

Eskimo wood bowl, southern Alaska (most likely from the region along the lower Yukon or Kuskokwim rivers) with a *palrai yuk* image painted in black on the inside bottom of the bowl. 30.1 x 21.5 x 8.3 cm





The mythical alligator-like man-eating *palraiuk* that is also painted on the sides of umiaks has been described by Nelson (E.W. Nelson: *The Eskimo About Bering Strait*, Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, DC, 1899, pp. 444-445; see next page).

The considerable residue of animal fat and blood still remaining in the bowl is apparent in the photograph below.



A strange, crocodile-like animal, known as *pāl-rai-yúk*, is painted on the sides of umiaks and on the inside of wooden dishes (see figures 155, 156) by natives along lower Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. A mask (plate xcv, 3) from the tundra south of the Yukon mouth has this animal drawn down each side of the face. According to the traditions of the people in this district the climate in ancient times was very much warmer than at present and the winters were shorter. In those days the mythic animals referred to were abundant in the swampy country between the two rivers, being more common near the Kuskokwim, where the climate was more temperate than on the Yukon.

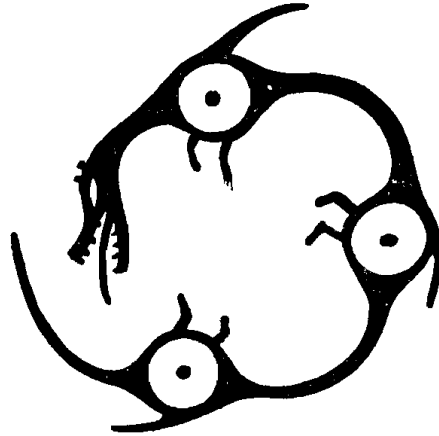


FIG. 155—Drawing of the *pāl-rai-yúk* in a wooden tray ($\frac{1}{3}$).

In those days the waterfowl and other birds came back from the south in February and the snow melted during that month and the water ran into the passages of houses as it does now in April. At that time the *pāl-rai-yúk* lived in lakes, creeks, and marshes, where it killed men and animals for food. Several of the lower Yukon Eskimo recounted the killing of the last one by a hunter whose wife the beast had caught and devoured while she was getting water from the lake. In the tale of the creation by the Raven, as the latter and the First Man were traveling in the Skyland, the Raven cautioned his companion not to drink from the lakes which were passed, because in them were animals he had made that would seize and destroy any one who ventured near. These were the *pāl-rai-yúk*.

In the drawings of this animal on umiaks, at intervals along the body are open spaces, inside which are represented parts of a human body, showing the belief in its having eaten such food. It was said to live in the water, where it lay hidden among the grass, whence it suddenly rushed to seize a person on the bank or to attack kaiaks when crossing its haunts.

The curious likeness of these animals to the alligator, as shown in the accounts of its habits and in drawings representing it, is very remarkable. Nearly all of the umiaks in the country of the lower Yukon and to the southward have a picture of this animal drawn along the entire length on each side of the boat, with the head near the bow, and the figure is common also on wooden dishes in that region. It appears to be a local myth, and can scarcely have been brought to these people since the advent of the whites. The country where this myth



FIG. 156—Drawing of the *pāl-rai-yúk* on an umiak ($\frac{1}{16}$).

is most prevalent is one of the least visited of any along the coast of Bering sea. The accompanying figure 156 represents a model of an umiak from the lower Yukon, with the animal drawn along the sides.