AN ATTEMPT TO DISTINGUISH PHASE AND FACIES: TECHNOLOGICAL VERSUS STYLISTIC ANALYSES OF EARLY THULE HARPOON HEADS

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Abstract

The various harpoon head types of the early Thule culture are examined in an attempt to differentiate between their determining functional attributes, their purely technical aspects of fabrication and their stylistic attributes. This procedure could constitute ***one means among others*** *to define the technological characteristics of a culture phase and to approach its geographical and chronological extent and limits. Simultaneously, it could help distinguish and explain the specific elements of the various facies which compose the culture phase.*

Résumé

Nous examinons les différents types de têtes de harpon du Thuléen ancien pour essayer de faire la distinction entre leurs attributs fonctionnels déterminants, les aspects purement techniques de leur fabrication et leurs caractéristiques stylistiques. Cette méthode pourrait constituer ***un moyen parmi d'autres*** *de définir les caractéristiques technologiques d'une phase culturelle et d'en déterminer provisoirement l'étendue et les limites géographiques et chronologiques. Elle pourrait en même temps nous aider à distinguer et à interpréter les éléments particuliers des différents faciès qui composent cette phase culturelle.*

Preamble

Among the conceptual tools in Arctic archaeology we have sometimes regretted the absence of the term "facies", which is so commonly employed by European prehistorians.

Yet the difficulty consists in the fact that "facies" cannot that easily be defined, and one cannot simply say: "a facies is ...". Even for the European prehistorian, it is its utilization which gives it its substance and creates it.

In order to illustrate its pertinence it will be applied in the following to what is best known by everybody, i.e. harpoon heads. The general topic of this symposium being "Transition", the term "facies" might hence become a conceptual tool ranking with those of phase, period, and tradition to which it is affiliated, yet from which it is clearly distinct.

Introduction

"[...] the origin of the shape [can be] ascribed to a quest of a coincidence with the ideal function."

"Taking the technical level into account, the ideal function is frequently very close to its realization in numerous objects; they preserve, however, a style which penetrates the narrow margin which function concedes to the shape."

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"Three parameters interfere with the shape of an object:

- the ideal mechanical function;
- the material solutions to a functional approximation, which depend on the technical state;
- and the style which depends on the ethnic figuration [or the personality of the group]" (Leroi-Gourhan 1965: 128-133)

Figure 1. Sites mentioned: 1. Co-op and Memorana Sites; 2.Nelson River; 3. Cape Kellett; 4. Clachan; 5. Lady Franklin Point.

A harpoon head is an ingenious object, in which technical complexity approaches functional perfection. Among the factors affecting indirectly the shape of a harpoon head are ecological conditions. They obviously determine hunting strategies, and with them certainly the type of harpoon head and its ballistic characteristics. Another factor is the available raw materials not only to constitute the harpoon head itself but also to fashion it. These go hand in hand with the range of technical skills which a culture masters.

Esthetic and spiritual considerations, finally, seem to guide the craftsman producing a harpoon head (McGhee 1977). Considering the preeminent role of the harpoon head in survival, it can reasonably be supposed that it conveys aspects of the spiritual culture of the hunter and his group, and this probably even after the shift occurring in Punuk times, from a belief in the necessity of a spiritual-magical pervasion of the weapon to functional efficacy (Fitzhugh 1988:104).

Therefore, it seems primordial to clearly distinguish the technical-functional elements which determine the different harpoon head types from those stylistic elements, which do not directly interfere with its functioning and which may be the result of esthetic and spiritual considerations. The interaction between function, technical skill, raw material, esthetics and spiritual aspects must not be underestimated (McGhee 1977:141), and the difficulties to define stylistic attributes and distinguish them from functional aspects have been expressed elsewhere (Park 1994:33). Therefore, this paper does not claim to be anything else but a timid approach to analyzing harpoon heads with regard to the second part of this paper: define the essential traits of a culture phase and distinguish what could be called its different "facies".

This paper is based on analyses of the harpoon heads from the initial Thule expansion to Classic Thule. It will be restricted to the Amundsen Gulf area - this key area of transition between the Alaskan origins of Thule culture and its expansion eastwards and its establishment in Arctic Canada and Greenland (Figure 1) - and will focus on the early Thule culture site Co-op, but will also refer to the very early Thule site Nelson River (Arnold 1994), to Cape Kellett (Manning 1956), Lady Franklin Point (Taylor 1972 and Semmler collections), the Clachan and neighbouring sites (Morrison 1983a), and the Memorana site (McGhee 1972; all ASC collections except Nelson River stored at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center). Some rare harpoon heads (on display at Holman Island, N.W.T.), which had been collected by Inuit at non identified localities on western Victoria Island, also enter these analyses. If we have proceeded to fairly explicit analyses of the harpoon heads of the Amundsen Gulf as to their technical and functional as well as their stylistic aspects, this is to provide a base for discussion and for comparisons with early Thule in other areas.

