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A MOST PECULIAR MAN

The Life and Times of Aleš Hrdlička

If the student is to make anthropology . . . his life vocation, he must also possess certain qualifications . . . he should possess those mental qualities which will enable him to follow his work with undimmed enthusiasm and vigor under smaller material compensations and perhaps other advantages than those of his friends who have . . . chosen other vocations; for anthropology is not an industrial necessity. The compensations for this lie in the high grade of his work. He deals intimately with the highest of organisms, he contributes to the knowledge of what is most worth while. His studies of human evolution and antiquity, of the developing child and youth, of the infinite variation of full-blown manhood and womanhood, of the laws that control all this, and of the means by which these laws may consciously and effectively be directed for future advance of humanity—all these will provide him with mental food of such an order that he will easily forget the regrets of not having chosen a more remunerative vocation. (Aleš Hrdlička 1920:37–38)

You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my

intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull. (Dr. James Mortimer to Sherlock Holmes, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)

Few curators have left as tangible a mark on the halls of science at the Smithsonian as Aleš Hrdlička (fig. 4.1). During his career he served as a major catalyst in transforming the field of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian, in the United States, and around the world from its obscure origins to an internationally recognized discipline dealing with many of the most profound questions of this century—human origins, evolution and variation, health and morbidity, growth and development, and ethnicity. At the Smithsonian Hrdlička presided over expansion of the field from his single cluttered office and lone position to a highly visible and productive subdivision of anthropology with four curators, support staff, laboratory facilities, library, and unparalleled collections that attracted graduate students and scientists from all over the world. Fifty years after his death, Hrdlička's collection of publications and reprints are still stored in boxes that line the walls of the Anthropology Department's seminar room from floor to ceiling. Just beyond the seminar room are two corridors that are lined with gray-green drawers stacked 14 levels high and filled with human skeletal remains. Additional collections are housed in individual offices, in two staircase corridors leading up to the attic, and in the upper rotunda

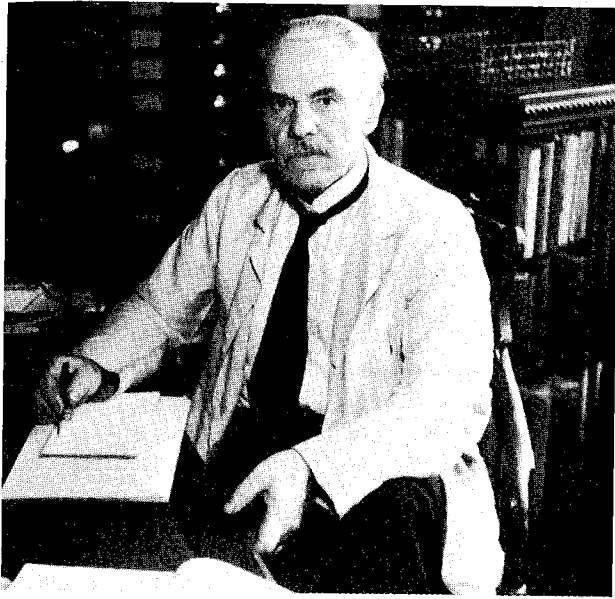


Figure 4.1. Portrait of Aleš Hrdlička in his Smithsonian office. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

beneath the museum's dome. Prior to recent repatriations, the Anthropology Department housed approximately 32,000 "cataloged records" of human remains from all over the world, although the actual number of "individuals" in the collection is different since each catalog record may include the remains of more than one individual. Of the number, 14,300 records are for Native Americans from the lower 48 states and 3,500 are from Alaska. Approximately 75 percent of this "collection" was acquired by Hrdlička either personally through his own expeditions or through intermediaries and correspondents. To house this extraordinary collection, Hrdlička arranged for the museum to construct drawers and shelves that were specially designed to house crania and skeletons.

Hrdlička collected skulls and bones with a passion. With the penchant of a nineteenth-century natural historian for accumulating type collections, he and his collaborators ranged the globe to recover "representative samples" of human skeletal material from as many different cultures and time periods as possible. The passion was in naming and describing the material, with the belief that each individual contribution to knowledge would eventually lead to a brilliant synthesis. Hrdlička seemed to have seen himself as an inspired soldier of science with a duty to recover as much information as possible. He preferred large series of human remains to single individuals because larger collections offered more control over individual variation. He bemoaned the loss of "specimens" to unscrupulous collectors with the pathos of an ornithologist

seeing the last of a bird species disappearing into the pot. The collection that resulted was Hrdlička's pride, a great scientific assemblage salvaged from the ravages of time, the indiscriminate disturbances of vandals, and environmental perturbations.

Times have changed, however, and this unassailable scientific monument to one man's collecting zeal is under attack. Changing political and social mores have invaded the previously sacrosanct halls of the academy. Under repatriation legislation much of the collection stands to be dismantled. The future of the collection, which took the "bone doctor" some 40 years to amass and involved travels to remote parts of the world, along with much energy, expense, diplomacy, and effort, seems uncertain.

Hrdlička: The Early Years

Yet here, the first and alone of the family of seven, born with insatiate yearning to travel, see, smell, hear, feel with his own senses, and endeavor to find, gather, penetrate. With longing to know this mother earth as intimately as possible . . . to go and learn and get ever nearer the essentials, the vast secrets of it all. (Hrdlička 1943:7)

Biographies of Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943) include works by Montagu (1944), Prokopec (1971), Schultz (1945), Spencer (1979), and Stewart (1940). Hrdlička was born in 1869 in the town of Humpolec in southern Bohemia. As a child he embraced a nineteenth-century love of natural history, encouraged by tutors and schooling. After arriving in America in 1882 at the age of 13, he worked in factories by day and attended school by night.

