of the Arctic after the "Little Ice Age" and their common and distinguishing adaptations to living on the coastal regions.

7. describe the structure of the society, the belief systems, the division of labour and other roles, traditional rites of passage, and the technologies attributed to a people of a region of the Arctic.

Reading Assignments

The course instructor will assign readings from the required textbook by Freeman (2000), *Endangered Peoples of the Arctic*.

Course readings will be reviewed to examine the effects in different regions of the North circumpolar world of contact and of indigenous-newcomer relations.

Overview

This module comprises three parts:

- The Natural Environment: A Review of the Major Environmental Zones of the Arctic Region
- Peoples of the Coast: General Considerations and Archaeological Record
- The Coastal Peoples: The Main Populations of the Arctic and Coastal Regions of the Circumpolar North

Lecture

The Natural Environment: A Review of the Major Environmental Zones of the Arctic Region

The Arctic Environment: Temperature and Climate

Temperature and climate are central to the lives of all peoples, but perhaps nowhere is this truer than in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. As reviewed in earlier modules, the expansion of humans into the North required new cultural adaptations, notably the use of bone needles to sew clothing that would allow humans to work in the cold. Nonetheless, southerners have many misconceptions that are unfounded.

Though the image is often portrayed as a frozen wasteland, this is not accurate. The region is not as cold as many southerners believe, and it is quite rich in mammals, as we will review. In fact, the Arctic is not the coldest region of the world, and this is owing to the fact that the Arctic Ocean, like any other large body of water, is a heat sink: given the greater mass of water as opposed to air, lakes and oceans absorb heat and radiate it when the surrounding air is cooler than the water. This is true even of the Arctic Ocean when it is covered by ice: the Arctic Ocean will in the winter radiate heat through two metres of ice. Even when it is –45°C, the ocean will radiate more than 15 degrees of heat. This radiating heat warms the air on the ice and, consequently, temperatures on the ice can be 22 degrees warmer than a few kilometres inland. Not only is life on the Arctic ice relatively warm, the air is quite dry, making the cold much more bearable. For all of these reasons, the coldest temperatures are not in the Arctic per se, but in the Subarctic: the coldest recorded temperatures are in the Sakha Republic, where temperatures will drop to below –70°C. The same is true in Canada: the coldest temperatures will be in the interior, in central Yukon for example, as opposed to the coasts of the Arctic Ocean.

These variations in temperature certainly shaped subsistence and habitation patterns: traditionally, the Arctic peoples spent the winter months living in igloos (the traditional snow and ice house), thus maximizing on the heat radiating upwards through the ice. It is clear that the Thule abandoned their semi-subterranean houses in a period of global cooling in favour of living on the ice. In the classic Thule period—when global temperatures were much warmer—the houses from this period are relatively large, with deep pits lined with boulders, sod, and whalebone and roofed with whale rib and jaw frameworks covered with skin and sod. These houses had a long tunnel from the outside that opened onto a paved floor. The houses often had sleeping platforms raised above the floor to retain heat. The basic structure of the Thule house is not very different from the igloos located on the Arctic ice: the igloo features snow benches covered with hides, which served as sleeping platforms, with long tunnels to prevent the loss of heat, and both would have been heated by oil lamps. However, the Thule may have borrowed the concept of a snow house from the Dorset, who, as discussed in the previous lecture, inhabited the central and eastern Arctic before the arrival of the Thule. The relative paucity of Dorset habitation sites and their more ephemeral nature, compared to the thick-walled permanent houses of the classic Thule with their thick middens—that is, piles of refuse containing bones and other materials—and subterranean pits, suggest that the Dorset spent some of the year on the ice. This would certainly have been practical, given the Dorset environment: living in a much colder period, the Dorset, like the later Inuit, would have benefited from the relative warmth of living on the ocean ice as opposed to living on the shoreline.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Inuit traditionally live in igloos does not mean that there is a lot of snow in the Arctic. The simple fact is that it snows very little in the Arctic: annual precipitation will range from a low of 2 centimetres to a

maximum of 38 centimetres, and half of that annual precipitation will fall in the short summer months. Quite often, areas will be swept clean of snow, but Arctic winds will compact the little snow that falls to the consistency of Styrofoam. It is the existence of this compacted snow—as opposed to the quantity of snow—that allowed the Inuit to use snow as a building material.

Another possible misconception of the Arctic is that it is a desert, with few resources. Though the tundra does not support a diverse array of plants and animals, the Arctic Ocean is rich in resources. It has been estimated that in the eastern Arctic, nearly 75 per cent of the food supply came from hunting on sea ice. This provided more food than the interior caribou hunts or the open-water hunting of seal and walrus in the summer. The move from land to living in igloos on the ice of the Arctic Ocean during the winter months allowed the Inuit in the central and eastern Arctic to benefit from the warmer temperatures on the ice, but equally to be closer to their primary food resource: seals. This was the case with the Copper (Killinirmiut) and Netsilik (Natsilingmiut) Inuit who lived in regions of the Arctic where whale hunting was no longer possible. In the central Arctic, seal was hunted through the seal's breathing hole in the ice, on the ice edge in the spring and from kayaks in the summer. The subsistence pattern in the central Arctic after the decline of the classic Thule period, with its focus on seals, was different from both the earlier period (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) and the hunting practices in Alaska, where whales continued to be hunted.

Though the Arctic is considered as one zone, there are three distinct ecozones in Canada alone.

Student Activity

In the Subarctic area nearest you,

1. what are some common misconceptions about its climate?

2. have average temperatures turned warmer or colder in the last 1,000 years? in the last 100 years?

Arctic Cordillera Ecozone

Other than the Rocky Mountains system, the Arctic Cordillera contains the only major mountainous environment in the Arctic.[1] It occupies eastern Baffin and Devon islands and most of Quttinirpaaq (Ellesmere) and Bylot islands. The highest parts are strikingly crowned by ice caps and multiple glaciers. The climate is very cold and arid. Mean daily January temperatures range from –25.5°C in the south to –35°C in the north; and mean daily July temperatures are about 5°C. Precipitation amounts to 200–300 mm, generally with higher totals on exposed eastern slopes and at lower latitudes.

Vegetation at upper elevations is largely absent, owing to the permanent ice and snow. The Arctic Cordillera ecozone is largely devoid of terrestrial mammals, although polar bears are common in coastal areas. Representative birds in the warmer coastal margins include northern fulmar, ringed plover, hoary redpoll, and snow bunting. Walrus; bearded, harbor, ringed, and harp seals; narwhal; and beluga and killer whale typify the marine environment.

Northern Arctic Ecozone

The Northern Arctic ecozone extends over most of the non-mountainous areas of the Arctic islands as well as portions of northeastern Keewatin District and northern Quebec. Physically, the western portion consists mostly of lowland plains covered with glacial moraine. East of a longitudinal line that runs between Prince of Wales and Somerset islands, the terrain tends to be uplands, consisting of plateaus and rocky hills. The climate is very dry and cold. The annual precipitation ranges from 100 to 200 mm. Mean daily January temperatures range from –30 to –35°C in the long winters; and the mean daily July temperatures are between 5 and 10°C in the short summers.

