Dorian Andreevich Sergeev (1928-1984) has the distinction of having discovered each of the three major Eskimo cemeteries on the western side of Bering Strait. The Uelen and Ekven cemeteries, that account for almost all of the artistically significant artifacts, were initially excavated and described by Arutiunov and Sergeev (1969, 1975, 1983) and excavations at Ekven were later continued by Bronshtein and Dneprovsky (Leskov and Müller-Beck, 1983; Bronshtein et al., 2007; Bronshtein and Shirokov, 2008), whereas the Chini cemetery that Sergeev discovered in 1960 was later studied by Dikov (1974). Sergeev’s close familiarity since childhood with the Chukotka Eskimo language and culture was critical for his productive interactions with the local population, and consequently for the identification and ethnographic interpretation of the archaeological finds that resulted from his excavations carried out in collaboration with Sergey Arutiunov. Because there is no published biographical information on Dorian Sergeev aside from a short unsigned obituary in Sovetskaia etnografiia (No. 1:170-173, 1985), Sergey Arutiunov agreed to share his knowledge of the life and career of his close friend and colleague.

Dorian was born in 1928. I think his birthday was May 1st, but I'm not so sure - he never celebrated his birthday. He was born in Vladivostok. His father, Andrei Sergeev, was a successful
Soviet manager and worked in many places in various positions. Dorian had two elder brothers, a younger brother Igor (a Colonel in the Soviet army), and a younger sister, Irena, a rather well known poetess in Leningrad. I knew Igor and Irena quite well. All five bore the surname Sergeev, and all five were from different mothers. Relations between all of them were quite good, but Dorian could only rarely meet his elder brothers, who lived in Rostov-on-Don and Krasnoyarsk. Dorian’s mother, Katerina Semenovna Sergeeva (I don’t remember her maiden name) was born in Ukraine, near Poltava, in 1900. She had a partly Circassian ancestry, of a high-standing princely family of which she was quite proud. Her ancestor, prince Temryuk Idarov, was the father of princess Maria Temrukovna Cherkassskaya, the second of the seven wives of Ivan the Terrible. Dorian named his only son Kerim, in honor of one of his Circassian ancestors.

Dorian was only one year old when his parents divorced, and soon Katerina Semenovna went to teach in an elementary school on the Commander Islands, where she studied some local Aleut dialects. I have read her materials, but they remain unpublished. The next year she moved with her little son to Chukotka, and for several years taught there in a number of Eskimo villages. She also compiled and published several elementary school textbooks for Yupik children, and recorded, edited, and later published in Yukhtun, Russian and Ukrainian her records of folktales told by the blind Yupik storyteller, Kivagme. This was her principal contribution to Eskimo folklore studies.

Dorian grew up in Eskimo villages, where his mother taught. He learned Eskimo ways of life, the Yukhtun language, mythology, and values. At the age of 13 he already worked as a cook on a whaling schooner with a predominantly Eskimo and Chukchi crew. Around 1943, when E.S. Sergeeva’s health declined, they had to leave Chukotka and moved to a town in Irkutsk oblast, where E.S. continued to work as a teacher. She retired in 1946, and from that time on she lived in Leningrad, where Dorian entered Leningrad University. He studied during the day, and in the evenings he earned his living by working in a restaurant, first as a waiter, then as a cook. He was generally an excellent cook. In the summers Dorian worked on archeological expeditions in Irkutsk oblast, where he got his professional training under the guidance of Prof. Aleksei Okladnikov.

In 1951 Dorian graduated from the university with a diploma as a history teacher. He married and went to Chukotka, where his son Kerim was soon born. Dorian taught in the Eskimo village of Urelik, near the port of Providenia. Among his students there were some Eskimo and Chukchi children, but mostly children of officers of a small military base located near Urelik. From there Dorian organized an amateur archeology team. They managed to build an umiak, and in that umiak they investigated the shores of the Chukot peninsula from Sireniki in the south to Chegitun in the north. They did no actual excavations, but rather gathered objects from the ruins of nyngloo (pit dwellings) eroded by the surf. These objects made a very good small museum attached to the school but later, when Dorian left, the museum fell into neglect and the objects ended up in a number of private collections or just disappeared.