Hrdlička always prided himself on his medical degree, which he believed was a necessary prerequisite for a career in physical anthropology. He graduated from the New York Eclectic Medical College in 1892, first among his fellow-students, and then acquired additional medical training at the New York Homeopathic College. In 1894 he began a career in medical research among the insane at an asylum in Middletown, New York. Two years later, following a year of anthropological and medical study in Europe, Hrdlička accepted an associate in anthropology position at the newly formed Pathological Institute at the New York State Hospital. There, he was able to apply his European-gained insights and skills to initiate a systematic study of human physical variation. The study originated with data collected on mental patients at the state hospital. Hrdlička realized that in order to make sense of this data he needed to be able to define "normal" physical types with which he could then compare to "abnormal" samples. Thus began Hrdlička's interest in human skeletal remains. His

early publications dealt extensively with studies of white American physical attributes and skeletal remains (e.g., Hrdlička 1898, 1932a). They also established white male Americans of European descent as the baseline norm for comparing human variability, revealing the inherent racist assumptions that permeated the fledgling field of anthropology (Gould 1981).

Although Hrdlička's private life remains for the most part obscured by the distance he maintained between his personal and professional domains, it is known that on his return from Europe in 1896 he married a former student, Marie Strickler-Dieudonné, to whom he was devoted (Spencer 1979:54–64). When she died in 1918, Hrdlička had her remains cremated and enshrined in an urn at his home. He married again in 1920. Both marriages were childless.

Hrdlička: Anthropologist, Collector, and Curator

Hrdlička first participated in anthropological fieldwork in 1898 as a member of the American Museum of Natural History's expedition to Mexico and the American Southwest. Franz Boas described the young Hrdlička as "evidently possessed of an incredible capacity for work, and of a wonderful energy" (Prokopec 1992). The field experience was a turning point in Hrdlička's life. After it, his work gradually changed from the study of comparative anatomy to that of human populations.

In 1903 Hrdlička came to Washington as an assistant curator to set up a physical anthropology division in the U.S. Museum of Natural History. He became curator in 1910 and retired in 1941, after serving the Smithsonian for 38 years in acquiring and maintaining collections to rival those anywhere in the world. He described most of the collections now housed at the museum in a series of seven volumes entitled *Catalogues of Human Crania in the U.S. National Museum*. Over his lifetime, Hrdlička authored some 400 publications, including 20 books (Schultz 1945; Stewart 1940:21–36).

During his time at the Smithsonian, Hrdlička travelled extensively. His research on human origins in the New World (Hrdlička 1902, 1907) led him to undertake ten field expeditions between 1926 and 1938 to Alaska, the Aleutians, and the Commander Islands in search of ancient migration routes. In addition, he made trips to virtually every other continent on the globe (Table 4.1). Wherever he travelled, he examined famous skeletal material and fossil localities. He acquired human skeletal material, particularly crania, whenever he could. When he visited other institutions and museums, he carefully and systematically measured the human remains in their collections.

Hrdlička played a central role in the establishment of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, serving as its first president and as editor of the first 23 volumes of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. He served as first secretary of the National Science Foundation, president of the anthropology section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and president of the Washington Academy of Science. He was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Hrdlička received numerous awards, including the Huxley Memorial Medal of the Royal Institute of Anthropology of Great Britain and Ireland and honorary doctorates from universities in Prague and Brno. One of the U.S. Liberty ships built during World War II bore the name Aleš Hrdlička.

A tireless and indefatigable worker, he referred to the enforced period of hospitalization following his first heart attack in 1939 as "the first vacation of my life" (Hrdlička 1942:20). A second heart attack in September 1943 claimed his life at the age of 75. Hrdlička's death came within a year of that of Franz Boas. With the passing of these two individuals, the formative era of American anthropology came to a close.

As a final irony, Hrdlička arranged to have his body cremated and his ashes placed in an urn that, along with his death mask, beloved calipers, and measuring devices, were displayed in his one-time office for many years. "It was ironic for Hrdlička to desecrate his own skeleton, since he obviously thought a great deal of the human framework as a research tool. It would have been a wonderful gesture, and quite a personal touch from this most impersonal of men, to have had himself filed away in the 25,000-skull boneyard of mostly unknowns that he built up from practically nothing."¹

Hrdlička, the Man

Hrdlička was a proud, formidable man with a central European formality that he seldom relaxed. He never disguised his Czech origin, always insisting that his name should be written in its original form. He was an abrupt and disconcerting man, ceremonious and idiosyncratic, "entirely unconventional in many ways" (Stewart 1975:31). Throughout his professional career at the Smithsonian, he always dressed in a formal European manner, in a black suit with a high celluloid collar and a black clip-on tie. He disliked accepting social invitations from colleagues and preferred to keep his business and social lives separate (Stewart 1975:29).

His enthusiasm was indefatigable, his energy boundless, and his discipline unbending. He was a relentless worker who demanded the same of his associ-

Table 4.1. The Life and Travels of Aleš Hrdlička

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1869	Born in Humpolec, Czechoslovakia
1882	Emigrated to United States
1896	Medical and anthropological training in Europe; visits to France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, England
1898	Medical and anthropometric fieldwork in Mexico
1899	Medical and anthropometric fieldwork in Mexico
1900–1905	Fieldwork among the Indians of the American Southwest and Mexico
1903	Starts work at the Smithsonian Institution
1906	Examines early human remains in Florida
1908	Medical research among western American Indian tribes
1909	Anthropological research and collecting in Egypt; travel and collections research in Turkey, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Germany, and Russia
1910	Attends the International Congress of Americanists in Argentina; makes large skeletal collections in Peru; visits Mexico
1912	Travel to Europe, western Russia, Siberia, and Mongolia to examine early human remains
1913	Travel to the Caribbean; collects archaeological remains in Peru
1915	Fieldwork with Sioux and Chippewa in Minnesota
1916	Studies early human remains in Florida
1917	Anthropometric research among Native Americans in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Tennessee
1918	Anthropometric research among the Seminole in Florida
1920	Travel and research in Japan, Korea, China, and Hawaii
1922	Travel to Brazil to participate in conferences; travel to Europe to examine early sites and Pleistocene human remains
1923	Director of the American School of Prehistoric Studies in Europe
1925	Anthropometric and human palaeontological research in India, Ceylon, Java, Australia, South Africa, and Europe
1926	Anthropometric and archaeological research in Alaska
1927	Delivers the Huxley Memorial Lecture to the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain; travels to fossil localities and does collections research in Europe
1929–30	Fieldwork in Alaska
1931	First visit to Kodiak Island, Alaska
1932, 1934–36	Archaeological fieldwork at the Uyak Site, Larsen Bay, and Kodiak Island
1936–38	Archaeological fieldwork in the Aleutian Islands and on the Commander Islands (Russia)
1939	Travel to England, Russia, and Siberia
1943	Died in Washington, D.C.

