

## **The Legacy of Shamans? Structural and Cognitive Perspectives of Prehistoric Symbolism in the Bering Strait Region**

This research is designed to explore the meanings of prehistoric sculptures and decorated artifacts discovered in the Bering Strait region. The research will focus on the prehistoric period between 100 A. D. and 1,700 A. D., including Okvik/Old Bering Sea (OBS) culture, Ipiutak Culture, Punuk Culture, Birnirk Culture, and Thule culture.

Based on abundant ethnographic records from the Bering Strait region, this research will mainly rely on an ethnographic analysis as methodology to approach prehistoric symbolism. Therefore, this project needs to deal with two groups of material resources: ethnological data and archaeological data. The data collection will be conducted in the National Museum of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History, the University of Alaska Museum of the North, and the Archaeological Laboratory in Barrow. Theoretically, the research will draw from the fields of cognitive archaeology, structural/symbolic archaeology, and shamanism theory (general shamanism theory and the neuropsychological model), further probing the ideology, cosmology, and belief systems of prehistoric Eskimos. In order to obtain a more adequate understanding of prehistoric symbolism in the Bering Strait region, the proposed research will put its examinations of Bering Strait prehistory into a broader archaeological context and conduct limited comparative studies with the archaeological record from Siberia and East Asian civilizations. Based on investigations of artistic production among ethnographic collections, this project uses the working hypothesis that the artistic complex consists of multiple-purposed artifacts, which might bear potential spiritual or secular meanings. Applying ethnographic analysis will result in new and diverse interpretations of the archaeological artifacts and an informed discussion of ancient thought and mind.