

III. FAR EASTERN ARCHÆOLOGY

A. Time Depth and Culture Process in Maritime Northeast Asia*

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The coasts and offlying islands of the North Pacific coast of Asia to the south of Bering Sea, down to Japan, were characterized to a considerable extent in historic (or should we say ethno-historic) times by an economy and way of life oriented toward the sea. It is one in which the hunting of sea mammals played an important role—an activity which presupposes the presence of seagoing craft and is generally characterized by that distinctive piece of sea-hunting equipment, the toggle harpoon. We are thinking of such peoples as the Maritime Koryak, the Kuriles (or Kurile Ainu) who have been described as real sea-gypsies in some of the early accounts, many of the coastal Ainu groups of Sakhalin and Hokkaido, even some Gilyak. It has been generally assumed that this pattern had a significant time depth: that it represents a long-standing way of life in this part of the world. As a result, this area has often been regarded as the ancestral hearth for the highly-developed Eskimo maritime complex of the Bering Sea region, which was thought to have appeared at a later date. This assumption of time-depth for the maritime pattern in northeastern Asia has been based largely on extrapolating the present back into the past, bolstered occasionally by adducing archæological specimens, the dating and context of which have been unknown or little understood. In other words, the assumption had *not* been based on any actual knowledge of the situation in prehistoric times. No disparagement is intended here, because we have hitherto had no data on the economic prehistory of this area. But with data now coming in, a review is called for. So let us see what the prehistoric way of life could have been in those parts of coastal northeast Asia on which information is presently available; and determine whether this maritime pattern is in fact a long-established tradition here, and consequently might represent the source for such patterns elsewhere around the North Pacific rim. The subject has intrinsic interest, since we are dealing with one of the major human cultural and ecological adaptations.

Proceeding from north to south, we note initially that remains of classic Eskimo type extend only to the north shore of Anadyr Gulf—just around the corner from Bering Strait. Beyond this stretches one of the least known parts of Siberia, archæologically speaking. Aside from the Kanchalan site in the estuary of the Anadyr River, which falls well within the Christian era, we have no prehistoric remains till we reach Kamchatka. They are fairly numerous here but all seem quite recent and

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clearly do not represent a sea-hunting economy. For instance, toggle harpoons do not occur in Kamchatka. It is pertinent to recall also that the historic aborigines of the peninsula, the Kamchadal, were not maritime people. West and south from Kamchatka the mainland coast is again largely a blank, but broken by a stretch in the Magadan region, where we find a maritime culture with whaling harpoons, pit houses and check-stamped pottery but of protohistoric date and thought to represent the ancestors of the Koryak. An earlier horizon characterized by shell middens is said to be reminiscent of Aleutian materials; we are told that it lacks toggle harpoons, pottery and pit houses; but further details are lacking and there is no basis for dating. Proceeding southward again we traverse a long stretch of forbidding coast that offers little inducement to human settlement and was only spottily inhabited in historic times. There is no real centre of aboriginal population until we reach the Amur River, which for at least the last 5,000 years has been characterized by sedentary populations with a river fishing economy. No essential change in the way of life has been reported over this span of time. Groups that moved out to the coast and across to the island of Sakhalin in Neolithic times continued to follow the same kind of life. Proximity to the ocean seems to have wrought none of the magical changes that are alleged to have taken place in the American Pacific Northwest when, we are told, river tribes moved down to the sea and spontaneously invented a maritime economy. The Amur population remained riverine until historic times, although a few modern Gilyak do a limited amount of sea hunting—evidently a recent borrowing. Our next coastal sites on the mainland are in the general area of Vladivostok—the southern part of the Soviet Maritime Territory. The earliest horizons here represent a Neolithic culture of land hunters and fishers that flourished from about 1600 to 1100 B.C., as typified at the Zaisanovka I site (or Gladkaia I, depending on which author you are reading). This is succeeded by the shell-mound culture which lasted down to about 200 B.C. and reflects a littoral economy of strandloopers and stock raisers (chiefly of pigs), with secondary land hunting. Their antecedents point toward China. There is no convincing evidence of actual sea-hunting by this population, although an opposing viewpoint has been vigorously propounded by my friend Professor Okladnikov, who sees a genuine maritime culture here. In neighbouring Korea to the south there seems to be no evidence for early maritime economies.

The maritime pattern is thus absent altogether, or of very recent date, in all parts of the northeast Asiatic coast for which data are available for the prehistoric period. Mostly it is simply blank in the archaeological record. Admittedly, vast expanses of mainland coast are still a blank, but nearly all of those areas have little to offer from any point of view. By and large only the regions most favourable for settlement have received archaeological investigations.

Let us turn now to the offshore islands: the Japanese archipelago and its northward extensions, the Kuriles and Sakhalin.