ates and students. At home he claimed to sleep on boards, or on the floor, to be fit for expedition life (Schultz 1945:314). His tenure at the Smithsonian coincided with the Great Depression. To ensure that financial resources would be available for research and travel, Hrdlička regularly returned a portion of his salary to a private fund for financing fieldwork. He was generous with the resources at his disposal, personally contributing to the research of a number of individuals, always with the admonishment to return with more skulls. His private contributions, both financial and intellectual, figured significantly in the founding of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* in 1918.

Among Hrdlička's peculiarities was an aversion to women. According to a writer in the *Washington Star*,

Hrdlička was "abrupt and disconcerting in his often gruff remarks, especially to women. He never did understand them. He objected to their smoking, wearing make-up, and working anywhere but in the home 'Where they belong.' He could not bear the thought of women in science. He even avoided looking at them, and at scientific meetings he shunned the rare species of female scientist as if they had a communicable disease. He walked out of one such mixed meeting that dealt with the sexual habits of monkeys, considering it an improper topic to discuss with women present."²

As concerned as he was with heredity and eugenics, Hrdlička studied his own ancestry and was pleased (relieved?) to find no serious illness or mental disorders in his early relatives (Prokopec 1992). This convinced him he was "normal." This concept

must be understood in the way an anthropologist and a physician in the hospital for the insane understood it. He believed that his judgment, based on his observations and relying on his senses once all the available facts had been taken into account, must be "normal," must correspond to reality, and must be close to absolute truth. Once he made a decision, he never felt it necessary to revise it, even if new facts or evidence had accumulated to contradict it. A newspaper reporter once asked Hrdlička to name some of his more important works. He replied "I consider all my works important; otherwise I would not do them" (Prokopec 1992).

Hrdlička, the Scientist

Hrdlička's scientific interests were manifold, but a constant trajectory is apparent through his career—from early descriptive and comparative studies to studies of human evolution. He pursued his research with perseverance and concentration, always economizing on time. According to his rigid daily schedule, he dictated four pages and measured a minimum number of skulls for his *Catalogues of Crania*. His handwriting, which is easily recognizable, shows that he also cataloged a large part of the skeletal specimens himself.

Interest in Human Variation and Craniometrics

While working as a research intern at the Hospital for the Insane in New York and later as an associate at the Pathological Institute, Hrdlička became interested in the differences between normal and pathological individuals. He applied scientific standards of description and nomenclature in identifying and characterizing separate groups within the population of the institutionalized insane. He saw in anthropological methodology a way of addressing problems in clinical medicine, identifying ailments, and synthesizing treatment procedures. Hrdlička applied his European training in anthropological methods of human measurement to a detailed study of "abnormals" who were housed in institutions in New York State.

The idea of creating comparable standards for healthy normal men, women, and children led him to a study of anatomical material in museum and institutional collections. The opportunity to participate in the American Museum of Natural History's expedition to Mexico, ostensibly to collect data on human variation, was the beginning of a lifelong commitment to physical and medical anthropological research and to studying human variation on a global scale.

The procedures and methodology of physical an-

thropology are by their very nature invasive, disruptive, and poorly understood by subject populations whose previous relationships with Euro-American males have been in the context of state-sanctioned colonial enterprises. Hrdlička never lingered long enough at any site to establish community, or even individual, relationships with his informants or subjects. In his avarice for data, his dealings with native people invariably consisted of taking measurements and photographs and running off to the next community and the next set of "subjects."

In the course of his life, Hrdlička was able to quantify the normal physical and physiological standards for American Indians, Eskimos, Caucasians, and Afro-American peoples. Although he had a prodigious publication record and conducted original research, he never broke free of the colonial, sexist, and racial underpinnings of nineteenth-century anthropology that seriously compromise our perceptions of his scholarship and humanity today. Yet there is little deceit in Hrdlička's work. His blinders, biases, and assumptions are readily apparent, as evidenced in the following quote: "It is quite a different thing to measure among the pliant, trusting savage, and then among the semi-civilized, suspicious, scattered free laborers and servants of a big city" (Hrdlička 1928:15, quoted in Blakey 1988:18).

Studies of Racial Differences

An underlying concern of American physical anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century had been with the biological significance of race and the scientific defense of race as an explanation of social inequality (Blakey 1988; Gould 1981). The recognition of racial variations in human skeletons was one of Hrdlička's sustained interests, and he participated actively in scientific discussions of the race concept. He fought against what he perceived to be an erroneous direction in race research, especially the eugenics movement and "scientific" racism proposed by the Nazis.³ In his book *The Old Americans*, Hrdlička used his anthropometric techniques to determine a measure of normalcy, the "sub-type of the white people" (Blakey 1988:15), and to firmly place the Euro-American Caucasian at the apex of human evolution, the standard by which all other human groups should be measured.

