

## Old Bering Sea II bone plaque, 18 cm



Bruce White photos

This bone (walrus rib) plaque has a central face that is surrounded on either side by Old Bering Sea II-style engraving. Attachment slots at each end strongly suggest that this ornament was attached to clothing, perhaps as a pectoral or breastplate for a shaman's costume.

The face and especially the prominent cheeks on this plaque also have affinities to the cannibal spirit called Yughym-Yua by the Naukan Eskimos of Chukotka, as exemplified by the wood mask found by Dorian Sergeev in Ekven OBS II burial 154 (Arutiunov and Sergeev, 1975, Fig. 94, shown below), and probably also to the 4.5 cm ivory maskette from the Ekven OBS II burial 216 (Bronstein et al., 2007, Fig. 413, p. 175, see below), both presumed shaman's burials.

Although folklore data on Yughym-Yua (югым-ио, in the Cyrillic rendering of the local Nuukaghmit pronunciation) remain unpublished, he is a very powerful spirit or god who reigns over the earthly world but probably not the realm of the sea, which is under the rule of Myghym-Aghnaq. Yughym-Yua is responsible for the lives and deaths of humans. He devours the souls of the deceased, but regurgitates them and lets them enter the bodies of newborn babies (Sergey Arutiunov, personal communication).

Note that based on its weight (215 g), the number and location of potential lashing holes, and other characteristics, this is definitely not part of an armor, as was first assumed by the Eskimo collector. For a description of reindeer antler armor slats found in Ekven house H-18, see Dneprovsky (2002, p. 185 and Fig. 11-6).

Literature:

Arutiunov, S.A. and Sergeev, D.A. (1975): *Problemy etnicheskoi istorii Beringomoria – Ekvenskii mogilnik* (Problems of the Ethnic History of the Bering Sea – The Ekven Cemetery), Nauka, Moscow [English translation by Richard L. Bland, Shared Beringian Heritage Project, U.S. National Park Service, 2006].

Bronshtein, M.M, Dneprovsky, K.A., and Sukhorukova, E.S. (2007): *Mir arkticheskikh zverboev: shagi v nepoznannoe* (World of Arctic Maritime Hunters: Steps into the Unknown). State Museum of Oriental Art and Department of Culture of the Chukotka Autonomous Region, Moscow-Anadyr.

Dneprovsky, K.A. (2002): Ekven house H18 – A Birnik- and early Punuk-period site in Chukotka, in *Archaeology in the Bering Strait Region – Research on Two Continents* (Dumond, D.E. and Bland, R.L., Eds.), University of Oregon Anthropological Papers No. 59, pp. 166-206.