Herb- and lichen-dominated communities constitute the main vegetation cover. Mammals of the Northern Arctic ecozone include Peary and barren ground caribou, muskox, wolf, Arctic fox, polar bear, Arctic hare, and brown and collared lemming. Representative birds include the red-throated loon, brant, oldsquaw, gyrfalcon, willow and rock ptarmigan, and snowy owl. In the marine environment, typical species include walrus; bearded, harp, and harbor seals; beluga; and narwhal.

Source: Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Report (1996)

Fig. 3.1 Physical-Geographical Regions Classifications

Southern Arctic Ecozone

[1] This section on Canadian ecozones is drawn from Environment Canada (2003), http://www.ec.gc.ca/soer-ree/English/Framework/NarDesc/canada_e.cfm.

The land portion of the Southern Arctic ecozone is split by Hudson Bay into east and west portions. Hudson Bay is included within this ecozone as a marine environment. The larger land portion covers the mainland of the Northwest Territories; the smaller eastern segment bridges northern Quebec and Labrador. The terrain consists largely of strongly rolling lowland plains. Much of the Southern Arctic ecozone is mantled by glacial moraines. The climate is typically Arctic with long, cold winters and short, cool summers. Mean daily July temperatures tend to be cool, about 10°C. Winter temperatures are highly variable, but the mean daily January temperature tends to be about –30°C. The average precipitation in the Arctic ranges between 200 and 400 mm per year (including both rain and snow). The snowfall tapers off as you move North in the Canadian High Arctic.

This ecozone represents a major area of vegetation transition and contains the major shrub lands in the tundra. Typical shrubs include dwarf birch, willows and heath species; these are commonly mixed with various herbs and lichens. Characteristic mammals of the Southern Arctic ecozone include moose, muskox, wolf, Arctic fox, grizzly and polar bears, and Arctic hare. The area includes the major summer and calving grounds of two of the largest caribou herds. The area is also a major breeding and nesting ground for a variety of birds. Representative species include the yellow-billed, Arctic, and red-throated loons; whistling swan; snow goose; oldsquaw; gyrfalcon; willow and rock ptarmigan; northern phalorope; parasitic jaeger; snowy owl; hoary redpoll; and snow bunting. The marine environment includes different species of seal and whale.

Greenland

Close to 80 per cent of the surface of the island of Greenland is covered by a glacier. Coastal mountains to the east and the west border the glacier, which pushes out to the ocean at several locations, calving icebergs that float into the Atlantic Ocean. Long, deep fjords protrude into Greenland's ice-free coastal areas. The coastal ecozone of Greenland is marked by tundra. The vegetation consists of sedge, cotton grass, and lichen. As is typical of tundra, the limited ice-free areas are almost totally devoid of trees, although some dwarfed birch, willow, and alder scrub do manage to grow. Seven species of land mammals—polar bear, muskox, reindeer, Arctic fox, snow hare, ermine, and lemming—are found on the island. As is true elsewhere in the Arctic, the waters surrounding Greenland are rich in a number of marine species, including whale and seal.

Northern Alaska

With the exception of the panhandle and surrounding territories, the coastal areas of Alaska are marked by tundra.[2] The interior territory of Alaska is composed of taiga, an extension of the boreal forest that spreads into the Yukon and across northern Canada. Southeast Alaska bears more in common with the Pacific northwest, as its ecosystems are coastal forest-meadows that are similar to the forests of coastal British Columbia. The North Slope of Alaska—the Arctic Tundra ecozone and the Brooks Range Tundra ecozone—is located to the north of the Brooks Range, a northern extension of the Rocky Mountains. In the Arctic Tundra ecozone, permafrost limits the growth of roots and keeps the water to the surface, resulting in extensive marshes and lakes. Dominant plant species include cottongrass-tussock, sedges, dwarf shrubs, lichens, mosses, dwarf birch, Labrador-tea, and cinquefoil. The Brooks Range Tundra ecozone is characterized by discontinuous vegetation over the rocky territory. In addition to the species found to the north in the Arctic Tundra ecozone, low mats of herbaceous and shrubby species predominate, such as dwarf Arctic birch, crowberry, Arctic willow, resin birch, and dwarf blueberry. This territory provides excellent forage for large herds of caribou. Other species of terrestrial mammals include brown and black bear, wolf, wolverine, caribou, and Dall sheep. Smaller mammals include marmot, red and Arctic fox, ground squirrel, lemming, and pika.

Western Alaska

Western Alaska comprises the Bering Tundra ecozones (northern and southern), the Seward Peninsula Tundra-Meadow ecozone, the Ahklun Mountains Tundra-Meadow ecozone, and the Aleutian Oceanic Meadow-Heath ecozone. Coastal tundra and transitional forests to the east characterize the Bering Tundra ecozones of Alaska. Vegetation includes: sedge and cotton grass in the coastal areas, and birch-willow-alder thickets in transition zones between beach and forest. The lower Yukon and Kuskokwim valleys are dominated by white spruce, mixed with cottonwood and balsam poplar, in tall, relatively dense stands, with a dense undergrowth of thin-leaf alder, willow, rose, dogwood, and various species of berry bushes. Alpine tundra and meadows and their respective transitional zones dominate the remaining territories. In the southern ecozones, the forested zones are home to a number of species that are common to the taiga/boreal forests, including black bear, red fox, lynx, beaver, moose, squirrel, weasel, mink, and marten. In the northern Bering Sea coast, the fauna is more characteristic of the Arctic and includes the occasional polar bear and Arctic fox. The Aleutian Islands were produced by volcanic activity, and the islands feature mountains rising above the ocean. There are no trees in the Aleutian Islands, and in the Alaskan Peninsula the boreal forest and coastal rainforest are spreading into the ecozone—an ongoing process that is changing the landscape. The dominant plants include dwarf willows at higher elevations

[2] This section on the Alaska ecozones is from the USDA Forest Service (2003), http://www.fs.fed.us/colorimagemap/ecoreg1_akprovinces.html.

and tall grasses, flowering plants, ferns, and thickets of low willow at lower elevations. The ecozone features much milder temperatures than the coastal tundra to the north. The Aleutian Islands do not have any terrestrial mammals larger than foxes, but the coasts are home to a variety of marine mammals, such as seals, sea lions, and sea otters.

Northeastern Russia

The coastal areas of the Chukchi Peninsula resemble their Alaskan counterparts to the east. The main ecozones include Polar Desert and Polar Tundra. The Polar Tundra features species of plants and animals that are found in the Bering Tundra ecozone of Alaska: sedges and cotton grass.

Student Activity

Explore the maps at http://maps.grida.no/uarctic/.