Studies into the Origins of North American Indians

During his travels in Europe and Asia, Hrdlička had an opportunity to closely examine the fossil record of human evolution, a subject in which he was keenly interested. After joining the Smithsonian in 1903, he continued his studies of physical variation among

American Indian populations. He also began his life-long interest in the debate over the antiquity of humans in the Americas. Hrdlička ardently supported the argument against a long antiquity in New World occupations. In order to counter spurious claims, he conducted detailed metrical studies that showed that human remains believed to be of great antiquity were morphologically within the range of recent American Indians. In addition, Hrdlička demanded good contextual data (cultural, geological, biological) for proof of human antiquity in the New World. His experience with Pleistocene faunal remains in Alaska (Hrdlička 1943:249) made him especially skeptical of spurious associations. During his travels, Hrdlička had managed to visit many important localities where human fossils had been recovered, especially in Europe and the Middle East, and he knew what good Pleistocene archaeological sites should look like and what kinds of data had to accompany and underlie claims of antiquity. Although Hrdlička has frequently been criticized for his conservative stance in the debate (Wilmsen 1965), his critiques of bogus associations and inherent flaws in the data helped to establish the rigorous standards for proof that eventually, with the discovery of the Folsom site and Blackwater Draw in the 1920s, confirmed the presence of humans in the Americas during the Pleistocene.

Hrdlička's Travels in Alaska: 1926–1938

There is therefore, except for the nature-blind, but little real lonesomeness in Alaska, and enough to call one to it year after year; not as a settler—it is not, in the main, yet a white man's country—but as a privileged visitor. (Hrdlička 1943:7)

It was in Alaska that Hrdlička earned his sobriquet “skull doctor” from the natives in the Yukon (Hrdlička 1943:223). The Aleut had their own name for him, “ashaalixnamaataax,” which can be translated as “the dead man's daddy” (Laughlin in press, and personal communication).

Hrdlička was 57 years old when, in 1926, he made his first trip to Alaska to seek evidence of the route by which the first hunters, the original “old Americans,” invaded the continent. He chose the Yukon River as the most probable prehistoric route over the “land-bridge” between Asia and America to the inland territories.

The possibility of fieldwork in Alaska was a siren call that Hrdlička could not resist. It was he who, almost singlehandedly, reestablished an institutional focus on Alaska at the Smithsonian. He oversaw the hiring of Henry B. Collins and T. Dale Stewart, both of

whom subsequently conducted important anthropological research in Alaska. In 1926 and 1929 Hrdlička travelled on the Yukon River and its tributaries. Ostensibly searching for archaeological and skeletal material to address the question of the peopling of the New World, he also collected measurements and photographs and made plaster face casts of living Indians and Eskimos throughout the course of his journey (and on all his subsequent trips to Alaska).

It would be a poor guest who never returned favors for hospitality received. In Hrdlička's case, his medical skills and services were in demand everywhere (Hrdlička 1943:94, 167, 245; Gruber 1943): “the natives were glad to let him measure and photograph them in return for his help in any sickness or injury (Hrdlička n.d.). In a rare show of humor, Hrdlička proposed charging one old “sourdough” he treated on the Yukon “a dozen skulls, or a few skeletons” for payment of his services (Hrdlička 1943:292).

In the field, Hrdlička had to balance his collecting ardor with the concerns of Alaskan natives who did not share his scientific zeal. The popular representation of Hrdlička draws upon the image of an insensitive scientist, a reputation not unexpected given the nature of his research; the barriers of language, culture, and class; and the frenetic pace of his fieldwork. Yet his diary attests to frequent occasions where the uncomfortableness and concern of local natives precluded his collecting activities (1930a:139; 1943:43, 197–198, 235) and where native knowledge and help were solicited and procured (1943:58, 235, 250; 1945:267, 409, 416), even to the point of helping to exhume skeletons (1943:65, 73–76, 115–118, 129, 219, 312, 321–322, 334; 1945:368) and to selling or giving human remains to him (1943:233–234; 1945:323). Although they are never clearly defined, Hrdlička had personal guidelines for collecting burials that were “too recent” (1943:215, 218, 361; 1945:255). He maintains that “though the work was sometimes of a rather delicate nature, [it was accomplished] without incurring the ill will of any person . . . due to the fact that the objects of the study and collecting were frankly explained in every case to whites and natives alike through lectures or individually, and that all recent burials were strictly respected” (Hrdlička 1930a:139).

His Yukon River research and subsequent investigations of the Kuskokwim River region convinced Hrdlička that many of the older, pre-Russian contact sites had been lost to erosion. As a result, he shifted his attention to Alaska's island archipelago where stable coastlines might be expected to contain earlier materials. In 1931, while working in the Bristol Bay area, he visited Kodiak Island where he was shown the Uyak site, along with others. The Uyak site on Larsen Bay seemed ideal for excavating: the soil was not fro-

zen, the site was accessible and looked very promising, and accommodations and hospitality were extended by the local cannery superintendent.

He spent four summer field seasons (1932, 1934, 1935, and 1936) excavating at Uyak with the assistance of volunteer crews (fig. 4.2). His research on Kodiak Island is reported in a number of annual reports (Hrdlička 1932b, 1933, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1941a, and 1941b) and in two monographs on ethnohistory and archaeology (Hrdlička 1944a, Heizer 1956). The results of the work on Kodiak led to the "recovery through excavation of many skeletal remains, and *incidentally* also much of the material culture" (Hrdlička 1944a:3, *emphasis added*).

Following his work on Kodiak, Hrdlička shifted his attention to the Aleutian and Commander Islands (1936–1938) where he sought answers to Aleut cultural origins and routes of Asiatic-American immigration (Hrdlička 1945).

Among the general conclusions of Hrdlička's research in Alaska are his recognition and definition of a variety of Native Alaskan Eskimo and Indian physical types (based both on observations and measurements of living people and on analyses of skeletal collections); the revelation that Alaska had a much longer and more complex prehistory than had been previously realized; and new insights about the movement and distributions of different prehistoric populations and their cultural origins (Hrdlička 1930b, 1943, 1944a, and 1945).

