

## Ivory comb, Thule culture, Wales, Alaska, 7 cm



Bruce white photos

The head on the left has labrets and usual features, whereas the head on the right has a “shaman face” with a short beard, flaring nostrils, and a large pile of hair (indicated by fine striations) that protrudes above the eyes (forehead) and extends in a sausage-shaped mass down each side of the forehead. Under each head is an 8 mm diameter hole, the one on the left surrounded by a circle and “rays”, probably representing the sun, the one on the right with rays but without a circle (the moon?), and in the center of the comb there is a larger (18 mm) hole from which short lines also radiate (the ice hole?). There is a rough sketch of a face on the flat rear surface of the left head.

This comb appears to represent several shamanic concepts, showing the “normal” and “transformed” appearances of the human figure, and holes symbolizing the sun, the moon, and the “ice hole”, through which the shaman descends to the lower world of evil spirits. These holes appear to be closely related to the iron discs with holes that customarily decorate the back of Siberian shaman’s costumes, including the sun disc (kūn) that is supposed to illuminate the shaman's path during his journey to the subterranean world, the moon disc, and the ice hole disc (Oibón). For an example of an ice hole disc from a 19th century Yakut shaman’s costume collected in 1906 by Viktor Vasil’ev (1877-1930), in which the large hole is also surrounded by short radiating lines very similar to those on the comb, see Vasil’ev (1910) and Pekarski and Vasil’ev (1910, for photograph of the complete costume; copies below), and Jochelson (1933).

## Literature:

- Jochelson, W. (1933): The Yakut, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 33, Part 2, pp. 108-109.
- Pekarskii, E. and Vasil'ev, V.N. (1910): Plashch i buben Yakutskago shamana (The Coat and Drum of the Yakut Shaman) in *Materialy po etnografii Rossii*, 1: 93-116.
- Vasil'ev, V.N. (1910): Shamanskii kostium i buben u Yakutov (A Yakut shaman costume and drum), *Sbornik Muzeia po antropologii i etnografii pri Imperatorskoi akademii nauk*, tom 1, vyp. VIII, 1, pp. 22-23 and Fig. 19.

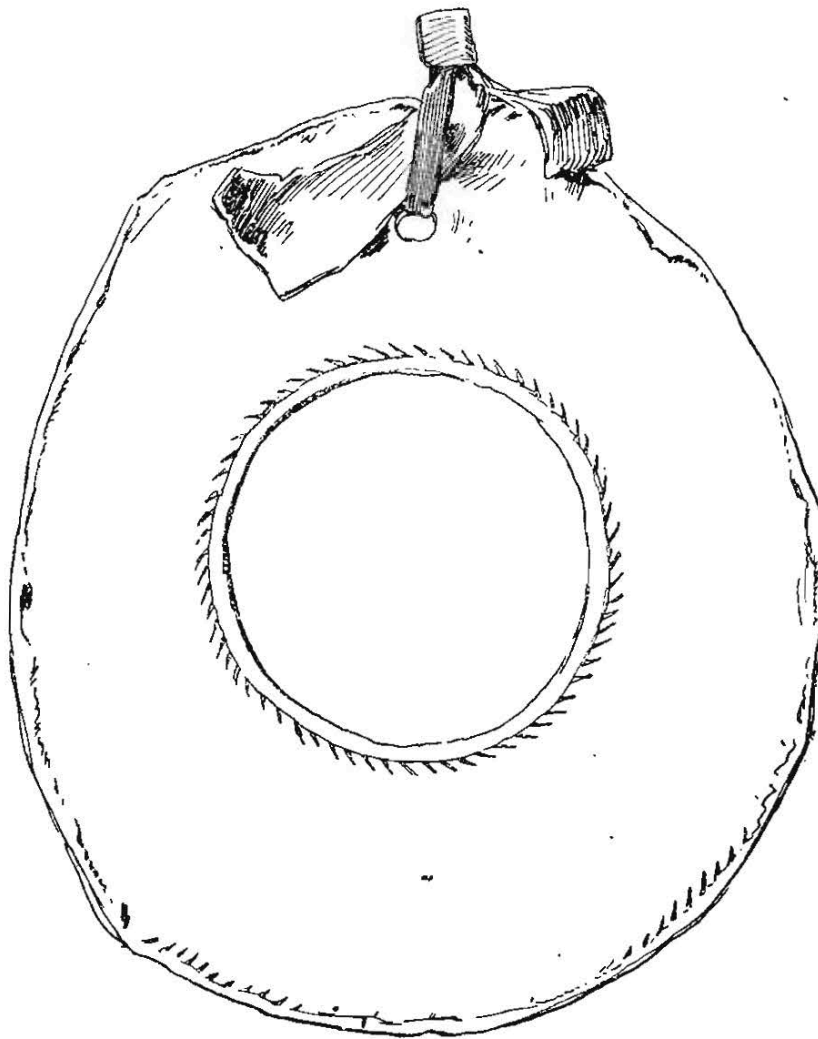


Рис. 19.