Peoples of the Coast: General Considerations and Archaeological Record

The phrases "peoples of the sea" and "peoples of the coast" refer to the two major ways of life that existed in the Arctic before contact.[3] The first was the focus on the sea: from the shores of the Russian Far East across the Arctic to Greenland, a group of related peoples turned to the sea for their livelihoods. Hunting on open waters using kayaks or umiaks, or hunting on or through the ice, the indigenous peoples of these northern regions relied upon the rich maritime fauna for food and fuel (blubber that was burned in oil lamps). Inland, groups focused on caribou in North America or on hunting or herding reindeer in the Russian Far East and the Russian North. For the coastal peoples, the main resources included whales, walruses, and seals, in addition to fish. The reliance on the sea produced a very distinctive material culture as represented by a variety of boats for travelling on the sea (kayaks and umiaks) and a number of instruments required for hunting marine mammals (harpoons and a variety of floats). In certain regions, as will be examined in this lecture, the abundance of resources allowed for large permanent settlements.

[3] The archaeological data in this module is drawn mainly from R. McGhee (1996), *Ancient Peoples of the Arctic*.

The Appearance of Coastal Adaptations in the Arctic

Between 3,000 and 4,000 years BP, truly coastal adaptations were emerging in Beringia. In Alaska and the neighbouring regions of Russia, the indigenous peoples were pursuing seals over ice and open water. Though the seals were supplemented with a number of other species—caribou, birds, and fish—the economy focused on the sea and its resources, and these traditions maintained themselves over time; the region is marked by continuity. The history and the archaeology of the Inuit, for example, can be traced back to the Thule, a tradition that emerged in the archaeological record roughly 1,000 years ago. The Thule, like the modern Inuit and Aleut, had a broad economic base that included the hunting of whales, caribou, and seals.

Seal Hunting

Two of the most abundant and widespread mammals in the Arctic waters are the ringed and bearded seals. The hunting of seals during the winter is founded upon one basic principle: seals are mammals that need to breathe air in order to survive. During the winter when the Arctic Ocean is covered by ice, seals spend all of their time under water, yet they maintain a series of breathing holes that allow them to breathe during the winter. As the ice begins to freeze, the seals keep a series of holes open throughout the winter: they dive down to catch the fish that they eat to survive and swim up to their breathing holes to breathe. Much of traditional Inuit subsistence in the central Arctic was founded upon this simple fact; and by using dogs to find breathing holes (by finding the telltale sent of the seal) and by having a group of hunters patiently waiting at breathing holes, seals could be harpooned and recovered even when the ice covered the Arctic Ocean. The seal would provide food, and its thick layer of fat (blubber) would provide both nourishment and heat, as the melted fat would be the primary fuel used to light and heat homes in the Arctic. This would have been the only practical option, as there would not have been any driftwood readily available to burn—the only other source of fuel in the Arctic prior to the modern period. The sealskins could also be prepared to form floats—buoyant “balloons” that could be used in hunting in the open water: a mammal harpooned from boats would be kept afloat by these sealskin floats and could then be towed to the shore.

Whaling

People relied on seals for their subsistence when and where the sea ice was frozen for much of the year. In periods of warmer global temperatures and along the southern coasts of Alaska, the open waters allowed for the hunting of whales. As is the case with seals, whales are mammals that require oxygen to survive. Though they can dive down to great depths, they must surface to breathe air; otherwise they would drown. Unlike seals, whales cannot rely on breathing holes for their survival, and when the ice freezes, they migrate to open ocean.

As noted, Thule expansion occurred at a time of global warming when the Arctic Ocean did not completely freeze over in the winter, as is now the case. In this much warmer period, the Thule hunted large ocean mammals, such as the bowhead, or Greenland, whale (*Balaena mysticetus*), which can reach 90 tonnes in weight, and the slightly smaller right whale (*Balaena glacialis*), which can attain a weight of 50 tonnes. The successful hunt of one whale would have provided an entire community with a large mass of meat to eat and a substantial quantity of blubber that for their soapstone lamps. One whale would have been enough to ensure the survival of four or five families over an entire year. The quantity of meat that successful whale hunting provided is evident in classic Thule habitation sites: Thule "villages" comprised a number of large semi-subterranean habitations with thick piles of refuse indicating that they were inhabited for much, if not most, of the year. In these permanent villages dating back to the classic Thule period, ice cellars are usually found. These are holes dug into the ground where meat could have been preserved. Given the permafrost, as we will review later in this lecture, meat stored in these cellars would have remained frozen and edible throughout the year. In Alaska, indigenous peoples continued to hunt whales, an important component of their subsistence.

Even if whales could have provided most of the food for the Thule, other species were hunted, notably seals and caribou. In the case of caribou, the great importance of this animal in the lives of the Inuit and their ancestors did not lie in the meat, but in the hides. Whereas the marine mammals rely on a thick layer of blubber (fat) to keep warm, caribou have a layer of thick fur—of hollow hairs—that provide excellent insulation. Whales, for example, do not have fur, and in Inuit communities who hunted this animal, the skin was prized for culinary reasons (eaten as mattak, or muktuk) as opposed to its use in clothing. In terms of clothing, whale skin provided only soles for mukluk; this was one use of beluga whale skin in some regions of the Arctic. Nonetheless, the Inuit could not have survived without the caribou, as caribou fur provided the most important source for clothing and bedding. If the peoples of the North could not obtain a sufficient quantity of caribou hides (or, in Russia, reindeer hides)—as was the case for the north Alaskan Inupiaq or the Siberian Yupik—they invariably traded with neighbouring groups in order to obtain the necessary hides. Hunters of caribou were most effective when they either hunted from kayaks in rivers during the caribou migration as the caribou crossed rivers, or when they herded the caribou into locations where hunters waited in ambush to kill the caribou. Caribou were not central to subsistence, given the migratory nature of the animal: in the summer, caribou move north to the tundra of the Arctic; but in the fall they tend to migrate to more southerly locales. Lacking a thick layer of fat, caribou alone did not provide all of the oil required to heat and light homes during winter months; also, the proportion of meat to bones is much smaller in caribou than in sea mammals.

Sealskin has one important characteristic: it is impermeable, or waterproof. It was used when a waterproof skin was required as opposed to insulation for warmth. The skin of ringed seals was used for traces, lines, boot soles, boat covers, and a variety of other similar goods. The skin of other sea mammals, such as walruses, was used to cover umiaks. The Thule would have hunted seals—even if whales could have provided all of the food that a community required to survive—if only to obtain the sealskin they required. Likewise, both the Thule and the modern Inuit would have hunted caribou for their hides, without which life in the Arctic would have been impossible.

Archaeological Thule Tool Tradition

Archaeologists find a rich diversity of tools and artifacts in Thule sites: harpoons, lances, spears, darts, throwing boards, bows, and arrows—a very diversified set of implements that would have been used for hunting both on sea ice and in open water. Harpoons would have been toggled and barbed to facilitate the hunting of mammals in the ocean. On land, a mammal that is speared and dies can be found: its carcass will lie on the land and a good hunter can follow a trail of blood left by a wounded animal and then find the animal when it dies. A marine mammal that is wounded will either swim away, never to be found, or will sink when it dies. A toggled harpoon makes it possible to successfully hunt marine mammals. The harpoon head is barbed and fixed to the shaft in such a way that the harpoon head will easily be released when it pierces the animal; yet the harpoon will remain fixed in the animal's body because the barbs in the harpoon trap the projectile in the flesh. This can be achieved in two ways: either a harpoon head will have a closed foreshaft socket—a deep hole drilled into the harpoon—and a line tied directly to the harpoon; or it will have an open socket, whereby the harpoon head will have a deep groove cut into it, allowing a piece of foreshaft to be fixed to the harpoon, tied in place with sinew or baleen. Either option produces the same result: a harpoon attached to a line that can be used to tow the hunted animal back to shore. (For more on harpoons, see http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/croads/ekven10.html.)