Investigations at Larsen Bay

There never was a finer and more remunerative comparable site than this at Uyak, and within modest limits and means, and barring the rains and the gnats, there never were more favorable conditions for excavations. (Hrdlička 1945:213)

Alerted to the potential significance of the Uyak Bay site (also called the Jones Site and "Our Site") by U.S. Fisheries Bureau personnel, Hrdlička made a reconnoiter of the area a high priority of his 1931 Alaska field season. He was not the first to excavate at the site; digging there had long been a popular activity pursued by cannery employees and local villagers (Hrdlička 1944a:136). The fortuitous, albeit momentous, discovery of a human skull with artificial ivory eyes in an exposed midden profile was the event that captured Hrdlička's interest and set in motion the phenomenal "excavations" of the next four years (fig. 4.3).

Throughout his sojourn at Larsen Bay, Hrdlička worked closely with Gordon and Laura Jones, the superintendent and his wife of the Alaska Packers Association cannery at Larsen Bay. The Joneses greatly fa-

cilitated the Smithsonian research. Along with providing the implied local consent, they made the cannery's resources available and oversaw logistical constraints. In Laura Jones, Hrdlička found an enthusiastic supporter who labored ceaselessly on his behalf. Due to her efforts, Hrdlička acquired a large number of additional specimens, both artifacts and human remains, from local fishermen and trappers. In addition, she donated her personal collection of skeletons and artifacts to the Smithsonian and she became smitten by the passion to dig. Her letters are almost ghoulish in their enthusiasm for obtaining more skeletons for Hrdlička. This enthusiasm led her to exhume the graves of recently deceased cannery employees, "chinamen," to provide the good doctor with additional specimens from sites in the vicinity. Her candor and enthusiasm are revealed in a letter, dated September 14, 1931, to Hrdlička: "Packed ten skeletons and some extra bones. Two to a box as you did . . . I so want to send you all I possibly can. By the way—think I've located ten more Chinamen but it's hard digging and will have to leave them until next year. In box number 13 there was evidently a Chinaman of note for he was buried in brocade, had a 'pig tail' and a lovely white jade bracelet. I kept the bracelet (naturally) and sent you the 'pig tail' . . . Still hope you will be able to come back here next year and instruct me further in this 'bone business' as Gordon calls it" (Jones correspondence in Hrdlička n.d.).

According to Hrdlička (1944a:274, 324), the "near-by natives" had no tradition concerning the site locality. A careful reading of his narrative, however, reveals that for some local villagers the site remained significant as both a place of gardens and a place for burial.

To Hrdlička (1944a:141), "the chief object of these excavations was to secure the skeletal materials which the site evidently contained; at the same time, however, throughout the work all reasonable care was given to the cultural side of the project, every specimen that showed any human work was carefully examined, and where worth while preserved for the National Collections." It is impossible to condone Hrdlička's excavation strategy even in light of his day. He made neither plan maps nor profile drawings and, as a consequence, it is not surprising that the features he unearthed, including burials, storage pits, stone lined hearths, and houses, in the absence of documentation proved a "constant puzzle" (Hrdlička 1944a:179). The difficulty of cutting through the surface vegetation led Hrdlička, for expediency's sake, to cut a face from the top to the bottom of a midden and proceed systematically to undercut the face with a pick (Hrdlička 1944a:170) (fig. 4.4). He found note taking to be "quite impracticable, and would have confused rather than simplified matters" (Hrdlička 1944a:141). The



Figure 4.2. Field crew of 1935 at Uyak site, posing with skeletons. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

loss of an entire season's fieldnotes was summarily dismissed as "unfortunate," since the notes were "largely a repetition" of the preceding field season and of little consequence (Hrdlička 1944a:204).

In the name of expediency, with a conciliatory nod to archaeological procedures, he did make a rudimentary concession to separating his collection into color-coded stratigraphic units, specifically upper (black), middle (red) and lower (blue). Given the extent of the site and the varying depths of the cultural deposits (see Speaker, this volume), this notorious field technique severely compromised the potential use of both skeletal and cultural collections. Yet the scale of Hrdlička's excavations, the sheer volume of earth removed, and the quantities of materials recovered remain unsurpassed in the annals of Alaskan archaeology.

After working at the Uyak site, and before the outbreak of World War II, Hrdlička shifted his focus to the Aleutian Islands in his determination to identify the conduit for the movement of ancient peoples between continents. The Aleutian work, more reconnaissance than excavation, never approached the scale of the work at Uyak Bay. In many respects, the

work at Kodiak was Hrdlička's swan song. It represented the end of the single, most focused, and intensive period of research he undertook.

For many of us who work in the north, our interactions with native colleagues and informants contribute a tremendous amount of insight into our understanding of local peoples, both past and present, the land, and its resources. Hrdlička avidly combed the ethnohistoric and "discovery" literature for insights on the native inhabitants of Kodiak Island. Yet he apparently avoided any involvement with local native families and any possibility of discussions with them that might have proved fruitful. One of Hrdlička's students at Larsen Bay, Robert Heizer, who later went on to write an archaeological summary of the excavations, identified the outstanding anthropological need for the area as recording "what remnants of traditional ethnology are still recoverable" (Heizer 1956:5).