Technical and Functional Analysis

Principally, five harpoon head types (following typologies by Mathiassen 1927; Collins 1937; Ford 1959; Stanford 1976; Morrison 1983a; McCullough 1989; Park 1994) are known from the early Thule period in the Amundsen Gulf area:

- **Thule type 2** (Fig. 2)
- **Clachan type** (Fig. 3)
- **Thule type 3** (or Sicco-like or Tasik; Fig. 4)
- **Barrow** (or Nuwuk; Fig. 3)
- **Thule type 4** (Fig. 3)

A variant of the open socket, self-bladed **Thule type 1** (not figured) does occur but is excep- tional (Morrison 1983a, Pl. 5:a,b). Finally, the most ancient manifestations of the Thule culture are attested by sporadic harpoon heads of the open socket types **Sicco** and **Natchuk** (Fig. 4).

The most characteristic traits which allow us to distinguish these types are, of course, the socket (open or closed) and the blade form (either self-bladed or with an inserted blade of slate or of copper).

Yet, the open vs. the closed socket is an essential trait, especially when correlated with the blade type: it is an opposition between raw materials and can be generalized as an opposition between antler beam on one side and whalebone and certain other antler parts on the other side (Fig. 3). It has to be noted that whale bone is not a very abundant raw material in this area. Ivory, finally, which could be called the universal raw material for harpoon heads because it allows the manufacture of all harpoon head types, is an exogenous, imported material which does not seem to have been modified here.