Central to Thule subsistence was the umiak, a large boat capable of carrying a crew of 4–7 hunters. The umiak was constructed using a driftwood frame and was covered with the skin of the bearded seal. In the spring, when whales were migrating, a crew of hunters would have paddled out to the whale pods and would have harpooned a whale. As noted, the harpoon would have been fixed to a sealskin float. The whale would have struggled, but the floats would have made it difficult for the whale to swim and dive, thus tiring the wounded whale. Once the whale died, the floats would have kept the whale from sinking, and crews of Thule hunters could have towed the whale to shore where it would have been processed and its products preserved to feed a number of families through much of the year.

The Thule Hunting Cycle

Although some archaeologists believed that the whale bones found in Thule sites suggest the scavenging of beached whales as opposed to the hunting of whale in open water, there is still an archaeological consensus that whale hunting was widespread throughout the Arctic during the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries—referred to as the classic Thule period—when global temperatures would have been significantly warmer than they are today. Based on the ethnohistorical and archaeological record, we reconstruct the annual subsistence and hunting cycle of the Thule. The migration of whales would have been of central importance to the Thule (and their Inupiaq or Eskimo of Alaska descendants). When the sea ice broke in the spring, whales migrated from the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea to their summer feeding grounds. Whales would have been hunted in these conditions from March to May, when whales were swimming close to shore and could be hunted from umiaks. Later in the spring and summer, other sea mammals were hunted; and in the summer, families moved inland to fish and to hunt ducks and other migratory birds that had nesting grounds in the Arctic—and, most importantly, to hunt caribou. In the late summer and early fall, the caribou hides would be ideal: the skin of the caribou would have healed since the summer's warble fly larvae had burrowed into the skin of the caribou and had left holes in the hides. In the winter, when the Arctic Ocean was covered with ice, seal would have been hunted through the ice, as described, and fish could have been jigged using hooks and lines.

The Emergence of Contemporary Coastal Peoples

It is the onset of the "Little Ice Age"—a period of global cooling that we reviewed in the last lecture—that would have forced the Thule of the central and eastern Arctic to shift their attention from whales to seals and to hunting seals on the ice. Throughout this entire period, fish would have been an important source of food not only for humans, but also for the dogs of the Thule and the Inuit. In the short growing season, a variety of plant foods and materials would have been gathered. Nonetheless, whaling continued. The coastal peoples of northern Alaska continued to hunt whales using traditional methods well into the twentieth century. Ethnographic accounts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries describe the hunting of whales from late March until as late as early July. After the spring whaling season, they would hunt bearded seal from the ice edge and they would hunt caribou in September and October when the pelts were at their prime for making clothing. Over the winter, they would hunt on the ice.

Student Activity

Describe Thule whale or caribou hunting methods.

"Inuit" or "Eskimo"?

In Canada, Inuit, the preferred ethnonym, has replaced the term Eskimo, a term considered derogatory, as it was thought to condescendingly mean "eater of raw meat." The term Eskimo, however, continues to be used in Alaska. The term Inuit refers to speakers of Inuktitut who include the peoples referred to as the Caribou (Qairnirmiut, Hauniqtuurmiut, Harvaqtuurmiut, Paallirmiut, and Ahiarmiut), Iglulik (Aivilingmiut), Netsilik (Natsilingmiut), and Copper (Killinirmiut) Eskimo of the central Arctic, and the Inuit of Quebec and Labrador. The term Inuit refers to people, whereas Inuk refers to an individual.

The Inuit population of Labrador lives alongside the Innu, an Algonquian-speaking population, which is both ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Inuit.

In Greenland, the indigenous populations were classified as Polar, East Greenland, and West Greenland Eskimo. In three regions, the language spoken is Inuktitut, the eastern Inuit language, but the Greenland Inuit, refer to themselves as Greenlanders.

In the Mackenzie Delta of the western Canadian Arctic, the indigenous coastal dwellers call themselves "Inuvialuit" or "real human beings." Their language is a western dialect of the larger Inuit language, quite distinct from the Inuktitut language spoken to the east. The language of the Inuvialuit is more closely related to the Inupiaq of northern Alaska.

The Inupiat (or Iñupiat) live in northern Alaska. The term Inupiat signifies "real people" in the Inupiaq language, a language quite distinct from Yupik (or Yupiit), the language of the inhabitants of western coastal Alaska, St. Lawrence Island, and the Siberian Yupik or Eskimo of the Russian Far East. Inupiaq and Yupik are related languages, and both are distantly related to the Aleut language of the Aleutian Islands and the Alaskan Peninsula. In Alaska, the term Eskimo is used to refer to both the Inupiaq and Yupik speakers.

In southern Alaska, modern ethnic distinctions have been confused by the old Russian practice of using the term Aleut to speakers of the Aleut language, as well as to the inhabitants of the Alaska Peninsula who spoke the Pacific Yupik dialect.

In the Chukotka Peninsula, the "Eskimo" speak a Yupik dialect. The term used by the indigenous Siberian Yupik is yuhyt, "people" or yupikhyt, "real people."

The Coastal Peoples: The Main Populations of the Arctic and Coastal Regions of the Circumpolar North

The Aleut

The Aleut inhabit a chain of islands stretching from the Alaska Peninsula far into the Pacific encircling the Bering Sea.[4] The territory inhabited by the Aleut is relatively moderate: there is no permafrost, and ocean ice is only found on the Alaska Peninsula, the eastern edge of the traditional Aleut territory. No trees grow on the Aleutian Islands, and high mountains mark the interior of the islands. However, the Aleut would have lived on the coast and relied on the resources of the sea. The Aleut speak a common language, one distantly related to the Inuit languages. However, the islands were clustered with wide straits and riptides, making travel between the islands difficult; and this separation led to the emergence of a number of dialects, which are divided into eastern and western branches of Aleut.

Aleut Settlements

A traditional Aleut house was a semi-subterranean, windowless dwelling that housed a number of related nuclear families. The house was rectangular or oblong and was sunk more than a metre (3–4 feet) into the ground. The framework of the house was built of driftwood logs. The house featured two rows of posts that formed an inner rectangle; rafters were built over this foundation. Over this framework was spread skins or grass, and the entire structure was then covered with sod. Two large holes were located in the roof for light and also served as an entrance with a notched-log ladder leading to the living area below. The inhabitants of the house would sleep in mat-covered trenches at the edge of the house. Curtains would have been draped over this

[4] This module's ethnographic descriptions for the Aleut, Siberian Yupik, Inupiat of Northern Alaska, and Inuit of the central Arctic are partly drawn from *Arctic*, edited by David Damas (1984), in particular, the chapters "Aleut" by Margaret Lantis; "Siberian Eskimo" by Charles C. Hughes; "North Alaska Coast Eskimo" by Robert F. Spencer; "Iglulik" by Guy Mary-Rousselière; as well as "Central Eskimo: Introduction" and "Copper Eskimo" by Damas, and "Netsilik" by Asen Balikci. You are encouraged to see this text for further information on the territory and environment, settlement patterns and housing, subsistence methods, clothing, sociopolitical organization, and religion of the peoples studied in this module. In addition to this publication, a video recording of Netsilik traditional life gave inspiration to the ethnographic descriptions of this module: *Netsilik Eskimo* is a collection of 11 videocassettes produced by the National Film Board of Canada (1999). This collection is well worth the 11 hours of viewing it offers.

space delimitating families. Houses were usually located next to a stream emptying into a bay that allowed for easy travel.

