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Adrian Jacobsen's Dena'ina Collection in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin

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Twenty-eight objects in the *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi* exhibition come from the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Germany. All were acquired by the same collector, Johan Adrian Jacobsen, who visited Alaska in 1883. The particulars of his commission from the Ethnologisches Museum to collect ethnographic material are best viewed in the context of his time.

Johan Adrian Jacobsen's Institutional Background

Johan Adrian Jacobsen was one of several outstanding contemporaries of Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the founding director of the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (today's Ethnologisches Museum), who contributed to the building up of its huge collections at the end of the nineteenth century. These collecting activities were personally promoted by Bastian, and their traces are still evident today, not only in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin but far beyond, in the world abroad. The course of these collectors' achievements and the reasons for the acquisition of the most important collections in the museum have been studied in depth.

The collectors who worked for the Ethnologisches Museum were from diverse backgrounds; nonetheless, they all pursued a common goal, namely, amassing large collections, sometimes with an eye to quality as well. In the late nineteenth century, the

ethnological museum was a new type of institution, and according to the historian Douglas Cole, this caused a "scramble" for objects to an extent that would never be repeated (Cole 1985). During this founding phase of ethnological museums, Berlin assumed a leading role both nationally and internationally, creating envy as well as criticism on the part of contemporary collectors.

Just a quarter century after the opening of Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum in 1886, however, and only six years after Adolf Bastian's death, the museum's general director, Wilhelm von Bode, issued an assessment that not only demoted the museum to an institution of strictly "natural" ethnological aspects but also limited its acquisition policies:

A museum of ethnology must limit itself accordingly to the collection of products of natural peoples, if it is not to degenerate into a monstrous universal museum, that is, to a disorderly, completely overlaid and useless collection of jumble.... In general, the progressive development of the Ethnological Museum will depend not only upon the increment of its holdings, but far more in their rational limitation and purposeful arrangement.... First the ethnographical departments must be freed from the

16.0 Chijel, feather headdress, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. W 23.5 cm, H 27.5 cm. Feathers, down, wool, cloth binding. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6107. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG 16.1a



FIG 16.1b



FIG 16.1c



FIG 16.2

16.1a, b *Tl'usel*, moccasin-trousers and and *kil dghak'a*, tunic (front and back views), Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

L moccasin-trousers 110 cm, W 57 cm, L tunic 129 cm. Caribou hide, ochre, porcupine quills, sinew, thread. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6098, IVA 6096. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

16.1c *Chik'ish*, man's hood, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

L 55 cm, W 22 cm; caribou hide, red ochre, sinew. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6099. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

16.2 *K'izhagi yes*, knife sheath, Athabascan from Yukon (?).

L 34 cm, W 21 cm. Caribou hide, porcupine quills, beads, sinew, otter or beaver fur. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 9088. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

16.3 *K'izhagi yes, chughi*, knife sheath with beaver tooth, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 57 cm with strap, W 9 cm. Moose hide, beads, beaver tooth. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6101. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