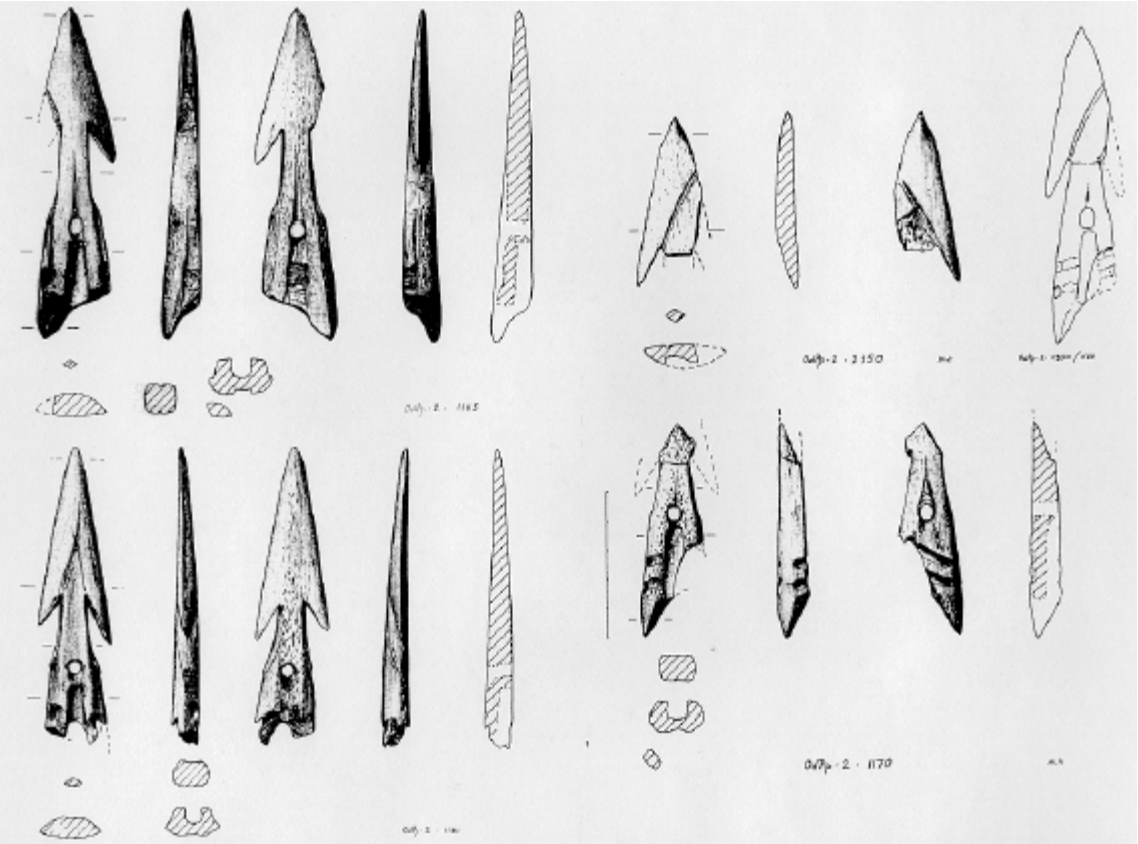

Figure 2. Several variants of Thule type 2, antler beam segment, all from Co-op site. No. 1165 - note the lateral ridges, the lashing slots, and the angling-off spur tip. No. 1151 - concave surfaces, raised ridge decoration. Nos. 2350 and 1170 - cut and broken specimen with perforated lashing holes.

The importance of the raw material

The various harpoon head types could be associated with the following raw materials (Fig. 4):

- **Thule 2** and **Natchuk**: a **1/3 segment** of an antler beam section (Fig. 4; one exception, of ivory).
- **Clachan** (both open and closed socket): **always** a straight, approximately cylindrical **antler branch section** (not segment!) possibly of the part between the main beam and the brow palmate (Fig. 4); perhaps also of a beam part.
- **Thule 3** and **Sicco**: **always a 1/3 segment** of an antler beam section (like those of the types Thule 2 and Natchuk; no ivory specimen is known from the study area)
- **Barrow** (or Nuwuk): **whale bone** for the bigger specimens (ivory in one isolated case from Lady Franklin Point) or of an **antler section** as mentioned for Clachan harpoon heads.
- **Thule 4**: **whale bone** or **antler section** (like the Barrow type). A simple antler tine was used at the Co-op site for very small specimens (Fig. 3).
- **Thule type 1**: antler, probably of a **1/3 segment** of an antler beam section.

While these raw material choices were obviously closely related to specific functional requirements of the harpoon head types, they also resulted in manufacturing constraints: **1/3 beam segment**: Only the compacta of the thick, anterior main beam (and, where available, ivory and good quality whalebone as observed outside the Amundsen Gulf area, cf. for instance McGhee 1984:41) is large and strong enough to