To see an Aleut house diorama, go to http://www.anchoragemuseum.org/ag_details.asp?page_id=29&item.

Aleut Subsistence

The Aleut relied on the sea for most of their food. Traditionally, the Aleut hunted all of the local whales (except the sperm and killer whales), in addition to other sea mammals, such as sea lions, fur seals, sea otters, and the occasional walrus. In addition to sea mammals, the Aleut fished a number of marine species and fish that would swim into nearby rivers to spawn: salmon, halibut, cod, flounder, herring, and sculpin. They also collected a number of invertebrates, including sea urchins, clams, limpets, and mussels. Mammals were rare in the territory of the Aleut: besides fox, larger mammals could only be found on the Alaska Peninsula and on Unimak Island.

The Aleut did not seem to have had the large open umiaks of the Alaskan Inuit, but they made extensive use of kayaks, some of which had two hatches (openings where a kayaker would sit). Unlike the Inuit (Eskimo) of Alaska and other regions, the Aleut did not rely on harpoons and floats to hunt whales and drag the carcass to shore. The whales were hunted using poisoned points, and the carcass would then drift to shore. As a consequence, not all hunted whales were recovered; some would drift to distant and inaccessible locations. Nevertheless, the Aleut whale hunters could secure 10–30, or more, whales per year.

The Aleut were expert hunters of the sea otter, a skill that attracted the attention of Russians who conquered the region for the prized pelts of the sea otter. Aleut hunters would form an arc, and when they spotted the sea otters, the hunters would circle the otters, harpooning the animals when they came to the surface to breathe.

Seals were essential to the Aleut. Nineteenth-century accounts describe how the Aleut believed that without seal oil they might starve or become ill—regardless of how much fish they had. Seal oil was added to dried roots, shellfish, and other food sources to make them more palatable; it was considered a necessary condiment.

Ethnohistorical accounts describe how the Aleut fished using long lines made of seaweed with hooks tied to this strong and durable line. Such lines could be used to fish marine species such as halibut and cod. Freshwater fish were caught using bag-like dragnets made of whale sinew.

In addition to mammals, hunters would also take sea birds as prey and collect their eggs. A hunter would either climb down a cliff or, when appropriate, would be lowered down by rope, where a great quantity of eggs could be gathered along the crags.

When hunting was not successful, edible roots supplemented the diet of meat. A number of greens and berries were gathered, including cow parsnip, cranberries, crowberries, and anemone. Some greens were available along the shores all year round.

Given the very damp conditions—poor for drying—that predominate in the Aleutian Islands, and the relatively abundant food supplies, little food was stored, except for festivals.

Aleut Social and Political Organization

As noted, the Aleut inhabited houses that contained a number of related nuclear families. A number of such houses would be found in a village. The families were related through the male line: the extended family might include an elder male, his brothers and sons, their wives, and any unmarried children. Because a groom had to offer his services to the bride's family—called "bride service"—a young man might live and work with his bride's family for one or two years, and in some cases would continue living with his father-in-law after the completion of the bride service. The preferred partner was a cross-cousin (usually a young man's mother's brother's daughter). Among the Aleut, parallel cousins (a first cousin who is the child of a mother's sister or a father's brother) were considered siblings in kinship terminology and were treated as such, whereas cross-cousins were not considered direct kin and were potential spouses. There is some evidence that the traditional rules of descent were matrilineal, but it cannot be proved.

Aleut society was marked by degree of status and ranking. Whale hunting was a high status activity and seems to have been limited to a number of families, with whale hunting privileges being inherited. A village, or deme, would have one "chief," or tukux, who would be responsible for protecting the kindred's hunting grounds, and would police the behaviour of kin to ensure that they did not raise the ire of neighbouring groups and, when necessary, would lead the group in times of war. Authority was not by any means absolute: a chief had to rely on personal qualities to ensure the allegiance of friends and relatives. Also, before deciding a punishment or going to war, it was necessary to gain the approval of the "honourables." A regional leader was often chosen, but his position relied upon the continued support of other chiefs. Likewise, the authority of one individual never extended farther than one island. Russian colonization did change indigenous political organization: Russians established a system of first, second, and third chiefs; and they defined and supported their authority. These offices came to be hereditary, especially that of the first chief.

The Yupik of the Russian Far East

The Inuit of the Russian Far East—the Siberian Eskimo or Siberian Yupik—are a small population when compared to the larger Inuit populations to the east and the neighbouring Chukchi populations of Russia; but they, along with the Inuit populations of Saint Lawrence Island, are an integral part of a cultural tradition that stretches across the coasts of the Chukchi Peninsula to eastern Greenland. They not only speak related languages—Yupik—their ways of life and culture share much in common with populations located across the Bering Strait. Unlike the inland Chukchi, the Siberian Eskimo do not herd reindeer; and they are focused on the sea and its resources. In this respect, they have a lot in common with the coastal Chukchi, who certainly were influenced by their neighbours.

Yupik Subsistence

As is the case with the Aleut and the Inuit farther to the east, the Yupik of the Russian Far East depended upon sea mammal hunting: meat and fat fed both humans and their dogs. Skins were used for clothing and footwear; skins were also used in the construction of houses. Blubber was used in heating and lighting homes. The coastal peoples of northeastern Russia depended on whales, seals, and walruses as central components of their economy. Fishing, gathering, and the hunting of reindeer, fur-bearing mammals, and birds supplemented the traditional economy.

Like the Inuit to the east, the Siberian Yupik used kayaks and umiaks for hunting and transportation. The umiak was constructed with a covering of walrus hide stretched over a wooden frame. The umiak was propelled using oars and sails and could transport several tons. It was well adapted for hunting in the Arctic Ocean: it could be easily pulled onto ice floes and dragged across with the tough walrus skin, which was resistant to tearing.

The walrus was of primary importance to the Eskimo. Walrus was effectively hunted in the spring when they could be spotted resting on drifting icebergs. Hunters pursued the walrus and harpooned them from the umiak, with inflated sealskin floats attached to the harpoon head. The walrus would then be killed with a lance and dragged to shore. Another method of hunting walrus was to drive walrus that swam close to shore to land using a flapper to imitate a killer whale, which—other than humans—are the only enemy of the walrus; and the walrus would then be killed by hunters waiting on shore.

The walrus not only provided meat, blubber, and skin; walrus intestine was used to make waterproof parkas.