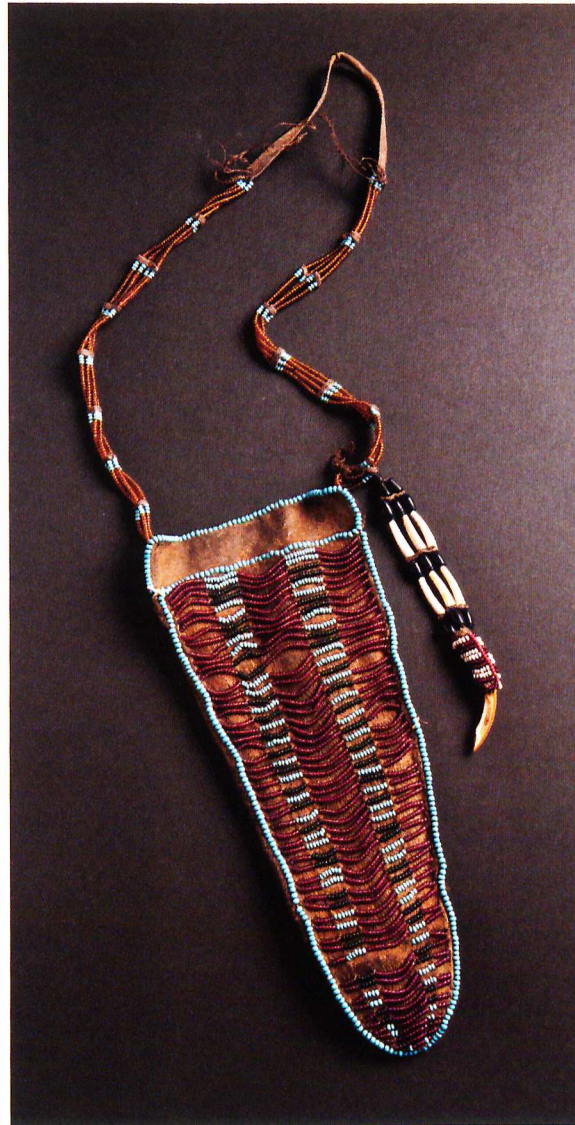


FIG 16.3

16.4 *K'izhagi yes*, knife sheath, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 75 cm. Moose hide, beads, dentalium shells, sinew. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6102. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG 16.4

burden of duplicates, through sale, exchange or, if there is no other possibility, simply donation.¹ (Westphal-Hellbusch 1973:27)

In the ensuing decades, this “liberation” from the “burden of duplicates” led to activities that are hardly imaginable today, explainable at best by the enormous size of the collections acquired during

Bastian’s lifetime. Entire collections were torn apart and the contents distributed to other museums in Europe. Thus, the idea that a museum should free itself of duplicate materials accounts in large part for the widespread existence of collections and objects in European museums today.

Adolf Bastian, the Ethnologische Museum’s founding director, is often portrayed as an odd person who was reserved when in the company

of others. Nevertheless, he was able to convince and enlist distinguished and effective persons as co-workers. The discovery, selection, and advancement of each individual collector must be seen as Bastian's special merit and recognized as his handiwork. For these persons carried on Bastian's work in a direct sequence and with considerable success. The museum and the field of ethnology continue to profit from the accomplishments of these collectors today.

Johan Adrian Jacobsen—Collector, Traveler, Adventurer

It was not only the academicians who contributed to the qualitative growth of the holdings of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. It was also individuals such as Johan Adrian Jacobsen, whose museum collecting work is internationally known today. Jacobsen, whose homeland was Norway, was a mariner, and he also worked as a collector under commission to Adolf Bastian. The museum owes no less than 11,000 objects to his collecting activities, some 7,000 of which he brought back from the Northwest Coast of North America and Alaska, thus representing the largest collection from that region. In addition, he procured 4,000 objects from Indonesia, forming the second largest collection in the subject area of South and Southeast Asia. The quality of the objects in both cases is beyond any doubt. The most comprehensive biography of Johan Adrian Jacobsen has been written by Ann Fienup-Riordan and appears in her book, *Yup'ik Elders at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin* (2005).

Jacobsen was born October 9, 1853, on the island of Risø near Tromsø in northern Norway. He came from an ordinary fisherman's family and received no proper formal education. After attending a school of navigation in Tromsø, at the age of sixteen he assumed command of a fishing boat. In 1874, he traveled to Hamburg, where his brother had his own business. Soon thereafter Jacobsen undertook his first long voyage, to Valparaíso, Chile. On returning to Hamburg in 1877, he acquired an ethnographic collection from Greenland for Carl Hagenbeck. In



FIG. 16.5

16.5 Nk'itl'it, girl's wristlets, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 7 cm. Dentalium shells, beads, sinew, hide. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6127 ab. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

1878, Jacobsen traveled to Berlin with this collection, as well as with several indigenous persons from Lapland and three from Patagonia. Hagenbeck and Jacobsen toured these people together with one of the popular "folk shows" (*Völkerschau*), including eight Labrador Inuit; the tour, however, ended in disaster when the Inuit, who were not vaccinated, died of smallpox. Shocked by this experience, Hagenbeck and Jacobsen ceased conducting tours with exotic peoples for a time (Haberland 1987:337).