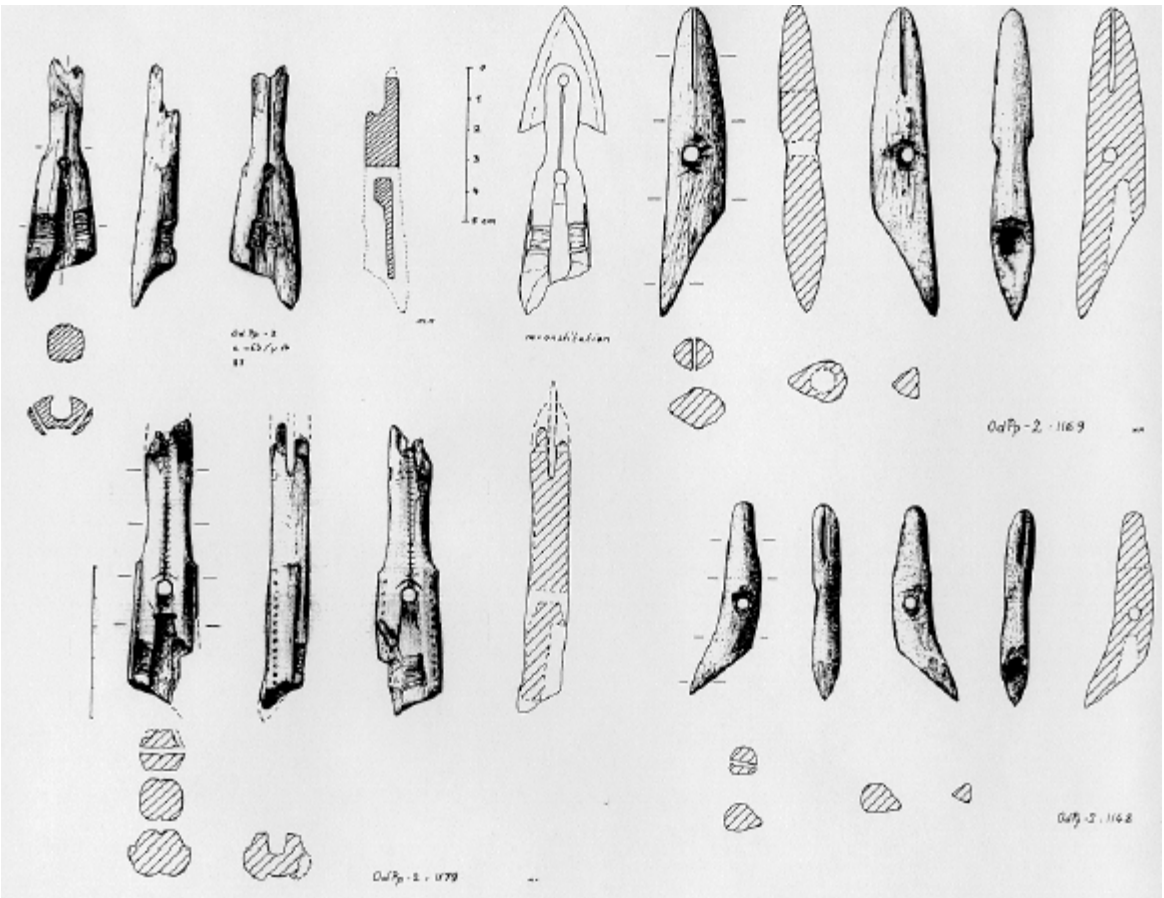

Figure 3. No. 87 - Clachan type, antler branch section. No. 1179 - decorated Clachan (?) type, antler branch section. No. 1169 - Barrow type, whale bone. No. 1148 - small Thule type 4, antler tine. All from Co-op site (OdPp-2)

carve barbs such as on regular-size Thule 2 and Natchuk harpoon heads (cf. Fig. 4), which would resist traction after penetration and toggling. The limited thickness of the compacta, on the other hand, excludes carving of a closed socket and makes it necessary to perforate the line hole and a possible end blade slot as on types Thule 3/Sicco according to a radial direction with regard to the original beam section (i.e. perpendicular to the wide axis of the harpoon head. A tangentially placed end blade would have to be riveted or lashed to a lashing bed).

Whale bone (if of dense, homogeneous quality) on the other hand, does not oppose any constraint either as to the size or thickness of the harpoon head, or as to the type of socket, or the orientation of the line hole and the end blade.

Antler branch section. An interesting example may be seen in the Clachan harpoon heads, a common type in the Amundsen Gulf area, but sporadic outside this area. As a response to Nagy's proposal (1990:139) to verify if the efficiency of metal tools influenced manufacturing techniques, it is suggested here that the specific form of the Clachan type is highly conditioned by the discovery of the technical possibilities in the use of copper, an abundant raw material in this region. It particularly finds its application as an end blade on the Clachan harpoon heads and as rivets, and many items, which elsewhere are made of lithic materials, principally slate, are replaced by copper at the type site. Shortage of strong antler beams suitable for the production of the Thule 2 type can be excluded here as a reason to create a different harpoon head type using the antler branch section instead. Rather, it is suggested that the Clachan Thule people simply

