

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

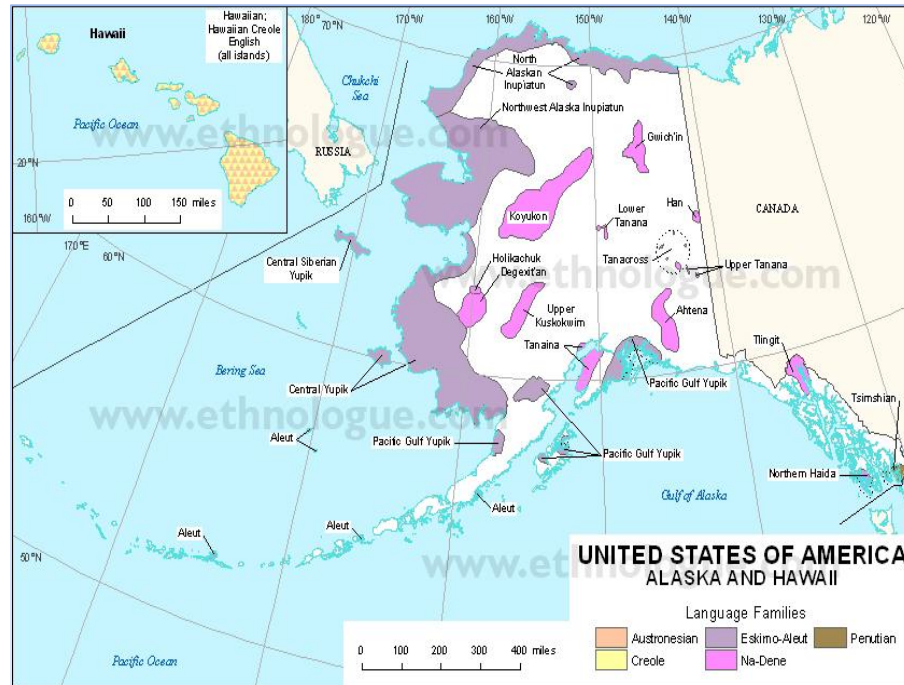
- Ahtna, Na Dene, Athapaskan

### 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

- ath

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- 61.312452,-142.470703



### 1.4 Brief history:

- Russians first made contact with the Ahtna in 1783. They attempted to set up Copper fort, near Taral, in Ahtna territory, but the Ahtna were hostile towards them, massacring a group of explorers led by Ruff Serebrennikov in 1848, which led to the closing of the fort. When the fort was reopened for a short while, only a little trade between the Ahtna and the Russians occurred. Smallpox killed many Ahtna from 1837-1839. After the US purchased Alaska the Ahtna traded directly with the Alaska Commercial Company at Nuchek and indirectly with other posts in the Yukon. The first major encounter with whites happened at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when word of gold in the area brought masses of people north. This introduced luxuries and tuberculosis to the Ahtna People. By 1930, all Ahtna had been baptized into the Russian Orthodox religion. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- Contact with whites led to epidemics that devastated the Ahtna population. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, all Ahtna had been converted or baptized into the Russian Orthodox faith. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 1.6 Ecology

- The climate of the Copper River valley where the Ahtna lived is transitional between maritime and continental. Snow covered the inhabited area from mid-November through mid-April. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- “Indian Potatos”, “Wild rhubarb”, several other greens, the innerbark of the poplar tree and many different kinds of berries were gathered by the Ahtna. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Sockeye Salmon, caribou, moose, mountain goat. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- Tomahawks, made from the antlers of a young caribou. These are used in close combat and never thrown. They are also thought to be used ceremonially. (Troufanoff)