The earliest horizon on Sakhalin, as revealed by recent Soviet field work, is an inland-oriented Neolithic pit-dwelling culture that seems to derive from the Amur River and vicinity. In the southern part of the island, it is succeeded by a full-fledged sea-hunting culture with toggle harpoons that left quantities of seal

bones in the shell middens. On the basis of typological comparisons with the mainland, the latter is dated to the final centuries B.C. and the first few centuries A.D. The harpoons, that appear to be associated with it, show points of similarity with Bering Sea and elsewhere, but always with later types, except for the curious Dorset parallels. Possibly the latter represent a late survival of Dorset forms in an area that must have been marginal to their main development. We should note that in southwestern Alaska, Dorset parallels are still older. This maritime complex on Sakhalin corresponds to the so-called Okhotsk culture of northern Hokkaido, which lasted there until A.D. 1000 or later and spread thence northeast through the Kurile Islands, stopping short of Kamchatka. In these areas also it is the oldest sea-hunting complex, whose members, as represented by crania from the Moyoro midden at Abashiri, are clearly a northern people who have impressed such eminent scholars as Coon and Suzuki as looking quite Eskimoid.

Thus the general archæological picture suggests the influx of an arctic or subarctic maritime group into southern Sakhalin in the last centuries B.C. who introduced the sea-hunting economy for the first time in this area. The invaders blended culturally with the preceding local Neolithic and adopted its rather advanced pottery—a ware alien to the north, with roots on the adjacent mainland. They clung firmly to their economic pattern, however, and apparently managed to retain their genetic identity—both features contrasting strongly with the existing picture in northeastern Asia. The resultant culture and population then expanded to the northwestern tip of Hokkaido and eventually spread along all the northern shores of that island and up into the Kuriles, where the culture lingered into the 2nd millennium A.D. and was subsequently replaced by the Kurile Ainu—who, however, perpetuated the same maritime pattern, evidently borrowed from their predecessors. The exact identity of this invading northern group is still a mystery, but it seems likely that they can be traced to the Eskimo world of the Bering Sea.

We may conclude, therefore, that maritime culture in Sakhalin, the Kuriles and northernmost Japan has no great time depth, and furthermore that according to all evidence it represents an alien intrusion from the north.

There is, on the other hand, considerable evidence of sea hunting a little farther south in Japan, on the northeastern part of the main island of Honshū (the Pacific side), which came into prominence at the end of Late Jōmon around 1100 B.C. and flourished especially in the following centuries (Final Jōmon times). It is associated with detachable harpoons of both barbed and toggle types, which show a certain number of scattered similarities with various Eskimo forms. These similarities in details, however, do not cluster convincingly in time or space; while their fundamental differences are overwhelming. In addition, there is convincing evidence of sea hunting at one site in southern Hokkaido (Irie shell mound) and some traces elsewhere in the vicinity. This appears to belong at a considerably earlier period (perhaps as early as 2500 B.C.: later Early Jōmon stage in this part of Japan) but would be of the same general Honshū cultural tradition. The significance of this situation is still far from clear and merits greater attention than it has received. At any rate it is permissible to say that although there is adequate time depth here to provide a source for the maritime manifestations farther north, the cultural

similarities between the two are not sufficient to establish any historical relationship, despite the very close proximity. Furthermore, there is no evidence that this north Honshū tradition ever spread even to immediately adjoining areas such as northern Hokkaido or Sakhalin—the very areas that were characterized in more recent times by the maritime way of life.

I think we may conclude that the maritime pattern does not seem to have been typical of northeast Asia prior to the Christian era, with the sole exception of northern Honshū and immediate vicinity. When it does appear, we can discern two distinct complexes with different histories and stemming from different hearths: a southern one of local origin and of some antiquity but highly restricted (north Honshū); and a northern widespread one representing a fairly recent intrusion from the Arctic, where its source must lie. In view of the greater time depth of the maritime complex in southwestern Alaska, and the striking cultural parallels with this area, it seems logical to look in this Arctic direction for its ancestral hearth. The original coastal culture of northeastern Asia was therefore, on present evidence, inland oriented.

This raises, of course, some interesting questions. Why, in this vast coastal and insular area with available sea mammals, did a maritime pattern develop locally only in one restricted area, north-eastern Honshū? And why did this latter complex not spread northward into the areas that were so receptive to similar complex from the north at a later date? Why, in other words, did northern Hokkaido receive its first maritime pattern from distant Bering Sea rather than from its next-door neighbours in the southern part of the same island? What enabled the northern complex to spread so rapidly over so great an area? What was its precise origin, and by what route did it so suddenly appear in southern (not northern) Sakhalin so far from Bering Sea? And what became of the breeding population that carried it, who seem to vanish as suddenly and mysteriously as they came?

From our present general picture of prehistoric northeast Asia, I think we can advance a few hypotheses that may stimulate fruitful studies in the culture history of the North Pacific. I suggest that the Kamchadal—the most marginal historic aboriginal culture in the area—represent the original way of life relatively unaffected by the southward spread of the arctic maritime complex. The Kuriles I see as a group of Ainu acculturated by these intruders from the north, taking over the latter's economy and much of the material culture. We could thus view the Kuriles as the last living survivors, in a cultural sense, of this Arctic intrusion far into Asia. On a broader or more theoretical level we can conclude: *i.* that many people will live on the sea without making much use of it until they are initiated by outside influences; and *ii.* (with the situation on the Amur River in mind) that riverine peoples do not inevitably evolve into maritime ones through the operation of some inexorable cultural law, which some workers in effect postulate on the strength of their work on the American rim of the North Pacific, which lies in the same general ecological zone and with a roughly parallel situation for cultural processes.