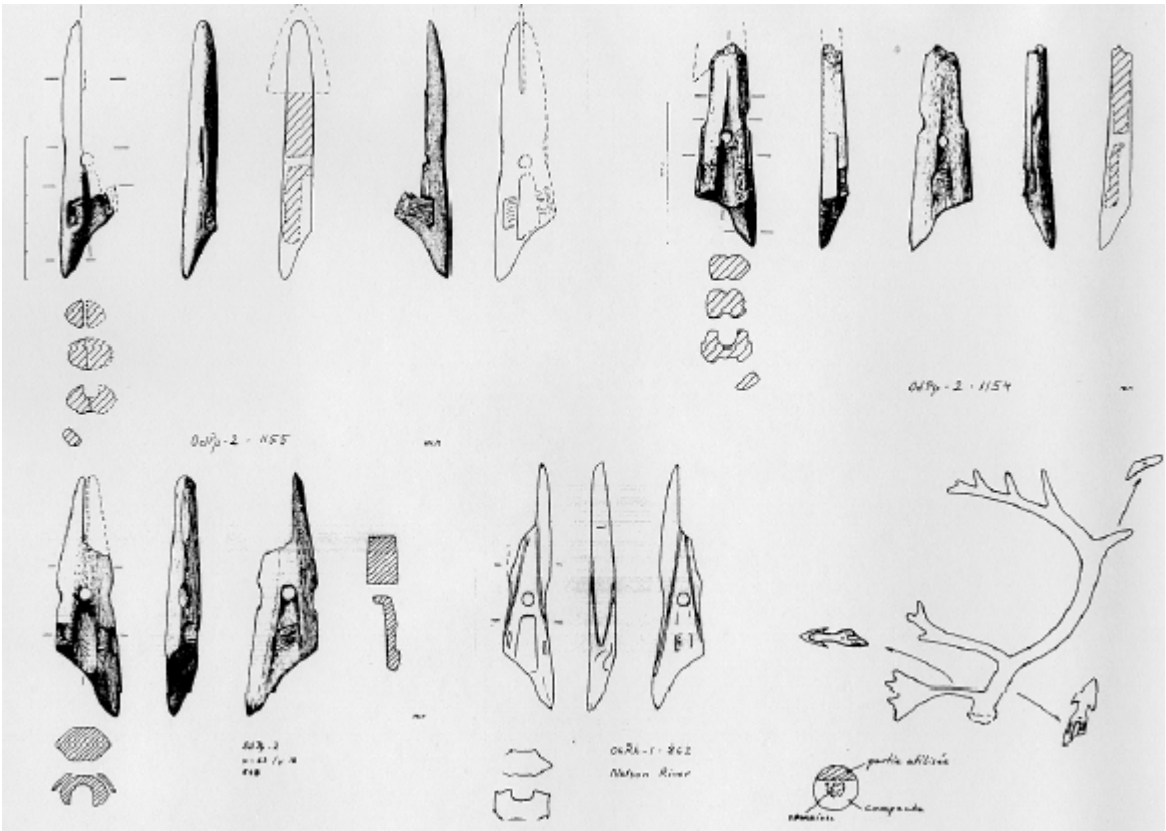

Figure 4. No. 1155 - Thule type 3 with residual side blade slots, antler beam segment, Co-op site. No. 548 - Thule type 3/Sicco with lateral constrictions and hexagonal cross section, antler beam segment, Co-op site. No. 1154 - Natchuk type with residual side blade slot, antler beam section, Co-op site. OhRh-1 No. 862 - Sicco type with raised ridge decoration and concave surfaces, antler beam segment, Nelson River. Bottom right - the harpoon head types with regard to the different antler parts.

modified the Thule 2 type by replacing the integrated, two-barb end blade by an inserted copper blade. Yet, this was possible on the antler branch section (cf. Fig. 4) - it was impossible on a beam segment because of the orientation of the blade and its slot. It seems evident to us that the Clachan harpoon head is the result of an intensified use of copper and its accompanying techniques (cf. Morrison 1987; McCartney 1988), but that it is functionally identical to type Thule 2.

Consequently, the choice of the raw material cannot be fortuitous: it not only greatly conditions the possibilities of manufacturing and hence the shape of the harpoon head, but its mass seems to be the determining factor with regard to the harpoon head type. While any raw material is adequate for harpoon heads used for thrusting at the breathing hole (although not clearly attested for the early Thule people), or short distance propulsion, as long as it is resistant enough to withstand the impact and traction, a material of high density, i.e. of high inertia would be preferable for propulsion at a distance where great precision and a heavy impact are required. These qualities seem to be attained by whale bone (and certainly also by ivory), a hard raw material of high density. Besides being chosen for such articles as certain arrowheads (a heavy type with inserted end blade), bolas weights, and mattock heads, whale bone seems to be the preferred raw material for the Barrow and Thule 4 harpoon head types. In addition to the high inertia of their mass these fairly compact types show aerodynamic contours which suggest excellent ballistic qualities approaching that

of bullets. This includes also Thule 3/Sicco types. It is noteworthy that the struck animal is being retained by the line only after complete penetration and toggling of these harpoon head types.

Opposed to these are the barbed specimens (self-barbed types as Thule 2 and Natchuk or those with an inserted bilaterally barbed blade as Clachan), mainly of antler, with a fairly long fore end with regard to the line hole. These harpoon heads would partly, though less solidly, retain the animal already by their barbs, even before complete penetration and toggling.

It appears that the harpoon heads can principally be divided into two categories: the heavy, bullet-shape types and the somewhat lighter, barbed types. Both categories coexist in all Initial to Classic Thule sites and it is being proposed here as a hypothesis to be checked that they correspond to two different hunting methods, which were practiced throughout this long time period: long-distance propulsion (such as on open water) and short-distance thrusting.

Technical or stylistic attributes?

Certain attributes which are considered stylistic and as such sometimes enter chronologies (Park 1994) may be examined under their technical aspects of functioning and of manufacturing (cf. Nagy 1990:138-139). In this regard the most complex harpoon head element seems to be the spur. Correlated to the position and the type of end blade, to the position of the line hole (and probably other parameters) it is the determining factor for the process of toggling.