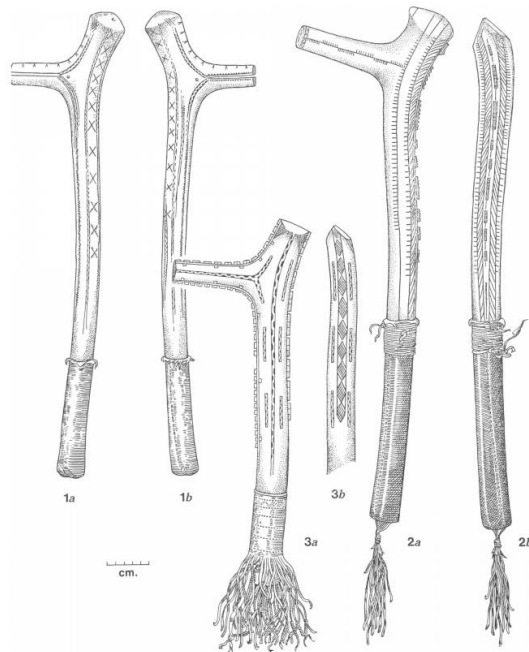


FIG. 2. Tomahawks Nos. 571-32a (1a, 1b), 571-32b (2a, 2b), and 3667-14 (3a, 3b), Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.

### 2.4 Food storage:

- Grease rendered from meat was mixed with berries and meat and stored in bark buckets for winter. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Fish were cut into slices thin enough to dry in the open air and then were folded together and pressed into bales of 40 for storage or trade. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

- Men prepared much of the large game. Women prepared and stored salmon and most other fish. When not in camps, men and women worked together to build tools they needed. Women made the clothing. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 2.6 Land tenure:

- Not discussed. There appeared to be certain areas that were associated with certain clans, indicating that they may have traditionally had home territories. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 2.7 Ceramics:

- None indicated.

## 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

- Men ate first at meals, with even boys eating before women. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 2.9 Food taboos:

- The Ahtna had a series of rituals to protect them from epidemics that they believed the salmon brought from saltwater. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- The pelts of furbearers were believed too dangerous to children be brought into the house until completely dried. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- The Ahtna refused to eat wolf, mink or dog even when starving. They only very rarely ate tree squirrel or marten.
- A warrior who had killed was traditionally a little crazy. He observed all the stringent life crisis taboos, such as being isolated for 100 days, letting his hair become unkempt and fearing sleep because the spirit may take revenge. This ordeal could be avoided if he ate a little fat from near the heart of the victim. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- When hunting it is considered bad luck to say the “true” name of the animal one wishes to kill. Instead animals were referred to by circumlocution. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Wolves are rarely hunted because it is believed that whoever kills one will starve to death. Only old men have the magical strength to skin one. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Someone’s first kill, no matter how small, must not be eaten by the one who killed it. It must be shared. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- Yes, the Ahtna made moose-hide boats. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## **3. Anthropometry**

### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

### 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

## **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- Women married shortly after puberty but men were usually around 30 years old before they married. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- Percentage not documented but polygamy was common amongst high-ranking individuals. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns:
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):
- Marriage usually occurs between exogamous moieties. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)
- 4.16 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- Cross cousins, members of another moiety. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?
- There are reserved relationships between a man and his father-in-law or son-in-law. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
  - There are avoidance relationships between a man and his mother-in-law and the sisters of her parents as well as his daughter-in-law. The strongest avoidance relationships are father-in-law/daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and son-in-law. In these relationships, they must never look at each other. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- Cross-cousins generally have joking relationships. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- Matrilineal descent.
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- Marriage is preferred to be with someone from the opposite moiety (cross cousin). (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

- Somewhat. After a kill, it is recommended that men eat a little fat from near the heart of their victim. This is similar to the tasting of game killed by a hunter and perhaps serves the same purpose, to subdue the spirit of the dead.