For Hrdlička, most of the people of Larsen Bay remained nearly invisible. A few appear as biological examples of "Koniag types" in his descriptions of the physical anthropology of the people (1944a:361–



Figure 4.3. Hrdlička standing beside the first skeleton discovered in 1932. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)



Figure 4.4. Hrdlička leaning against the exposed midden deposits at "Our Point," the Uyak site, 1932. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

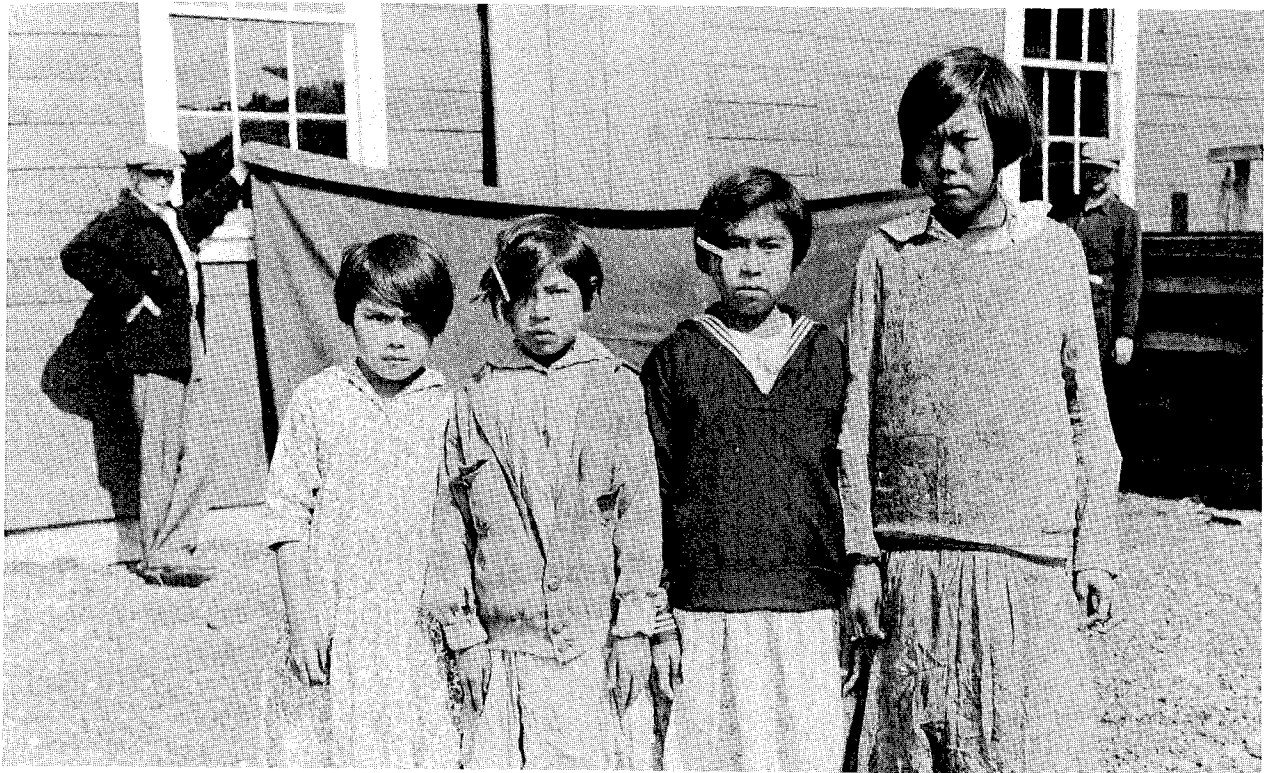
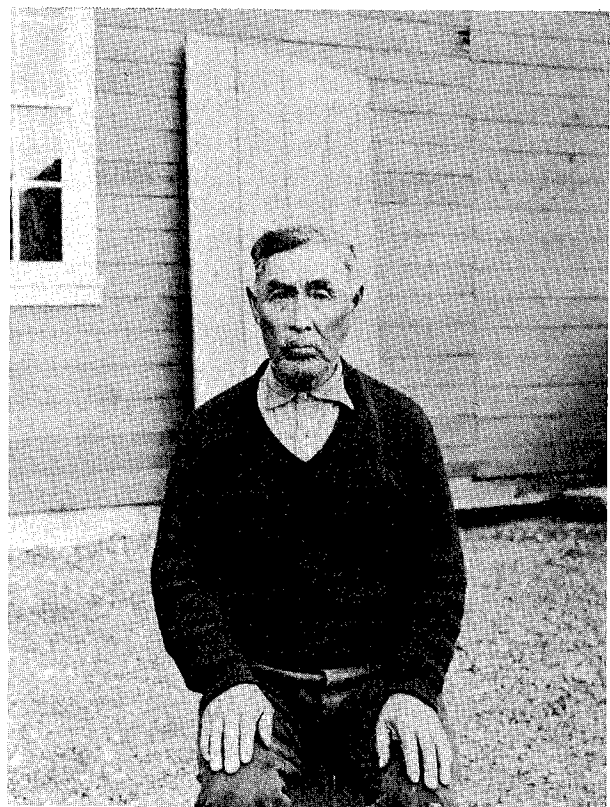


Figure 4.5. Kodiak Island natives, a group of girls (above) and a man (below), photographed as anthropological subjects by Aleš Hrdlička, 1932. These formal scientific views are about the only evidence of Hrdlička's interaction with Kodiak Island natives. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)