In 1881, Jacobsen seized the opportunity to carry out a collecting trip along the Northwest Coast of America under commission to Adolf Bastian for the Berlin museum. The previous year Bastian, during a return voyage from Polynesia via North America, had recognized that the indigenous cultures of the Northwest Coast, who had come into close contact with Europeans only at the end of the eighteenth century, were in transition and, he believed, already on the brink of extinction. The complex social structure of Northwest Coast cultures, together with an art style that was unique in North America and based on highly developed ornamental motifs and excellence in carving, moved Bastian to raise

16.6 *Sel*, woman's boots (pair), Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 52 cm., Caribou hide, beads, dentalium shells, sinew, ochre. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6123 ab. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG 16.6

almost 25,000 marks to finance Jacobsen's two-year-long collecting trip.

Departing from San Francisco, Jacobsen traveled throughout the Northwest Coast region and into Alaska. He purchased objects from the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Haida, the Tlingit, and others; he acquired additional objects from the Yup'ik and Inupiaq peoples in the north and from the Athabascans in the Interior of Alaska. Stops on his journeys could last one hour or several weeks; thus, he was able to acquire collections from local artists themselves or their patrons, from their successors, and from local dealers. These indigenous objects were soon viewed as representative, even unique cultural artifacts. Before long, critical voices arose in the United States and Canada against "selling off" the work of indigenous cultures to a European (Cole 1985:37).

One must credit Jacobsen for not only possessing strong aesthetic criteria as a collector but also with farsighted judgment of the contemporary objects that surrounded him. He took the opportunity and stood witness to one of the most important periods in the transformation of the Indians of the Northwest Coast. Jacobsen competed both with travelers in search of curios as well as with the Indians themselves, who still made the objects for their own use: "Unfortunately," he wrote, "a scientific collector must take these circumstances into account and console himself with the fact that in the future the objects will become much more expensive" (Jacobsen in Woldt 1884:27).²

Jacobsen certainly shared in the common view, held by many in this great era of museum collecting, that North American Indians were in a period of transition and prospects were dim for the future of their arts and cultures. This is evident in Jacobsen's comments on Haida totem poles:

A certain difference among the poles is also present on Queen Charlotte Island, insofar as the poles, the older [they are] are all the more beautifully and artistically made. This indicates that the artistic sense is gradually beginning to decrease. This is not at all surprising, for the Haida Indians are standing on a balance with extinction for more than one reason. (Jacobsen in Woldt 1884:28)³

Johan Adrian Jacobsen's documentation of the objects he acquired on the Northwest Coast left much to be desired—at least in the opinion of Franz Boas, who made use of the Jacobsen collection for his own ethnographic studies. Only with the later acquisitions from Indonesia did Jacobsen maintain a reliable documentation that earned praised on all sides. Today, however, scholars such as Peter Bolz and Ann Fienup-Riordan hold a more positive view of the value of Jacobsen's written commentaries.

After the great collecting trip for the Berlin Ethnologische Museum, Jacobsen remained active for years, traveling again to North America and