Yupik Clothing

The clothing of the Yupik of Russia was similar to that worn by the Eskimo/Inuit across the Arctic. Men wore sealskin underpants, a hoodless shirt of reindeer hide, reindeer-hide trousers, and sealskin boots. The summer shirt had one layer of hide with the fur on the inside. The winter shirt had two layers of hide with fur both on the inside and the outside. A sealskin belt was worn, decorated with white reindeer hair. A parka was worn in the winter for added warmth, though among the Eskimo of Russia, the parka did not usually have a hood. Both men and women would wear fur caps and mittens. Women's clothing included fur underpants and fur overalls. Traditionally, bird skin parkas were worn, until reindeer hide supplanted them. The Yupik obtained reindeer hides for making clothing through trade with the Chukchi and occasionally by hunting wild reindeer.

Yupik Housing

The traditional winter house among the Yupik of the Russian Far East was a large, communal, semi-subterranean structure that housed a number of families. In the nineteenth century, such houses were abandoned in favour of another type of dwelling modelled after the Chukchi winter tent. This structure was constructed of plank siding; the roof was covered by walrus hide. Sod was piled up around the walls for additional warmth. The summer house consisted of a walrus-hide tent stretched over a wooden framework.

To see a reconstructed Yupik house, go to http://www.museum.unl.edu/public/exhibits/house.html.

Yupik Social and Political Organization

Though Soviet ethnographers argued that the Yupik clans were originally matriarchal, the ethnohistorical material describes the social organization of the Russian Eskimo as patrilineal clans. Each clan had its own residential area in the village, its own meat-drying racks, and its own location for docking and tying its boats. However, clans did not have specific rights to hunting locations (i.e., a particular shoreline). Each clan was headed by one senior member—usually an elderly man—who directed hunting and subsistence activities, and he would lead trading expeditions to the Chukchi reindeer herds to trade for skins. He would also lead religious ceremonies among clan members and work with other clan leaders to settle disputes. Though clan leadership was often transmitted from father to son, a particularly powerful and respected clan leader could be chosen to lead an entire village, but authority was based on the continued support of other clans.

Traditionally, clan members would work together in the hunt, under the direction of a boat captain. However, the product of the hunt—meat, blubber, and hides—would have been distributed equally among clan members, including the children of deceased clan members. In the nineteenth century, with the increasing commoditization of the hunt, the hunts became less egalitarian, but the composition of hunting parties on the boats remained based on clan membership.

The Inupiat of Northern Alaska

The Inupiat shared a number of circumpolar traits in common with the indigenous peoples of the coast. These included similar harpoon types, use of oil lamps, dog sleds, similar tanning methods, clothing, a common worldview, and similar religious concepts and practices, such as the prevalence of shamans. Yet, the Inupiat of northern Alaska were in many ways on the border between the coastal subsistence and culture of the eastern Arctic and that of southern Alaska and the Bering region.

The winter dwellings of the inhabitants of northern Alaska were a semi-subterranean house that was built using whalebone and driftwood. A long underground passageway led into the winter house. Dome snow houses (i.e., igloos) were not built in northern Alaska.

The Inupiat of northern Alaska also practised whale hunting. In the spring, herds of migrating whales pass close to shore, past the Cape Prince of Wales, Point Hope, and then towards Point Barrow. The whales spend their summers in the Far North, in the Arctic Ocean, and in the fall they return to the same areas on their way south. The hunting of walrus, belugas, narwhal, and polar bears followed the spring whaling. In the winter, seals were hunted.

Though there was a coastal specialization focused on the hunting of sea mammals, other Inupiat hunted caribou in the interior. Groups of hunters would collaborate in caribou drives that made possible the hunting of large numbers of migrating caribou.

In terms of kinship and social structure, northern Alaska shared much in common with the Inuit of the eastern Arctic. The Inupiat of northern Alaska conformed to the “Eskimo” kinship terminology: bilateral kin were recognized; and siblings were distinguished from cousins, as was the nuclear family from the extended family. This contrasts with the unilineal patterns found in southern Alaska. Also, the Inupiat didn’t have the elaborate public ceremonies common in the south, though they did have the Messenger Feast. This feast was hosted by individuals who had accumulated sufficient resources to host a feast for guests from a number of villages who were also given lavish gifts, with the

expectation that they would reciprocate in the future, inviting the host of the Messenger Feast to one of their own.

The Inuit of the Central Arctic

The Inuit of the central Arctic abandoned whale hunting long ago and seal hunting then became more predominant in central and eastern Arctic. The Inuit abandoned the semi-subterranean winter houses that were common to the Thule and the indigenous coastal peoples of Alaska in favour of the igloo (a snow house) that was located on the frozen ocean. For much of the year, they lived on the ice, hunting seals. In the spring, when the ice began to melt, they moved to the shore and spent much of the summer hunting terrestrial mammals.

The Inuit Snow House and the Winter Seal Hunt

The igloo was a domed winter dwelling that featured a long passageway entrance and a porch. These features minimized the loss of heat. A number of small cubicles were built along the passageway and on the outside to store meat, clothing, and other goods. Inside the igloo, beds and tables were carved out of the snow. A large igloo would be 4–5 metres in diameter and 3–4 metres high. Transparent slabs of ice were used for windows to let in light, and a ventilation hole was cut to allow air to circulate and cool the igloo. The Inuit used a long snow knife made of caribou antler to cut out the blocks of packed snow required to build the igloo. Snow shovels made of thick pieces of wood and carved antler were lashed together with caribou sinew. These shovels were used for a variety of purposes, including to cover the igloo in a layer of snow for improved isolation. The igloo was heated using soapstone lamps that burned seal oil for fuel. Given the efficiency of snow as an insulator, the inside of the igloo could be kept comfortably warm with an oil lamp. In some cases, the Inuit would line the igloo with skins suspended from the roof. The skins would trap cold air and keep the inside surface of the igloo cool, minimizing the melting of the snow in the igloo. The temperature of the inside of a lined igloo could range from 10 to 20 degrees Celsius. Unlined houses would be colder, with temperatures ranging 2 to 3 degrees Celsius and would drip as snow melted.

The Netsilik Inuit would move onto the ice in mid-winter (December or January), congregating in fair-sized settlements that featured a number of igloos. The sites chosen for the settlements were bays and inlets where seal hunting would be best. The Netsilik (Natsilingmiut or “people of the ringed seal”) were skilled seal hunters. Netsilik hunters capitalized on the seal’s use of a limited number of breathing holes that allowed it to breathe under the thick ice. Given that seals would maintain a number of breathing holes, the cooperation of a number of hunters would improve the chances of success. The Netsilik used dogs to find the breathing holes. As already described, dogs used their sense of

smell to locate the breathing holes under the snow. Once the breathing hole was located, a hunter would patiently wait for the seal to surface.

The hunter had a number of implements with him when hunting seals. This included a thrusting harpoon. The harpoon point was made either of carved antler or bear bone. It was attached to a shaft made of several pieces of antler lashed together and reinforced with sealskin thongs. When the harpoon struck the seal, the point would detach from the shaft and a line fixed to the harpoon point would stop the seal from sinking into the water.