- **The shape of the spur:** Preceding the single spur were double and triple spurs, of which the vestigial spur on some very early Thule harpoon heads is thought to be reminiscent. Beside acting as multiple proximal barbs, they reinforced the proximal end and seem to have guided the toggling movement (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1945:57, 59). Could those two functions have lead to the angling-off proximal end of the spur, which can be observed on many early harpoon heads? Besides reinforcing the spur point (i.e. the proximal end), it initiates tipping of the harpoon head inside the body and results in an oblique twist which is further favoured by the asymmetric latero-dorsal position of the spur of all harpoon head types except Thule 4 and Barrow. This specific feature may avoid the proximal end getting stuck and eventually breaking during traction on the harpoon head. As to the difference between angular and curving spurs: Did the curved form precede the angular form as it appears from comparisons or vice versa? Did esthetic considerations enter the shape or rather manufacturing techniques (i.e. the use of an adze vs. that of a knife)? We are presently incapable of answering these questions.

- **The shape of the open socket** cannot completely be dissociated from that of the **lashing device,** because harpoon heads with carved angular sockets with a transverse delimiting groove (apparently for insertion of a bone platelet) are generally equipped with straight, narrow lashing slots. Rounded (drilled?) sockets, sometimes delimited by a vertical half-perforation), on the other hand, often go with drilled lashing holes. It seems that the drilled forms are the consequence of a progress in drilling techniques associated with metal technology employing copper and iron, which widely replace carving techniques for hollows and perforations by Modified Thule times (an exception is a Natchuk harpoon head with round socket from the very early Thule site of Nelson River).

- **The shoulder form,** too, is closely related to the type of lashing device: the neck of the barbed harpoon head types necessarily has to widen shoulder-like to place the lashing device on both sides of the socket. On the earliest harpoon heads, the sides form weak shoulders, which later seem to develop

into marked shoulders. The latter are generally accompanied by set-off bilateral edges or ridges thus creating grooves, which reduce the thickness of the sides to be slotted. Thus the bilateral ridges may be a technical rather than a stylistic attribute to facilitate carving of the narrow lashing slots with a metal tool, whereas the shoulder form can be considered a stylistic attribute. With the development of drilling techniques, shoulder forms and bilateral ridges are less obviously the result of technical considerations and they are less characteristic of certain Thule phases. It can finally be observed that open lashing beds (associated with slanting shoulders) are found on harpoon heads, where the antler beam was obviously not thick enough to fashion closed lashing devices, independent from the Thule phase: another example of material constraint as a determining factor in technique and thus shape.

- **The shape of the fore end:** The hexagonal or flaring forms as well as the keeled fore end on Thule 4, on Barrow, or on Sicco types distend the wound perpendicularly to the slit created by the blade, yet without cutting into the skin. Penetration of the harpoon head would thus be facilitated. On Thule type 4, the keels, which are situated above the line hole, further avoid the thick line being an obstacle during penetration. While these are technical aspects, the esthetic value of the elegantly flaring fore ends of Sicco harpoon heads, for example, is undeniable. The hexagonal, flaring, or keeled forms gradually give way to oval contours, but Thule type 4 harpoon heads maintain the bulge above the line hole.

With these examples, it may have become evident to what degree the functional concept, the manufacturing techniques, and the raw material are interrelated and to what degree these factors determine the harpoon head. Before even choosing the raw material to be used for a harpoon head, the craftsman has to be fully aware of all these factors.

Stylistic analyses

May stylistic attributes be considered as esthetic or may they reveal spiritual aspects of the Thule culture, or both? They "penetrate the narrow margin which function concedes to the shape" (Leroi-Gourhan 1965), as the example of the flaring fore end of Sicco harpoon heads seems to show. They are less dependent on raw materials, although the possibilities of delicate modeling and engraving of whalebone, for instance, are limited, compared to ivory.

There are fundamental differences between stylistic attributes:

- A first category directly affects the shape of the harpoon head, such as the cross section and the contours. Here, esthetic considerations, which may be the expression of a spiritual concern (cf. Fitzhugh 1988), apparently merge with function, as was shown in the preceding chapter. This category also includes the modeling of the harpoon head surfaces. They can be either weakly concave (Thule 2 harpoon heads) or plane as opposed to convex (Sicco and Thule 3 harpoon heads), resulting in the first case in a smooth ridge (four Thule 2 harpoon heads: Co-op site and Nelson River), in the second case in a hexagonal cross section creating an edge at the juncture between two of these surfaces (Co-op site and Nelson Head). They somewhat delimit the different parts of the harpoon head against one another thus underlining them and giving the whole harpoon head a more "elegant", fluid shape. For example, in the case of Sicco harpoon heads, they underline the triangular contours of the harpoon head **body** detaching it from the more or less flaring fore end. They are **integrated attributes** (i.e. not added) to be taken into account by the craftsman **before and during** the forming process of the harpoon head.