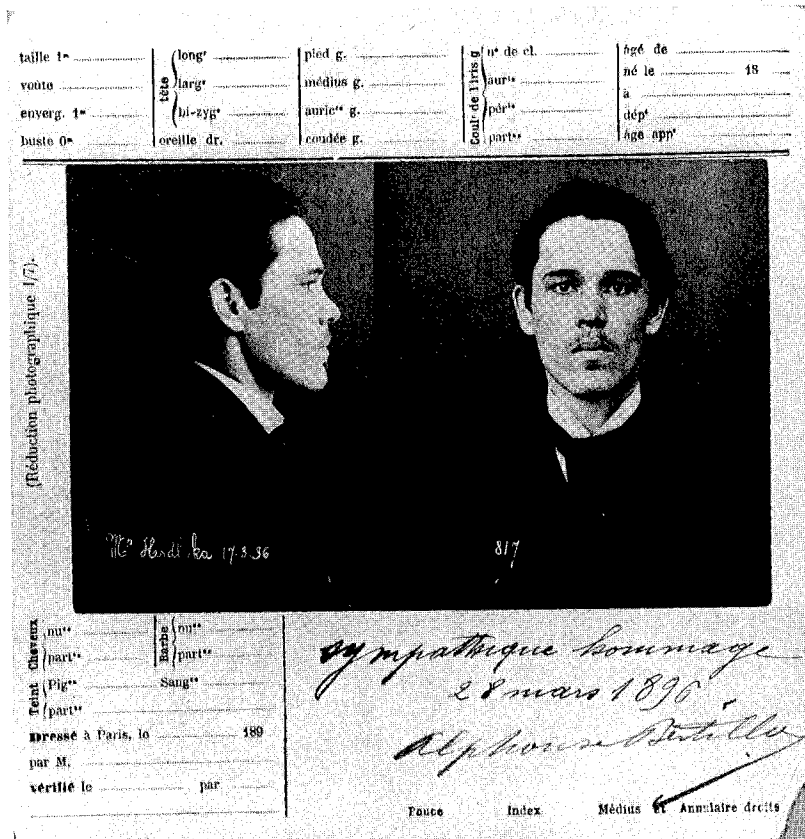


Figure 4.6. Hrdlička's own mug shot. (Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

365), but these people are nameless and their voices silent (fig. 4.5). Despite his anthropological training, Hrdlička never lost the racist assumptions grounded in his cultural background and in his science. He never formally recognized the help and assistance he received from native Alaskans, although white informants are conspicuously acknowledged. At the beginning of the 1934 field season, Hrdlička lamented (1944a:219): "The fine banks before us, remunerative as they are in spots, are largely soulless and can give but little more than an inkling of the old life and its riches." How much more might have been illuminated and how much enmity might have been avoided had Hrdlička been more sensitive to the knowledge and interests of the people on whose land he trespassed. The world was a different place then (fig. 4.6).

The Journey of the Bones

Throughout his journeys in Alaska, Hrdlička regularly encountered cemeteries and burial localities that had been disturbed, invariably by white trespassers and transient visitors, before his arrival (Hrdlička

1943:10, 55, 56, 102, 107, 127). He always lamented the loss to science, never once voicing concern as to the feelings of the descendants of this desecration. Of course, he never compared this peculiarly western custom of gathering skulls as souvenirs with his own scientific pursuits, which he held to be above such re-primations, even when knowingly at odds with local villagers. As he put it, "strange how scientific work sanctions everything" (Hrdlička 1943:56).

The human remains recovered by Hrdlička and his crew, as well as those brought to him by Laura Jones and other area residents and fishermen, were carefully marked as to their "provenance," packed in excelsior and shavings, crated, and shipped to Washington. At the Smithsonian, they were cleaned, conserved, and cataloged.

Basic metric analyses were conducted and sex and age were determined. Descriptions and measurements were taken according to internationally defined methods. Pathological findings were also noted. The results were compared with other population groups, resulting in an especially vivid picture of the people who once lived at the site in terms of their health and nutritional state, stature, body and muscle development, and demography. The skeletal collec-

tion from the Uyak site, by dint of both its size and its antiquity was one of the two most studied human skeletal collections at the Smithsonian. As many as forty researchers each year came to conduct research on the Uyak collection. While a complete bibliography is not possible, some inkling of the scope and potential of this collection can be indicated. Hrdlička himself published extensively on the Kodiak Island collections (1941a, 1941b, 1944a, 1944b). Scott (this volume) examines a variety of physical attributes in order to assess the significance of skeletal attributes potentially reflecting cultural continuity. The question of population origins and cultural affinities have also been addressed through comparative studies of cranial variation (Ossenberg 1977; Zegura 1971, 1975). Edynak (1976) has used the long bones from the Uyak assemblage to study growth and development. Turner (1983) has used his analysis of teeth from Asia and the Americas to develop theories of human migration and ethnic identity. Murillo (1991), Costa (1977, 1980a, 1980b), Dahlberg (1962), and St. Hoyme (1980) have examined the dentition from the Uyak remains for indications of diet, health, and stress. Ortner and Utermohle (1981) have studied the pathological traces of diseases apparent on bones and, not incidentally, the Uyak skeletal collections have also served as a valuable source of comparative data for forensic cases. For a detailed discussion of the current debate on the reasons and justification for the collection of human remains see Ubelaker and Grant (1989) and Ucko (1992).

An iron wheelbarrow used by Hrdlička's party and abandoned at the site remains as mute testimony to the activity that once took place on the shores of Larsen Bay. Today, the site is covered with luxurious vegetation, much as it was when Hrdlička first arrived. The stunning locality, with its vista of the mountain-rimmed bay, greets the visitor and resident alike. Scattered about the knoll are a few shallow pits made by local villagers searching for artifacts. The occasional human bone can be found laying on the surface.

The reburial ceremony for the human remains from the Uyak site took place October 5, 1991. About seventy people were present. The remains were reburied on top of an elevation not far from the site where the bones were excavated between 1931 and 1938. The reburial site is marked by a 12-foot-tall white Orthodox wooden cross. The contours of a pit about 50 × 10 feet in size are still visible. The journey of the bones is complete. They have returned to their original resting place.

The Man and His Times

Hrdlička entered the profession of anthropology at a time when speculation reigned and knowledge was

unsystematized. He shared with his contemporary Franz Boas a perception of science that was grounded in the accumulation of facts. Hrdlička had, as one biographer put it, "a healthy aversion to unsupported hypotheses and rash speculation" (Schultz 1945:312). His universe had little room for conjecture.