In addition to the harpoon, the hunter would carry with him a number of implements necessary for the hunt. Once the dog had found the site of the seal's breathing hole, the hunter would use a long, thin snow probe made of bone to find the breathing hole itself—which was covered with a layer of snow. A bone snow knife and ice scoop was used to clear away the snow to see if the breathing hole was still in use. A down or horn indicator was used to reveal the presence of a seal at the breathing hole. With the down indicator, a small piece of down, tied to a small anchor that would be pushed in the snow, would flutter as the seal breathed through the hole. This indicator was protected from drifting snow with a sealskin cover. A thin probe would be used to determine the orientation of the breathing hole so the hunter would know how to aim and thrust the harpoon. When a seal was harpooned, the hunter used an ice pick to enlarge the hole so the seal could be pulled out onto the ice.

The seal hunt would reach it apogee near the end of May, when the ice was free of snow. At this time, men, women, and older children participated in the hunt. Hunters would wait at a breathing hole while others would use a stick to push seals back from breathing holes, forcing the seal to search out another breathing hole—hopefully, one under the vigilance of a harpooner.

The seal hunt would continue well into the spring, when the ice would begin to break up and when seals would crawl onto the melting ice. Hunters would often lie on the ice, imitating the actions and sounds of seals while they slowly crawled close enough for a kill.[5]

Inuit Summer Camps and Activities

Once the ocean ice had melted and the hunting of seals was no longer possible, the Inuit moved inland. They would spend the spring and summer in skin tents made of sealskin. In the fall and early winter before moving out onto the ice, the Netsilik lived in transitional dwellings made with walls of snow and a roof covering of skins.

[5] A very good video recording showing how seals were hunted is the National Film Board of Canada's *Netsilik Eskimo* (1999).

The Netsilik hunted caribou in the summer and fall when the caribou were migrating: caribou wintered in the forest and moved north to the open tundra in the spring and summer before returning south in the fall. The caribou could be driven between two converging lines of large piles of stones spread over a long distance, or stakes waving pieces of skin or clothing, to waiting hunters. In the late summer, caribou would congregate in the thousands at lake narrows, or slow-running sections of rivers where they would cross on their migration south. Waiting Inuit hunters would wait for the caribou in kayaks and hunted caribou with lances from their kayaks.

Inuit fished throughout the year, though rarely in mid-winter. In early August, Arctic char would swim upstream. The Inuit used stone weirs to catch the fish, and hunters then speared them using three-pronged leisters and then strung the fish onto a line. Several extended families would congregate at the weirs during the summer fishing season. Once ice had begun to form, the Netsilik would cut holes in the ice, attracting Arctic char, which could then be speared. These two fishing techniques were the most productive, but other fishing techniques included the use of fishing harpoons with detachable points, the use of hooks, and the placing of baited gorges in shallows.

The Netsilik would occasionally hunt muskox with the help of dogs. When sensing danger, muskox form a circle with the males protecting the periphery. Netsilik hunters would shoot arrows at a bull, and when it charged, dogs would keep it at bay while Netsilik hunters would then kill the isolated animal with spears.

The Netsilik would rarely hunt polar bears. When a bear was hunted, it would be in the spring at the end of its hibernation. The bear would be driven out of its den using spears and, then, while dogs would keep the bear from attacking the hunters, the Netsilik would shoot the bear with arrows and then attack the bear with barbless harpoons and spears.

Other small mammals, such as fox and hare, were occasionally snared. Birds were hunted in the spring and summer. Ptarmigan were killed using blunt arrows, and a number of species of water birds were caught barehanded or were stoned when they were moulting; and seagulls were sometimes snared. In addition to the flesh of these birds, the birds eggs were collected; gull eggs were gathered in early June.

In the central Arctic, plant resources were limited, but some berries were picked in late August.

Inuit Clothing

The caribou hunts were essential to Inuit survival, not only for food, but also for clothing. Inuit men scraped and softened the caribou hides, and the women

sewed them into clothing using bone needles and caribou sinew. Hides were not tanned, and so the insulating hairs of the caribou were retained on the prepared skin. In some circumstances, sealskin was substituted for caribou hide when making parkas, but caribou hide was generally preferred because it more effectively kept a person warm in winter. The basic piece of clothing was a caribou skin, hooded parka with the fur on the inside. This parka could be worn in the winter, and a second parka with the fur on the outside would cover the inner parka for increased warmth. The parkas would usually feature a long flap in the back and a shorter flap in the front. The parkas would be decorated with fringes; and the inner parka was often decorated with beads or other decorative elements. A woman's parka would have a larger and deeper hood—with a pouch to accommodate a baby or small child—and wider shoulders and sleeves so a woman could move a baby to a comfortable breast-feeding position without having to expose the baby to cold air. In addition to the parkas, trousers (or long stockings) and boots would be worn, also made of either sealskin or of caribou skin with sealskin soles. Both men and women also wore mittens. Other articles of clothing included snow goggles: a carved piece of wood or antler with small slits fashioned to minimize the glare off the snow and ice and to reduce the risks of snow blindness.

Inuit Transportation

In the winter, dogs were used to pull sleds over the snow and ice. In some regions of the Arctic, driftwood was so rare that other materials had to be used in the making of sleds. Frozen fish wrapped in skins could be used to make runners; they would be lashed together using pieces of antlers. Runners, whether of wood, whale bone, or other materials, would be coated with a layer of ice mixed with crushed moss and polished, allowing the sled to run smoothly over the terrain. Dogs harnessed in a fan formation and driven with the help of a whip and various commands would pull the sled. Travel was easiest in the winter, as the frozen terrain of ice and snow did not impede movement as much as the summer landscape where the permafrost left the land riddled with lakes and bogs that made movement over the land difficult. In the late spring when the ice broke, a number of boats were used for transportation. The most important form of water transportation was the sealskin kayak. Open skin boats—the umiak—would also have been in use in various Inuit communities.

Other Important Inuit Tools and Instruments

Of great importance to Inuit men would have been the drill kit. Using the drill, bow, and a mouthpiece, the drill would have been used for the working of bone

and antler for making a number of tools and instruments, such as harpoon points.[6]

Bows were used by the Inuit; they were sometimes made of several pieces of wood pieced together and held in place with sinew. The bowstring was made of twisted sinew.

Of course, knives were important to the Inuit. Prior to European contact, the blades were usually made of copper or ground slate. A woman's primary tool used for a number of purposes was the ulu—a knife with a semi-circular blade.

Inuit Social Organization

The smallest unit of social organization was the nuclear family. A married couple and their children would work together as a collaborative unit, but the nuclear family would often be incorporated into a larger, extended family. On the ice, a number of igloos would be clustered together and joined, linking an extended family. The extended family would usually comprise a father, his sons and their wives, and children. When the father died, the family would split into new extended families. At other times, other kin relations were used to constitute an extended family: for example, two unrelated men married to two sisters.

In the summer, the extended family (usually 15–20 individuals) lived and worked together in the hunting of caribou and the fishing of Arctic char at stone weirs. Rules of sharing meat governed the redistribution of game and fish within the extended family: each nuclear family/individual would receive a share of the hunt.