The decisive turning point in Dorian’s life and career occurred in the summer of 1955, when soldiers of a small border guard post located at Uelen were digging a trench on the hill near their barracks. The trench cut across an Old Bering Sea period burial on the eastern side of the ancient cemetery, that was not visible from the surface. Luckily, Dorian and his team happened to be at that moment in Uelen. Dorian collected the bones and utensils from the burial and sent them with
a report to Prof. Maxim Levin, who was the deputy director of our Institute of Ethnography. Levin was also the supervisor of my PhD project (on Japanese archeology). The MAE (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, or Kunstkamera) was at that time a Leningrad branch of our institute. In 1957 Levin went for a short time to Chukotka, met Dorian there, visited Uelen, excavated several burials, organized the transfer of Dorian to the MAE as a research fellow, and in June, 1958 three of us, Levin, Dorian and I, started large scale excavations at Uelen, with the aid of local Chukchi and Eskimos. The excavations were completed in 1960, and in 1961 we shifted our attention to the newly discovered Ekven cemetery. We continued at Ekven in 1962. In April, 1963 Levin (a chain smoker) died of lung cancer at the age of 59, and Dorian became the head of the team. We worked at Ekven and some smaller sites in 1963, 1965, 1967, 1970 and 1974. The material continued to be sent to the Kunstkamera since it provided funding for the work, but after 1967 Dorian held the position of director of the REM (Russian Ethnographic Museum) in Leningrad. He did a tremendous job improving the management of REM, and modern ethnographic objects that our expedition obtained in 1967-1974 went to the REM. Dorian and his team of REM museum workers also did a great job of building an ethnographic-memorial museum at Shushenskoye, where Lenin spent his Siberian exile.

In 1967 our team excavated, among others, burial 154. There were four of us, assisted by three Naukan Eskimos. Having removed the soil layer and cleaned the wooden cover, we began to lift heavy logs saturated with water. When we lifted the fourth log, the blackened ivory eyes of a wooden mask stared out at us. The Eskimos were very frightened. They immediately cried out “Kamaka!” (“It's death!”, in Chukchi) and refused to continue. Dorian bent over, placed his palms on the mask, and said “If it's death, I will take its spell upon myself”. “You did it”, the Eskimos said. The work resumed, and in the evening the Eskimos told us the mythology connected with the mask of, as they called him, the cannibal spirit Yughym-Yua. The next day they left in their umiak.
Ekven Burial 154
(From Arutunov and Sergeev, 1975)
In the following years we maintained good relations with the local people, but they refused to help us in our excavations. The 1975 book on the Ekven site was the first widely circulated and detailed publication where the mask was illustrated. Soon a series of disasters began to occur. After a year or two, two members of our team who had participated in the excavation of burial 154 died of cancer. Both were rather young, between 50-55 (May Marievich Mechev and Vladimir Sergeevich Arnoldi). Dorian's only son Kerim was stabbed to death as a bystander to a quarrel at a wedding. Soon Katerina Semenovna died. A month later (in 1976) Dorian had a stroke while attending a conference in Dushanbe. He partially recovered after a year and even continued to serve as director of the REM, but two years later he had a second stroke that left him paralyzed and he therefore had to retire. After a third stroke, he died on June 29, 1984, at the age of 56.

The last time I went to Ekven with Dorian was in 1974. In 1977 Mikhail Chlenov, Igor Krupnik and I worked at the newly discovered Whale Alley with a team of Chaplinno Eskimos. I returned to Ekven only in 1987, this time with Mikhail Bronshtein and Kirill Dneprovsky, to pass on the excavation torch. From this point on the excavated objects were kept at the Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow, where Bronshtein and Dneprovsky are based.

Sergey Arutiunov
April, 2010

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1Sergeev's discovery of the Uelen cemetery is described below, and his discovery of the Ekven cemetery followed geologists finding of human remains on the surface (see Arutiunov and Sergeev, 1975). However, his contribution to the discovery of the Chini cemetery is not mentioned in Dikov's 1974 monograph, where he merely states that they first noticed it from the sea in 1958 but were not able to carry out excavations until they returned in 1963, when they discovered that “a burial in the main cemetery had already been excavated by someone” (Dikov, 1974, Fig. 1, page 6).

Although there may be some confusion concerning the exact dates, it appears that for a couple of weeks in 1960 Dorian stayed in Nuniamo, opposite the town of Laurentia. He hired an umiak with a crew consisting of Nuukaghmit Yupighyt, the then residents of Nuniamo, and investigated the surrounding shores. During this survey he discovered the Chini cemetery (spelled Sini in his reports), and excavated only one burial but made a complete sketch of the plan of the cemetery, since the burials were easily discernible from the surface. Regulations required archeologists to send a detailed preliminary report of any excavations to the Archeological Committee of the Soviet Academy of Sciences by the end of the year, and if they failed to do so they would not be granted a license to excavate in the following season. Dorian duly presented his report, including a description of Chini with the plan. Because the Committee archives were open to all professionals, Dikov copied the plan of Chini and later excavated it, but in his subsequent publications on the site he did not mention Dorian's name as its discoverer (above based on information from SA).


3A short article by Sergeev on “Eskimo Folklore Motifs in Old Bering Sea Sculpture”, that also illustrated the mask, had appeared 5 years earlier (Folklor i etnografiia, Leningrad, 1970, pp. 105-113).

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**Literature:**