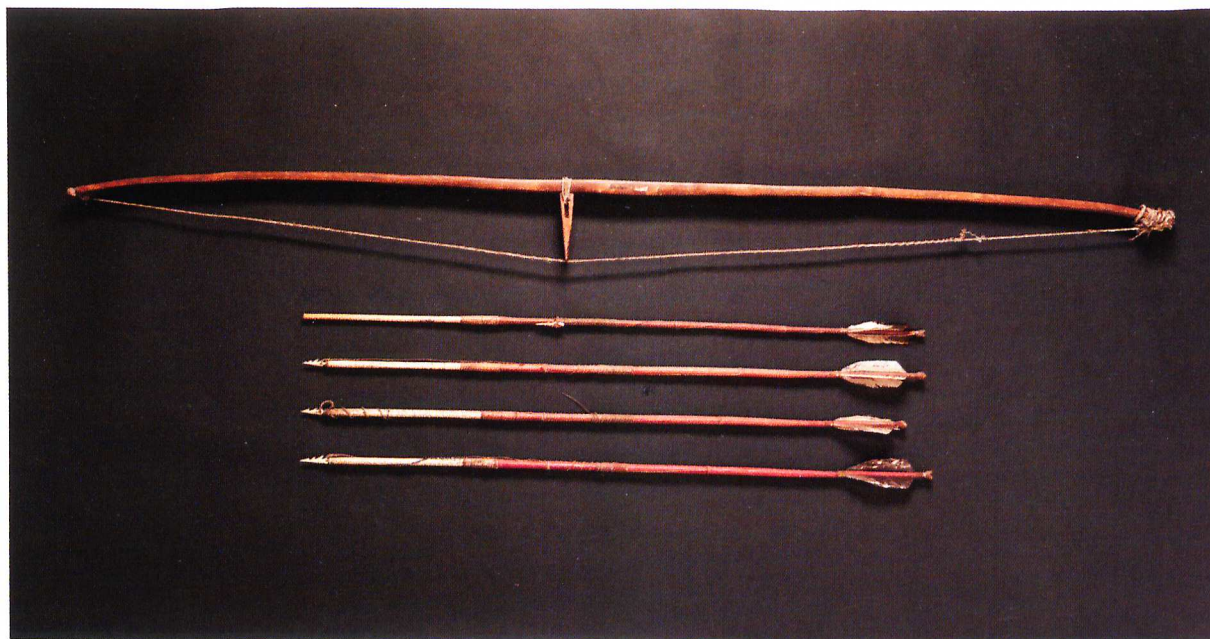


FIG 16.7

**16.7 *Ts'ilten*, *tuqesi ts'ilq'u*,
bow and arrows, Fort Kenai,
collected by Captain J.**

Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

L bow 153.5 cm; L arrows
80–87 cm. Wood, bone, sinew,
feathers, pigment, ochre.
Ethnological Museum Berlin,
from top: IVA 6164, 6161, 6162,
6160, and 6159. Photograph
courtesy of Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, Ethnologisches
Museum. Photograph by
Chris Arend.

**16.8 *Izin*, arrows (9), Tyonek,
collected by Captain**

J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

Lengths vary; IVA 6082 is L 66
cm. Wood, metal, feathers,
sinew, blue pigment, bone,
ochre. Ethnological Museum
Berlin, from top: IVA 6082, 6083,
6084, 6085, 6090, 6086, 6088,
6089, and 6092. Photograph
courtesy of Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, Ethnologisches
Museum. Photograph by
Chris Arend.

