

**OBS-II ivory shell-shaped object, most likely a burial mask for a child,  
with four partially drilled bosses and slots at each end for an  
attachment strap, 9 cm**



This probable burial mask is comparable to a larger (18.3 cm) Alaskan object described as the upper portion of a burial mask (“masque funéraire”, Menil Collection A8308, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 1984, Cat. No. 258, pp. 209 and 350). It is also in some respects similar to an object from burial 16 (59) at Uelen in Chukotka (Arutiunov and Sergeev, 1969, Fig. 94-7; Mikhailova, 2012, Fig. 5b) that resembles snow goggles from Ekven Burial 14 (Arutiunov and Sergeev, 1975, Fig. 51-2) but has no holes for the eyes. In addition to the goggles-like object, Burial 16 (59) contained several incised crescent-shaped or semi-oval ivory plaques resembling a grinning mouth with teeth (Arutiunov and Sergeev, 1969, Fig. 94-3 and 4; Mikhailova, 2012, Fig. 5a). Burial 16 (59) also contained over a dozen small ivory objects consisting of two linked parts (Mikhailova, 2012, Fig. 6), reminiscent of the non-utilitarian ivory or bone objects found almost exclusively in the surface burials of the Ipiutak cemetery at Point Hope (the so-called swivels and chains). These “charms” (as designated by Mikhailova) are very similar to objects found singly in other Uelen and Ekven burials, but never in a large group as in burial 16 (59).

Burial 16 (59), which was dated to the OBS-I/OBS-II transition period, is also unusual insofar as it is one of only two Uelen and Ekven burials in which the body was placed in a prone rather than supine position (thus comprising less than 1% of all Uelen and Ekven burials in which the position could be clearly established). Based on their grave goods together with archaeological and ethnographic evidence from a number of other areas, Mikhailova concludes that both of these prone burials were shaman’s graves. It is therefore probably a reasonable assumption that this shell-shaped OBS-II object, whose features may represent stylized snow goggles (drilled bosses surrounded by concentric circles in place of eye-holes, a lower inverted-V extension commonly found in snow goggles and that would fit over the bridge of the nose, and side slots for a leather attachment strap) is, if not necessarily a burial mask, a related object made for ritual use, possibly in connection with shamanic ceremonies as is likely the case for the Uelen burial 16 (59) “goggles”.

### **Literature:**

Arutiunov, S.A. and Sergeev, D.A. (1969): *Drevnie kul'tury aziatskikh eskimosov (Uzlenkii mogil'nyk)* (Ancient Cultures of the Asiatic Eskimos - The Uelen Cemetery), Nauka, Moscow [English translation by Richard L. Bland, Shared Beringian Heritage Project, U.S. National Park Service, 2006].

Galeries nationales du Grand Palais (1984): *La rime et la raison*, Les collections Ménil (Houston-New York), Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris.

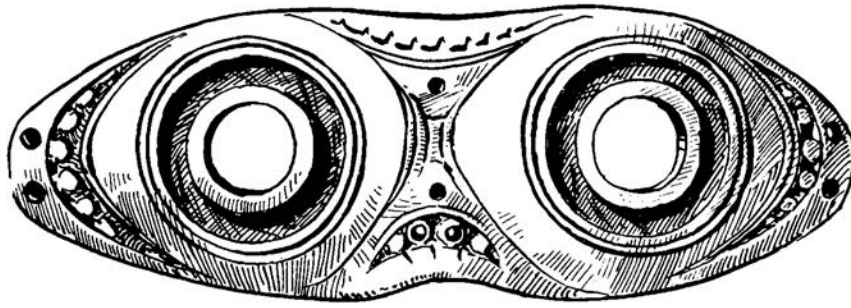
Mikhailova, E.A. (2012): Pogrebeniya nichkom na Uelenskom mogil'nike Chukotki (Prone burials at the Uelen cemetery, Chukotka) in *Vekhi na mysakh: K 80-letiiu chlena-korrespondenta RAN S.A. Arutiunova - Sbornik statei* (Landmarks on the headlands: For the 80th Birthday of Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences S.A. Arutiunov - A collection of articles), M.M. Bronshtein and I.I. Krupnik, Eds. State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow, pp. 32-41.

**“Burial mask”, 18.3 cm (Menil collection, A8308)**

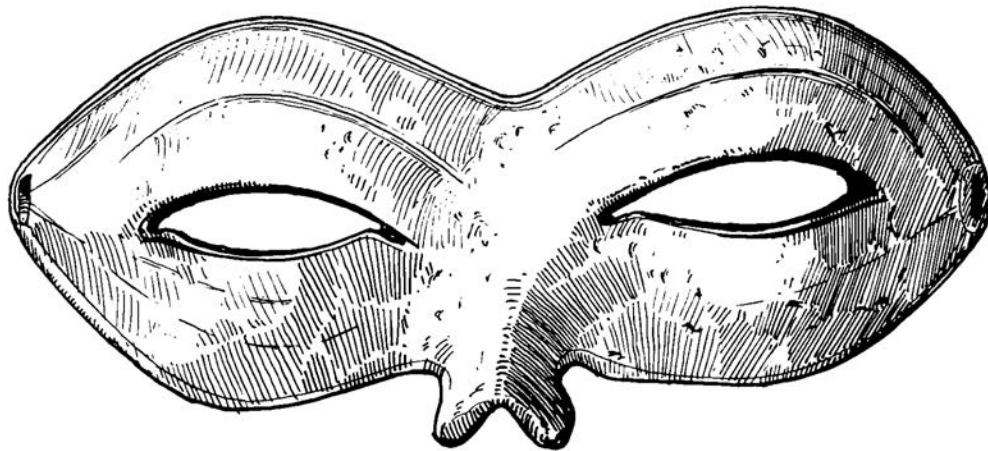


Mikhailova (2012), Figs. 5 and 6





2



1

*Рис. 51. Инвентарь погребения 14 (натур. вел.)*

1 — очки-забрало, 2 — очки-маска, 3 — рукоять ножа-уляка (фрагментированная), 4 — пугов: тенообразные поделки