- The next category concerns what may be called reminiscent functional elements such as the vestigial spur mentioned above (although this might also be considered an integrated attribute) and the residual side blade slot (an added attribute carved into the sides, which recalls the lateral blade slots on harpoon heads preceding the Thule specimens). Only two Thule 2 harpoon heads (Nelson River and Co-op Site) bear a vestigial spur, whereas residual side blade slots are frequent on Natchuk and Thule 3/Sicco types. Their esthetic value is less evident besides the fact that they interrupt an otherwise straight or curving contour. But what could be their significance? This is a question to which we have not yet found an answer.

- The most widespread attributes, finally, are those which were **added after** accomplishment of the harpoon head. It is the Clachan, the Thule 2 and 3, and their ancestral forms Natchuk and Sicco which show surface ornaments in the form of raised, engraved or superficially incised lines, straight grooves, and dots. Raised lines, for instance, separate the different harpoon head parts and underline them, comparable to the ridge created at the juncture between concave surfaces described above. A very widespread surface decoration, which developed apparently out of the inverted Y incision or a triangle consists in a simple straight groove on Thule 2 and Clachan types. Sometimes it is just a straight line, but on most specimens, it is wide at the base and tapers to a tip. On some rare specimens, the thus created narrow triangle is filled with hatches. It is typical for the Thule culture and may be associated with a whaling tradition, since it could be derived from the Y sign which is interpreted as the symbol of a whale's tail. The remarkable fact about this attribute is that it was obtained by removal of matter; it is **carved into** the raw material, as if desiring to leave a deep imprint on the harpoon head. Is there a symbolic significance inherent to this trait such as animating the harpoon head: the "lifeline"? One can only speculate about it. Superficially finely incised straight, curving, spurred, ticked, or bifurcating lines, crosses, and dots are more frequent on ivory harpoon heads (especially Sicco types) from Alaska or from the eastern High Arctic. They are very rare in the Amundsen Gulf area (Co-op site and Lady Franklin Point). The specimen from the Co-op site is a particularly carefully fashioned open socket Clachan type (? - the end blade must not have been non-barbed) with a ticked median line incised into a long, shallow groove. Additionally, alignments of dots parallel to or along the edge of the harpoon head decorate this Clachan (?) specimen and the Thule 2 type from Lady Franklin Point. Here, these features seems to be simply decorative. Yet, outside the Amundsen Gulf area, triangles, spurred and ticked lines and half-circles, frequently accompanied by cross incisions, seem to have been more than just ornamentation but are interpreted as anatomical elements.

Regarding stylistic attributes it is justified to distinguish within the early Thule period between an initial phase of the Thule expansion and the phase of the Classic Thule — not only in the Amundsen Gulf area (cf. Whitridge 2000). The specimens of the earlier phase are more elaborate, uniting function and esthetics and probably symbolic signification. The more recent Thule harpoon heads, on the other hand, apparently bear added stylistic attributes which are independent from function such as the engraved elongate triangle above the line hole. Remarkably, the only harpoon heads without added stylistic attributes are types Barrow and Thule 4 (except one ivory specimen from Lady Franklin Point).

Facies and Phase

This leads us to what has been described as the "Thule culture variability" (Park 1994:44). Yet, this variability may find its expression in the term of "facies", a term commonly employed in European prehistory.

The term of **facies** (originally derived from observations in sedimentation (petrography and paleontology) "is applied to prehistory to designate the predominating character under which an industry or a culture marks its appearance. It includes the possibility that the respective ensemble could appear elsewhere under a different form. Hence one specifies technical facies (such as Levallois or micoquien), habitat facies, […] seasonal facies." (Leroi-Gourhan 1988). This concept allows one to approach, and finally define, specific aspects of a cultural matrix, like hunting strategies, seasonality, and technology. It refers to **phenomenological** descriptions of a set of particular **aspects**, without insisting on the notion of evolution or process. Various facies would be as many "facets", which emerge from and compose the general spectrum of a culture.

The advantage of using the term of facies is that it places neither geographic nor temporal boundaries, problems which McGhee was fully aware of when describing what he called the Ruin Island, Resolute, Learmonth, Silumiut, and Clachan "Phases" (McGhee 1984:92) and Park when attempting to date the Thule culture (Park 1994:44). The term of facies describes "variation or segmentation within a complex cultural system" (Park 1994:44), may it be the result of change over time or represent synchronous events.