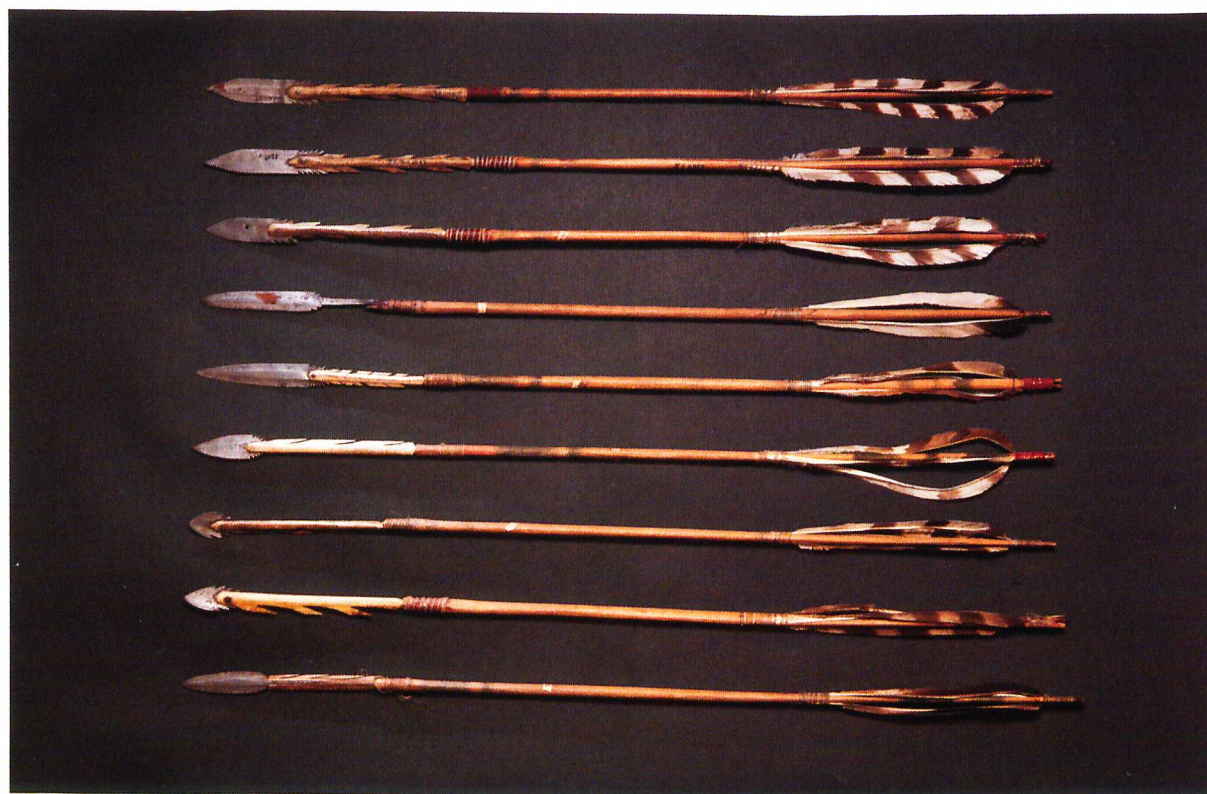


FIG 16.8

16.9 *Ulkesa*, bag for sewing, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 40.5 cm, W 27.5 cm; caribou hide, glass beads, ochre. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6134. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

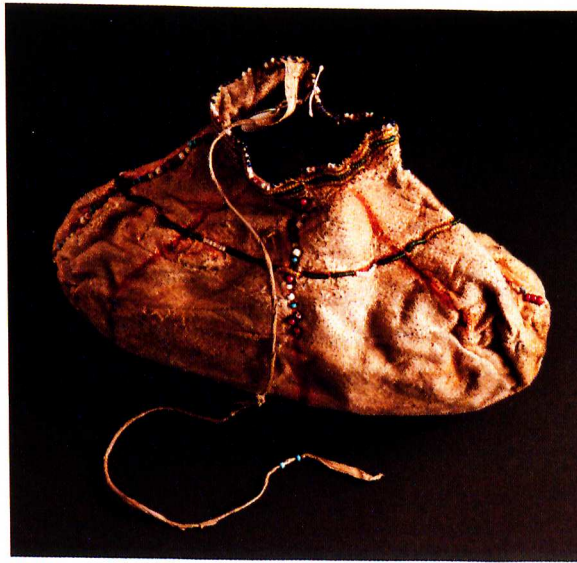


FIG 16.9

16.10 *Chijel*, feather headdress, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. L 30 cm, W 15 cm. Feathers, sinew, downy feathers. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6106. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

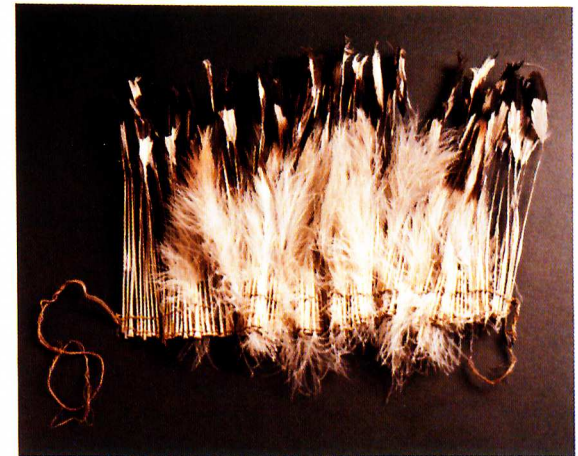


FIG 16.10

to Siberia. Later he returned to his involvement with “folk shows” and his association with Carl Hagenbeck. Jacobsen died on January 18, 1947. During his life, the Norwegian mariner and special collector for Adolf Bastian had carried out three major expeditions: to the Northwest Coast and Alaska (1881–1883), to Siberia and East Asia (1884–1885), and to Indonesia (1887–1888). However, while his collections from the Northwest Coast of British Columbia and the Yupit in Alaska have been intensively studied, other parts remain almost unknown. Such is the case with the approximately eighty-three Dena’ina objects that Jacobsen collected. How did Jacobson acquire these artifacts?

