
The Lithic Industry from the Pre-Contact Yup'ik Site of Nunalleq (South-West Alaska)

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Résumé

The Nunalleq site is a pre-contact Yup'ik site from Southwest Alaska dating to the XVIth-XVIIth century. This coastal site represents the first archaeological site excavated in Yup'ik territory relating to the Bow-and-Arrow Wars period with evidence of warfare, given that the site has been abandoned after it was destroyed and burnt during an attack. Through its rich lithic industry, it also provides one of the best examples of pre-contact Yup'ik polished stone tool technology. Indeed, thousands of polished artefacts made of slate, jade and other raw materials, give a clear insight into the Central Yup'ik tool kit of the pre-contact era. So far, the stone tool collection has provided a wide array of artefacts, including end-blades, lance points, adzes, multi-faceted chisels, ulus, drill bits, large knives, small knives, scrapers, and so on. Other than a technological approach to all these artifacts, the analysis also enables discussions relating to the Bow-and-Arrow Wars (through the study of end-blades used as arrow points) or to the gender distribution in the Nunalleq village (through the analysis of the spatial distribution of certain types of tools such as ulus). Located in a permafrost context, the site has produced archaeological remains with an extraordinary preservation of organic materials. Thus, when studying the stone tool component, the organic preservation permits to replace the stone industry within a larger technical system including organic materials relating (bows, arrow shafts, bone points, harpoons, armor plates, etc.). The Nunalleq site being a pre-contact Yup'ik coastal village, studying the site and its archaeological remains represents a window for understanding a coastal settlement of past hunter-gatherers-fishers in a region where this type of excavated site is non-existent.

Mots-Clés: Nunalleq, Yup'ik, Alaska, Lithic technology, Slate, Polished artefacts

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