A **phase**, on the other hand, cannot be understood without a reference to evolution. In this sense it is a passage or a stage characterized by specific traits, with regard to the **evolution** within culture. As such, a phase (and a succession of phases) is an integral, constitutive part of a cultural **process**. There is a "before" and an "after". The analyses of stylistic attributes on harpoon heads and their evolution from integrated to added attributes, as described above, illustrate the sense of "phase" to justify the distinction between the initial and the Classic Thule phases, although stylistic attributes should be considered as only one criterion of analysis among others.

As an example of a **technical facies** we could mention the Clachan harpoon head and the technological aspects which conditioned this "type". The Clachan Thule people intensified the use of copper and developed copper working techniques, which led to the production of a harpoon head based on different raw materials and consequently on specific techniques. This technical facies, which is equivalent with a technical know-how, may have been exported to other arctic regions, provided that material and technical conditions were complied with. But **functionally,** the Clachan harpoon head is a Thule 2 harpoon head, the most widespread harpoon head type of the early Thule culture. It further bears the same stylistic attribute as Thule 2 harpoon heads at the Co-op site and other sites in this and in other areas and one may conclude that all belong to the same culture **phase**, the Classic Thule.

In many regards, the Amundsen Gulf area is a transit area, as is repeatedly being emphasized (e.g. Morrison 1999). The transitional character is reflected by many technical traits. Some of these traits, which have their origin in Alaska, demonstrate adaptation to local conditions such as is evident in the use of wood complemented by other materials in architecture, in the use of pottery, and in the progressive substitution of slate by copper, but also in hunting strategies which required an economy based on storage (Morrison 1983b). Could this whole set of traits be called a facies - for example the "Amundsen Gulf facies" - of the early Thule period?

Similarly, the eastern Arctic could be looked at under a different angle. The Ruin Island phase as the first Thule occupation in this area is a phase with regard to the subsequent Inugsuk phase, but it can also be regarded as a facies within the early Thule phase. To return to harpoon heads: It is not necessarily because at Ruin Island the Sicco type predominates that it is a different culture phase from that manifested at Nelson River. At first hand, it is the ratio, within the same occupation level, between barbed types, and the more

compact bullet types which have to be studied with regard to environmental factors and subsequent hunting strategies, because these might reflect ecological differences. Hence, sites as distant as Nelson River and Ruin Island which contain the same harpoon head **types**, with the same fundamental **integrated** stylistic attributes (Schledermann and McCullough 1980), i.e. those in which function merges with style, can be supposed to belong to the same phase (although this seems to upset the chronologies so far established and although a chronological hiatus seems to separate Nelson River from Ruin Island), within which they constitute two chronologically and geographically distinct facies. As Park pondered, "part of the variability that we currently ascribe to temporal differences may in fact represent essentially synchronous variation or segmentation within a complex cultural system" (1994:44; see above).

It appears that it is the functional concept, beyond material constraints and beyond techniques, which is a determining factor in defining a culture phase, because concepts are mental and can be conveyed over time and space without getting damaged, broken or lost, contrary to the object itself in which it finds its expression. What seems then essential for archaeological studies when trying to define a **phase** is to discover which **functional concept** guided the craftsman when producing an object, and under which form spiritual aspects were expressed, if these are detectable.

On the other hand, there is the range of technical skills and procedures, which is so heavily conditioned by ecological conditions and the available raw materials in the various arctic regions. It is **the way how** the functional concept is realized. These technical skills and procedures are reflected in tools, weapons, architecture, but also in stylistic attributes. Studies of both, techniques and stylistic attributes, **could** therefore be a key to distinguish a **facies**. Yet, these hypotheses need to be checked with other categories of artifacts. They certainly need to be checked in other arctic areas linked to early Thule (e.g., the Kobuk River area), but also in more recent phases of the Thule culture, especially since these seem to be so much poorer with regard to stylistic expression.

Conclusion

What may then be so characteristic of the **early** Thule culture is that it is, patchwork-like, composed of a multitude of "facies", which developed out of a common cultural matrix. This would finally explain why we cannot satisfy Robert McGhee's claim for "a nice harpoon head seriation as Jørgen Meldgaard established for Dorset culture" (McGhee's reaction to a paper presented at this conference; Meldgaard 2000). Canadian Early Thule does not seem to have had a core area occupied over a long time period, as would have been propitious for a linear development of harpoon heads and the establishment of a seriation. It rather seems that early Thule was established over several core areas (a model exposed for the Dorset culture by Martin Appelt [2000]) focusing on different resources: iron and an abundant faunal potential in the eastern High Arctic / particularly rich marine resources in the Central High Arctic / copper and the exceptional transit position of the Amundsen Gulf area (offering possibilities of exchange and trade as well as facilities as a stopover), which links the East and the West.

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