The Hunt for Whales: Labrador Inuit Whale Use in the Archaeological Record

TIME: 12:00pm
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PhD PROPOSAL DEFENSE

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The history of Labrador Inuit whaling and use of whale products has never been adequately represented in archaeologically-constructed histories of the region. Though there is abundant documentary evidence for the practice, archaeology has been reluctant to engage in a meaningful discussion of the importance of whales in the Labrador Inuit past. This reluctance stems from the perceived (and very real) difficulties in interpreting such a complex set of resources as whales and their products. Whale remains are therefore typically excluded from most, traditional, zooarchaeological analyses. However, it has been consistently demonstrated that in whaling societies, the importance of whales permeates practically every aspect of life. Any interpretation that does not consider whales is therefore not only incomplete, but is in danger of being incorrect. I propose to undertake a non-traditional zooarchaeological analysis of whales in the Labrador Inuit archaeological record. By applying the method of chaîne opératoire to whale remains recovered and observed in the field across sites ranging in temporal and geographic space, within a theoretical framework of symmetrical archaeology, I aim to elucidate the natures of and provide adequate interpretive space for Labrador Inuit relationships with whales and whale products in the past.

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