

A STONE LAMP FROM YUKON ISLAND, ALASKA

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Yukon Island at the mouth of Kachemak Bay has already yielded a treasure of early Eskimo remains, carefully excavated, described and analysed by Professor Frederica de Laguna. To these we may now add a new, chance find of the summer of 1955. Mr. George Yuth, formerly of Seldovia, while exploring the beach lying below the village site investigated by Dr. de Laguna, spied a strange looking 'rock' embedded in the sand and gravel. A kick testified that it was firmly anchored, so he bent down and scratched the rock loose with his fingers, becoming increasingly convinced that this was no ordinary stone. His efforts exhumed the lamp portrayed in the accompanying plates.

The lamp measures approximately 17 inches long and tapers from 9 inches wide to about 5½ inches, and is in an excellent state of repair. The carving on the lamp constitutes its most outstanding feature. The narrower, wick end bears the pug-nosed, eared head of a mammal, which lies on its back as the lamp rests upright. Across the wide end opposite, flanking a gruff human face, rise a pair of hind flippers or paws, doubtless of the same animal. This posture of reclining on its back readily calls to mind the sea-otter, but we cannot eliminate the possibility of a sea-lion, fur-seal, or even a beaver or bear, if the creature is to be viewed from the bottom side of the lamp. The criss-cross bars along its sides, terminating in conventionalized fish- or whale-tails, seem however to set the ambiance of the main carving in the sea. The well-executed human head that dominates the rear of the oil reservoir displays an Eskimoid face with a groove across the lower lip that may depict a labret slit, and indications of some headdress or hair-do.

Such decorated stone lamps belong to an early Eskimo-Aleut stratum on Alaska's south coast. Other examples, though none so elaborate as this one, are pictured in de Laguna's "Archaeology of Cook Inlet, Alaska" and Hrdlicka's "The anthropology of Kodiak Island". Further information on the present lamp can be procured from the Homer Society of Natural History, Homer, Alaska, who have most kindly provided the data and photographs reproduced here.

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