Collecting and Digging in Dena’ina Country

Jacobsen’s 1883 trip was almost completed when he finally reached Cook Inlet in June 1883. He stayed in the trading post of Tagunak (Tyonek), owned by the Alaska Commercial Company. He had noted difficulties he had in acquiring ethnographic objects on the south coast of Alaska, believing that people there no longer had any ritual requisites. At Tyonek, however, he was more successful, collecting a variety of most interesting objects, such as articles of

clothing made from reindeer and elk (caribou and moose) hide and wooden bows and arrows, among other things.

While collecting in Tyonek, Jacobsen noted that the prices he had to pay for the articles were considerable. Unlike in the far north, from where Jacobsen had just returned, acquiring objects through exchange and trade was not accepted in the southern part of Alaska. Jacobsen had to pay for objects with real money. He also noted that the Dena’ina were doing quite well hunting and fishing and were occupied with their seasonal hunting of the sea otter. “They were therefore difficult to access for my ethnographic options,” he wrote.

On the eve of June 12, Jacobsen attended a feast in Tyonek, during which he observed that the Dena’ina way of dancing and singing was much “wilder and more emotional” than the Eskimo style. Jacobsen’s description of the performance is worth reading:

Whereas the Eskimo move their feet very little in their dances, the local... [Dena’ina] twist and bend their bodies with great force and liveliness and jump backward and forward. The dancers had painted their faces black, and instead of the feather ornaments of the Eskimo wore a handkerchief in



FIG 16.11

their hair. The movements of the dancers became so wild and excited that the audience could only imagine that they were about to scalp one another. Every dancer held a feather in each hand. After the dance, in which five men participated together, gifts were distributed and received. (Jacobsen and Woldt 1977:193)

The next day, Jacobsen left for Fort Kenai and Kachemak Bay. He stopped at the Western Fur Trading Company's former trading post Akedaknak in Seldovia Bay to sail on to Fort Alexander, an Alaska Commercial Company trading post. Learning there about an abandoned archaeological site called Soonroodna, he immediately headed



FIG 16.12

16.11 *Ts'en zitl'i*, drinking tube with strap, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

L 44 cm with strap. Incised bone, caribou hide, sinew, glass beads. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6109. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

16.12 *Dabatnulg*, snuff box with top, Fort Kenai collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

L 5.3 cm, W 3 cm. Wood, hide thong, ochre on lid, small nail or peg. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6166 ab. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

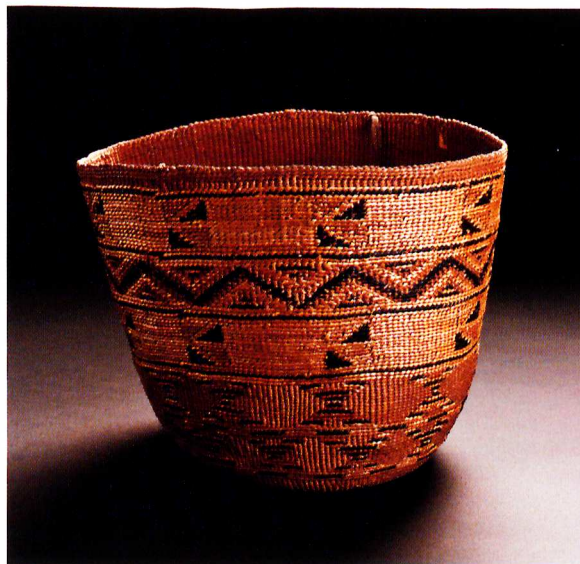


FIG 16.13

16.13 *Hagi*, twined basket, Knik River, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883.

