Abstract:

Prior efforts to identify traditional socio-territorial groups among the Central Yup’ik Eskimos of southwestern Alaska have been primarily theoretical in nature, examined the subject from very restricted temporal perspectives, and were heavily reliant on a small body of written historical accounts—none of which were informed by contacts with indigenous populations across the entire region. The collective results are inconsistent and largely unverifiable; hence many basic details about Yup’ik socio-territorial organization remain obscure.

This study deviates from its predecessors in geographical focus, temporal scope and methodology. The geographical focus is on the Nuniwarmiut (or Nunivak Eskimos), both the most isolated and best documented of all Central Yup’ik populations. Its temporal scope covers a period of 80 years, the earliest point of which marks the practical limits of reliability of the available ethnographic data. Finally, the study’s methodology is ethnohistorical; it employs a rich array of complementary historical, ethnographic and archeological data to produce a far more authoritative account of socio-territorial organization than has previously been possible for any Yup’ik population.