

THE NORDENSKIÖLD COLLECTION OF ESKIMO MATERIAL CULTURE FROM PORT CLARENCE, ALASKA.

By JAMES W. VANSTONE. *Fieldiana Anthropology New Series*, No. 14. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1990. 56 p., 30 illus. (including maps), bib. Softbound. US\$16.00.

The foundations for the study of Alaskan Eskimo material culture were laid by two Smithsonian publications a century ago: J. Murdoch's *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1892) and Nelson's *The Eskimo about Bering Strait* (1899). While these were preceded by several European publications describing, usually incidentally, Alaskan material culture, everything since then rests on these seminal works. For the next 60 or 70 years specialists concentrated on the archaeological record rather than the ethnographic present. In the 1960s and 1970s interest in historic collections was rekindled from two directions: ethno-historians, such as D.J. Ray, working in part with externally derived aesthetic criteria, and archaeologists, such as J.R. Bockstoce and W.W. Fitzhugh, bringing forward and reworking 19th-century collections. One of VanStone's great contributions to northern material culture in the 1970s and 1980s has been to produce a half dozen or so catalogues of northern collections, mostly in the Field Museum. No curator has done more to make the material culture in his or her custodianship better known.

A.E. Nordenskiöld made a collection of 246 artefacts from Port Clarence, Alaska, shortly after completing the first navigation of the Northeast Passage around Siberia. He spent four days in July 1879 turning his

riches to account by making visits like a pedlar in the tent villages with sacks full of felt hats, thick clothes, stockings, ammunition, etc., for which I received a choice collection of ethnographical articles.

None of this material was further documented as to the person from whom it had been collected or the specific source or detailed use of the object. While most of the collection was obtained in Port Clarence, the travelling and trading activities of Eskimos meant that the original source of artefacts may have been quite widespread.

VanStone's account of the collection is concise. He introduces the history of native-white relations and provides a detailed background to Nordenskiöld and his work, particularly on the *Vega* from 1879 to 1880. Appropriate excerpts from the navigator's published account of the trip (1881) are used to contextualize the few days of hectic collecting activity. The collection is introduced briefly, with comments on the relatively good condition of the collection and on the numbering system as used in its resting place, the Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm. The catalogue itself consists of two parts: an account divided by activity — sea and land hunting, fishing, clothing, household equipment, and so on — and a list in the form of an appendix. The accounts of activities are precise, with detailed descriptions of important artefacts, references to significant comparative material, and sufficient ethnography for the text to be informative. There is no attempt to provide the kind of exhaustive scholarship that too often has the effect of disinforming by building up great constructs of repetitive details. For example, in the section "Tools and Manufactures" adze blades are described, with the source and trade routes of the jadeite employed, its attributes, and the methods for hafting the blade. Perhaps the most significant artefact in the collection is the full-size kayak. This was purchased for a hat and 500 cartridges. The description is technical, with measurements, details of the sewing techniques, materials, and references to the rather few sources in the literature. The paper ends with a section of conclusions, which compares this collection to others and analyzes Western imports and changes to Eskimo material culture.

This publication will be of great use to specialists. It provides a great volume of information in an easily accessible form. However, only about one-third of the collection is illustrated. Most of the important artefacts, apart from the kayak, are included. Kayaks are notoriously difficult to photograph and are usually illustrated with drawings. Perhaps many of the most remarkable things should

have been illustrated with more than one figure; this would include all bow drills (Figs. 14, 20, 21), with their engraved hunting scenes, rather than just one, and the superb boathook (Fig. 25c).

It is rather difficult to find other criticisms. However, the word "gorget" (1880.4.1155) is used misleadingly. In correct use it refers to military decorations worn below the throat as pectoral ornaments (as defined in *Webster's*). In North American material culture it is used for the circular shell and later silver decorations worn in the same manner in the Eastern Woodlands and southern United States. "Gorge" (as also defined in *Webster's*) is a more general term for sharp instruments covered with meat left for animals to wolf down in such a way that the instrument kills them in the throat or stomach. Finally, perhaps some reference should have been made to the most significant European publication about Alaskan material culture before the Smithsonian publications emerged. This is the second volume of A. Bastian's *Amerika's Nordwest-küste* (Berlin: A. Asher and Co., 1883-84), which superbly illustrates and describes Bering Strait material of the same date as that from the *Vega* voyage.

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WHALING COMMUNITIES. Edited by ELISABETH VESTERGAARD.

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Perhaps the brief, uninformative title of this publication was intended to shield its potential audience from any preconceived notions they might have about its subject, whaling. Or maybe its scope defied an all-embracing title. However, I suspect that most readers would like a more informative title than "Whaling Communities"; I would suggest something like: "The Science and Politics of Whale Conservation and Its Impact on North Atlantic Whaling Communities," subtitled "The Proceedings of a Conference."

This conference, held at Aarhus University, Denmark, in January 1990, was organized by the Society for North Atlantic Studies "on the basis of their interdisciplinary research interests," which, according to the editor, "are regionally and not nationally defined and independent of organisations or governments in favour of or against whaling." An examination of the list of conference sponsors (Danish, Greenlandic, Icelandic and Faroese institutions) and speakers makes a mockery of this claim and the pretense of academic neutrality. (Although it is not a whaling nation, Denmark represents its dependencies, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, in the International Whaling Commission [IWC].) In fact, the proceedings clearly have a pro-whaling message. Furthermore, it is probably no coincidence that the conference was scheduled to occur before the 1990 meeting of the IWC, a meeting in which the 1986 whaling moratorium was to be reconsidered. Since the moratorium, Japan and the Nordic whaling nations have lobbied the IWC to recognize a new category of whaling — "small-type coastal whaling" — and to evaluate proposals for higher quotas under "research whaling." Despite this detracting background, it would be unfair to dismiss the conference as only a political prelude to the IWC meetings. There is much more to it.

When the IWC officially recognized aboriginal subsistence whaling, it gave legitimacy to cultural arguments for the continuation of whaling on a localized scale. The Aarhus conference takes up this argument with the stated aim of bringing socio-cultural perspectives on whaling together with the science of whale conservation, which, according to the editor, has dominated public discussions about whaling. Accordingly, a mixture of biologists, anthropologists and politicians were brought together to create a more "holistic" forum for discussion of whaling and whaling societies in the North Atlantic.