H 22.5 cm, diam. 26.5 cm. Spruce root, grass. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6151. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

back to Akedaknak to hire an elderly Indian as a guide (who sold Jacobsen an old stone lamp and a pair of rattles). Soonroodna, or Hardak/Hardanak, as the Eskimos called it, turned out to be a large, sprawling village. Though Jacobsen gave a detailed description of its position "below the third glacier at the south bank of Kachemak Bay," the site has not been located.

After three days of digging at the large site and in the surrounding area, Jacobsen returned

16.14 *Kinlvashi*, scraper,
Fort Kenai, collected by
Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen,
1883. L 13 cm, W 3 cm.
 Wood, bone, spruce root.
 Ethnological Museum Berlin,
 IVA 6154. Photograph courtesy
 of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
 Ethnologisches Museum.
 Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG. 16.14

16.15 *Ch'utl'*, model of
birch bark baby carrier,
Fort Kenai, collected by
Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen,
1883. W 18 cm, H 20 cm.
 Birch bark, split root or willow,
 thread, cloth, beads, yarn,
 dentalium shells, hide strips.
 Ethnological Museum Berlin,
 IVA 6157. Photograph courtesy
 of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
 Ethnologisches Museum.
 Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG. 16.15

to the Alaska Commercial Company post at Fort Alexander, where he sorted his collection. On July 7, 1883, he sailed from Fort Alexander to Kodiak Island, where he continued his collections work.

Unfortunately, Jacobsen did not provide as much information on the Dena'ina as on the groups in the north that he had visited before. He did not feel that his collecting output was spectacular, and by then he had almost reached the end of his long trip. As Jacobsen repeatedly mentioned, he had to pay “real money,” and the Dena'ina pieces were expensive. However, they were well worth it, and today we are delighted to house this small collection at the Ethnologische Museum Berlin.

A View to the Future

In 2005, Peter Bolz, curator of North American collections at the Ethnologische Museum Berlin, wrote in his foreword to Ann Fienup-Riordan's book

Recently, plans have been made to move Berlin's Ethnological Museum to the site of the former palace of the

Prussian kings, into the city's center. Public discussion of these plans generated the perennial question: Why does the Ethnological Museum keep so many objects instead of just selecting and keeping the best, most artistic ones?

Bolz promptly answered that question himself:

Each single piece that is preserved from the past is a unique document of a culture. This culture may have changed, but it has not disappeared, and each



FIG 16.16

16.16 *Ulkesa*, gut bag, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. W 30 cm, H 28 cm. Seal intestine, thread, wool, fabric. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6121. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.



FIG 16.17

16.17 *Ulkesa*, gut bag, Tyonek, collected by Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen, 1883. W 31 cm, H 35 cm. Intestine, wool (?). Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6122. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

object is a witness of its people's rich heritage. For Native peoples these objects have become symbols of their history and important guideposts for their future. (Fienup-Riordan 2005:x)

These words respond to the words we hear from the Dena'ina of the twenty-first century. We are more than willing to lend objects of a hitherto unknown and unstudied collection to Alaska museums. More than this, the way the Berlin objects will be presented and interpreted in the Anchorage Museum's *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi* exhibition has great importance for our museum. In the near future, these objects will be exhibited in a new building in the center of Berlin called the Humboldt Forum. In this new museum, we wish to present our Alaska collections from the Alaska Native perspective to an international public. Creating this installation will require strong cooperation and regular collaboration between the Alaska and Berlin museums. *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi* is a perfect opportunity to commence such a partnership.

Notes

1. In a letter sent to the museum from Tokyo, September 16, 1911. The correspondence, "Ernest Grosse 16.9.1911" is housed under I/MV 0486 in the archives of the Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin.

2. "Diesem Umstande muss ein wissenschaftlicher Sammler leider Rechnung tragen und sich mit der Tatsache trösten, dass die Gegenstände in Zukunft sicherlich noch viel theurer werden werden."

3. "Ein gewisser Unterschied der Pfähle unter einander besteht auch auf den Königin Charlotte Inseln insofern, als die Pfähle, je älter, auch um so schöner und kunstfertiger hergestellt sind. Es beweist dies, dass der Kunstsinn allmählich abzunehmen beginnt. Zu verwundern ist dies keineswegs, denn die Haida-Indianer stehen aus mehr als einem Grunde auf dem Aussterbeetat."