Hrdlička made substantial contributions to the methodology of physical anthropology. He introduced internationally accepted anthropometric methods to America and developed several anthropometric instruments and procedures of his own design. His contributions include his works on the methodology of anthropometry, his participation in the debate over the peopling of the Americas and the development and origins of modern humans, the compilation of his seven *Catalogues of Crania*, and his unswerving encouragement of and support for physical anthropology in many countries.

The discipline of physical anthropology in America owes to Hrdlička much of the breadth that defines it. He must also be acknowledged for having the vision and energy to have amassed the biological anthropological collections at the National Museum of Natural History, one of the premier collections in the world. His legacy also includes a fund he left at the Smithsonian which has facilitated the work of researchers from around the world who have needed access to the Smithsonian collections.

Hrdlička maintained a lifelong interest in the development of anthropology as a discipline in his native Czechoslovakia. A fervent nationalist, he prepared materials for President Wilson on the history of Slavonic nations in 1918, helped exiled representatives of the Czechoslovak government meet U.S. government representatives, and prepared a memo to President Roosevelt when Czechoslovakia was endangered by Nazi Germany in 1938. In his native country, he is remembered for both the moral and material support he gave to individual researchers and to Charles University in Prague.

As a researcher who sought to chronicle and describe human cultural and physical variety as another facet of the natural world, Hrdlička was the last of a tradition of nineteenth-century scholarship in anthropology at the Smithsonian. He was committed to detailing and describing skeletal variation, but cared little for synthesis. For Hrdlička, even the interpretive significance and value of statistics for ordering his carefully described world was suspect: "having very little knowledge of mathematics Hrdlička was quite unprepared to understand the development of modern statistical methods, and is known to have declared that 'statistics would be the ruin of physical anthropology'" (Montagu 1944:115). Nor did Hrdlička ever appreciate the significance of genetics and the fundamental contribution it would make to many of the

problems he sought to address. The fundamental equation of physical anthropology with natural history and the sociopolitical biases involved, particularly as applied to the concept of race, is one of Hrdlička's legacies and has been critiqued by Blakey (1988).

During his lifetime Hrdlička was unequivocally the most influential man in his field. Within the discipline, especially the subfield of physical anthropology, he acted like an overbearing European patriarch. As Montagu (1944:116) puts it, "in his manner Hrdlička tended towards the delivery of ex cathedra judgments in a somewhat pontifical style. Hrdlička had done so much for physical anthropology and, for the greater part of his life, had stood so long as the guardian angel over it, that he came to develop something of a proprietary interest over the field. This manner often amused his listeners, and irritated some, without, however, serving to diminish their respect for him personally or for his very real achievements." Despite his appearance as an imperious, quite often arrogant, self-aggrandizing figure, and a curmudgeon to boot, he was often spoken of highly. It seems as though his gruff, socially constrained manner was a mask he wore against a rapidly changing world that he sought to understand (Stewart 1975).

We doubt that Hrdlička could have ever imagined the repatriation of the skeletal collections he devoted his life to accumulating. He would have found it difficult to acknowledge a higher principle than the one that had guided his collecting: a nineteenth-century belief in the pending omnipotence of science. He lived in a pragmatic and optimistic era in which science was perceived as the way to resolve the physical and social ills that plagued humanity. With his materialist philosophy, he believed that knowledge accumulated from the sum of its parts, that science was a method for accumulating data, and that data accumulation was a worthy goal in and of itself; eventually, it would reach an unspecified critical mass and configure itself into the truth. Today, the flaws in Hrdlička's uncritical, atheoretical vision of science are obvious, as are his biases and prejudices. It is important, however, not to divorce the spirit of the times from the spirit of the man. Because of his resolute determination and thoroughness, Hrdlička was able to measure most of the cranial material, including that from Larsen Bay, that he had collected himself or had examined in various collections throughout the world. All of this information he published in his *Catalogues of Crania*. To a certain extent, this may mitigate the unprecedented loss of the original material, but the Larsen Bay repatriation still deprives the scientific community of the use of this material in future research initiatives; to what end—perhaps—time will tell.

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Notes

1. "The Skull Doctor": Head Hunter Larger Than Life," by John Sherwood, *The Washington Star*, January 10, 1977: C-1.
2. "The Skull Doctor": Head Hunter Larger Than Life," by John Sherwood, *The Washington Star*, January 10, 1977: C-1.
3. This information was noted in Hrdlička's obituary, published in *Time* magazine, September 13, 1943.

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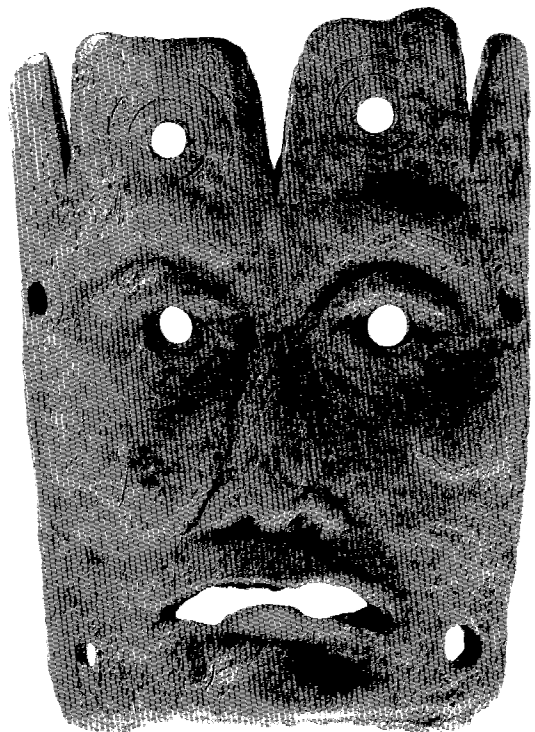
The Larsen Bay Repatriation
and the Smithsonian Institution

RECKONING

WITH

THE

DEAD



Edited by Tamara L. Bray
and Thomas W. Killion

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