## **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- The Ahtna were semi-nomadic. They spent the winter in their winter camps and in warmer weather moved out into hunting and fishing camps. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- Winter villages were established under a chief. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Traditionally, each local group was autonomous and the Ahtna never formed a tribal political unit. They also never assembled a council of all chiefs, even when they were threatened. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.4 Post marital residence:

- Bilocal, very fluid. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- Father-in-law/ Son-in-Law avoidance and also father-in-law/daughter-in-law avoidance (Fisch)

5.8 Special friendships/joking relationships:

- Cross-cousins generally have joking relationships. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.8 Village and house organization:

- Winter houses were elaborate buildings that housed the chief and his dependents, sometimes as many as 6 nuclear families. Smaller winter houses, called moss houses, were also built nearby or in the winter settlement. Every living site had a sweat house, pit caches, tree or platform caches. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

- There were specialized structures for menstruating women and also for women about to give birth. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Sweatbaths (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

- Organized into 8-10 matrilineal clans, traditionally about 5 in each exogamous moiety. The moieties are named after the Raven and the Seagull. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

5.12 Trade:

- The Ahtna are part of a widespread and ancient trade network that included the Inuit, other Athapaskans, Coastal Eyak and the Tlingit (and possibly also the Chukchi of Siberia). In pre-contact times, the Ahtna also carried copper on an overland route across the Tana River and The Bagley Icefield to the Eyak and Tlingitized Eyak. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- Yes, chiefs were high ranking individuals who had much wealth and often had many wives. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

### 6 Time allocation to RCR:

- A great deal of time. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- Shamans or “dream doctors” (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 6.2 Stimulants:

- None indicated.

### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- Birth Ritual: Birth traditionally took place in a small shelter where mother and child were isolated for 30 days. For the first 10 days, both parents must stay quiet, so as not to injure the fragile new soul. The parents repeat many of the rituals associated with adolescence. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Puberty Ritual: The puberty ritual is of great importance because it is the first time that an individual goes through each step of the ritual they will use (in modified/shortened versions) for the rest of their life. The adolescent was put under strict restrictions for 70 days (in stages of three; 30 days, 30 days, 10 days) and then followed by less stringent roles for another year. Traditionally, the adolescent also wore a moose skin hood with fringe falling over the face to shield living things and the sky from the wearer’s baleful glance and was hung with rattling hooves to warn others. For the first 3 days, the adolescent mustn’t speak, eat or drink. They sat with bowed head and bent knee, a position they remained in for 10 days and for as much as possible over the next 60 days. To insure that limbs were limber, caribou strings were tied around the joints (elbows, knees, wrists, ankles, and laced around the fingers of the hands) and girls also wore a string around her waist. After the first 10 days, they washed (although sweat bathes weren’t allowed for a year) and began the observations and exercises to allow them to develop into a desirable adult. After the first 30 days, the individual bathed and was dressed in perfumed clothes and moved to a new hut near to the family dwelling. The old counting strings and clothes were hung in a tree so that the wind might blow away the odors. Food taboos mandated that a drinking straw made of swan bone be used and that special dishes be consumed. Hot food, flesh less than 3 days old, handling a knife, and cooking were all forbidden. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)
- Death: Dying people were moved to a special shelter where they were washed and dressed by friends and relatives in fresh clothing. They sit and watch over the deceased for 2 days while the spirit lingers, telling the deceased that they are dead and that they should leave without taking another soul with them. The person is cremated and the building they died in burned down. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 6.4 Other rituals:

- Menstruation and handling a corpse require variations of the ritual performed at puberty. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

- It is said that the Ahtna are descended from two sisters who came up the Copper River. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- Victory and mourning songs (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

- Due to Russian influence, the Ahtna are now Russian Orthodox. They bury their dead and mark the graves with wooden crosses. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- Yes. The true name of the deceased is not to be said. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- The Ahtna live in a world where magic and the soul are very important. Many rituals are performed for the safety of the soul or for others.

## **7. Adornment**

7.1 Body paint:

- Men and women paint their faces before special occasions. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

7.2 Piercings:

- Both sexes had nose and ear piercings with dentalia shells as decoration. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

7.3 Haircut:

- Hair is well-kept. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

7.4 Scarification:

- None indicated.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- Jewelry made from dentalia shells, such as necklaces or nose or ear rings. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

- After contact, the Ahtna began wearing European style clothing. (De Laguna, Frederica & McClellan, Catherine)

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

**9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

## Works Cited

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