At the head of the extended family was usually an older hunter who decided when and where the family would move; chose hunting sites; and advised younger men on hunting and fishing. However, this headman did not have absolute authority: orders were not given; and nuclear families were free to move away from an extended family and join other family units.

In the winter, a number of families would congregate to hunt seal. The number of individuals living together on the ice in clusters of igloos could number as many as 100. There was no clearly defined leader in these larger groups: the opinions of older and respected hunters would carry more weight than those of other members of the group, but these people could not impose their will on others. Extended families could always move away. Reciprocity and the sharing of meat maintained the unity of the group.

[6] See the chapter by Eugene Y. Arima, "Caribou Eskimo," in Damas (1984, 457) for a photo showing how a bow drill with mouthpiece is used.

When a seal was killed, the distribution of the meat and blubber was predetermined. Within the extended family, food was shared and the distribution of food was under the guidance of the eldest woman. A Netsilik hunter would have sharing partners, and each would be named after a part of the seal. When a seal was killed, it was brought back to the settlement, where it was cut into 14 parts and distributed among the sharing partners.

Given the egalitarian nature of Netsilik and Inuit society, social control was maintained informally through ridicule and mockery, though care was taken to ensure the individual was not provoked to retaliate. Other forms of conflict resolution included public fist fights and song duels. An individual would be killed in the community in extreme cases: for example, an individual suspected of sorcery. However, most conflict was resolved through conflict avoidance: when conflict could not be resolved, groups could always split, move apart, and form new groupings.

Inuit Religion

The Inuit lived in a rich spiritual world. The Netsilik believed in a variety of supernatural beings including personal souls, name souls, human ghosts, animal souls, and special spirits—amulet spirits—who helped hunters. Among the Inuit of the central Arctic, humans were seen as having a number of souls: within the body the Inuit had a soul represented as the breath of life; and one also had a soul proper. One's name was also a form of soul inherited from an ancestor.

The souls of seals, caribou, and bears in particular had to be ritually placated after being killed by a hunter. The soul of an animal that was killed would inhabit a new body, so it was important that respect be shown to the soul of the animal that was hunted and killed, lest the soul be offended in its new reincarnation.

A number of spirits inhabited the landscape, including spirits that could bring harm to humans. Some were bloodthirsty and the Netsilik feared them.

Netsilik cosmology featured a number of deities, including Nuliayuk, a goddess living at the bottom of the ocean and reputed to be the mother of all land and sea mammals. Also, Sila—the giant baby—was the master of wind, rain, and snow. The one deity that helped humans was Tatqiq, the Moon spirit. Tatqiq was particularly important in ensuring the fertility of humans. His sister was Siqiniq, the Sun.

On the whole, the spiritual world was filled with a number of spiritual entities that were dangerous to humans. In this larger spiritual universe, the shaman played an important role in maintaining spiritually harmony, acting as a necessary intermediary between the community and supernatural forces. In order to become a shaman, a novice had to be initiated by an established

practitioner. The novice would then seek the power of shamanism through exposure, solitude, and fasting. Often, the novice had to symbolically die before being reborn as a shaman. The power of the shaman, however, depended on the helper spirits that assisted the shaman.

Special articles of clothing signalled the shaman's status. Quite often the shaman would wear a special belt. The shaman would be called upon by the community to influence the weather, to find game, to recover lost souls, and to fight against malevolent spirits and supernatural forces.

The shaman would be called upon in times of misfortune. In such circumstances, the shaman would enter into a trance and communicate with protective spirits. The shaman would summon protector and helper spirits and question them. The cause of misfortune would invariably be a taboo that had not been respected. The shaman would elicit public confessions of taboo transgressions and the shaman would then expiate the infringement of the taboo to relieve the community of its misfortune. A number of taboos regulated daily life: taboos were particularly numerous around important rites of passage, such as life and death. Women had a number of taboos surrounding menstruation and the birth of a child. Men had to respect a number of taboos surrounding hunting. The transgression of any of these taboos could bring misfortune upon the community.

Finally, a shaman would be called upon when a person became ill. Instead of entering into a trance, a more passive form of shamanism was often performed in the case of illness, which required lifting the patient's head with a thong and interrogating a helper spirit.[7] The goal, however, was the same, to better understand the spirit world and how it was causing sickness or misfortune. If an evil spirit inhabited an individual, and so caused the illness, the shaman would force this spirit to leave the body of the patient. Illness could also be caused by the loss of one's soul: ilisiniq, evil magic or forces, could cause illness by stealing or harming the soul of an enemy. An evil shaman could cause illness by stealing the soul of a victim and setting spirits against it.

Student Activity

1. Why are Inuit of the central Arctic known by other names?

2. List the main populations on the coastal regions of the circumpolar North and locate them on a map.

3. Describe the population on the coastal region nearest you.

[7] See the chapter by Guy Mary-Rousselière, "Iglulik," in Damas (1984, 431–446) for a fuller explanation of the practice of head-lifting.

Supplementary Readings

Internet Resources

Calving icebergs in the Antarctic (with photos), Technical University of Munich-Weihens: http://www.weihenstephan.de/dvs/kraft/iceberg/calve.htm

Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), a working group of the Arctic Council: http://www.caff.is/

Harpoons (with photos), Arctic Study Centre: http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/croads/ekven10.html

Parks Canada site, Quttinirpaaq National Park: http://parkscanada.pch.gc.ca/pn-np/nu/quttinirpaaq/

Quttinirpaaq Island: Nature: Living Edens: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/arcticoasis/eco_explorer3.html

Other Resources

For ethnographic descriptions of other peoples of the North, see the following chapters in *Arctic*, edited by David Damas (1984), volume 5 in *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution), the general editor of the series is W. C. Sturtevant:

- "Baffinland Eskimo" by William B. Kemp, 463–475
- "Inuit of Quebec" by Bernard Saladin-D'Anglure, 476–507

For extensive readings on the Greenlanders, see also these chapters from *Arctic*:

- "Greenland Eskimo: Introduction" by Helge Kleivan, 522–527
- "Paleo-Eskimo Cultures of Greenland" by William W. Fitzhugh, 528–539
- "Neo-Eskimo Prehistory of Greenland" by Richard H. Jordan, 540–548
- "History of Norse Greenland" by Inge Kleivan, 549–555
- "History of Colonial Greenland" by Finn Gad, 556–576
- "Polar Eskimo" by Rolf Gilberg, 577–594
- "West Greenland Before 1950" by Inge Kleivan, 595–621

- "East Greenland Before 1950" by Robert Petersen, 622–639
- "Greelandic Written Literature" by Robert Petersen, 640–645

This volume also addresses the issues of modernization between 1950 and 1980. See several chapters, pages 646–728.

Glossary of Terms

clan	**1** the basic social and political organization of many Aboriginal societies, consisting of a number of related groups and families. **2** a group of families with a common ancestor. **3** a large, close-knit family.
heat sink	a device or substance for absorbing excessive or unwanted heat.
panhandle	*noun* a narrow strip of territory surrounded on three sides by the territory of another country or state.
patrilineal	of or relating to, or based on kinship with, the father or descent through the male line.
umiak	a large, open, flat-bottomed boat made by stretching an animal hide over a wooden frame.

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