



## LABRADOR MORAVIAN MISSIONS AND THE CZECH COLLECTORS OF INUIT OBJECTS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY <sup>1</sup>

Kateřina Klápřtová<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The article dealing with collecting activities of two Czechs in Labrador Moravian Brethren Missions. Both collectors independently created a remarkable collections of the objects that depict cultural change, which is reflected in the material sphere of Labrador Inuit life during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This article is trying to show that their observation may be used as a source complementing comprehensive ethnographic description and study of the Inuit life on Labrador in this time.

**KEY WORDS:** Labrador Inuit – Moravian Brethren – Jiří Jaeger – Vojtěch Suk – duffle coat – parka – amautik – walrus carvings – cultural change – Hudson Bay Company

The Moravian Brethren (Unitas Fratrum) Christian movement traces its origins to the Czech lands. Its origins date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Czech Brethren and were influenced by the teachings of Jan Amos Komensky, (Comenius) a native of Moravia, one of Czech lands. The Moravian Brethren Church was formed after 1620, when the Non Catholic Czech lands had just been defeated and the victors set out to impose Catholicism on the country, execute the leaders of the non-Catholic Czech estates and banish Protestant clergy to exile. Other Czech Protestants were subjected to bitter persecution and were pressured to convert to Catholicism. It was during this time that Count Zinzendorf in Herrnhut, Saxony (Lusatia) offered a safe haven to a group of Czech Brethren. In Herrnhut, a new denomination of the Protestant faith was born: the Moravian Brethren. Even though Saxony recognized the Protestant Church as one of the state religions, the Moravian Brethren were seen as a sect of theomaniacs that

---

<sup>1</sup> This work was financially supported by Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (DKRVO 2014/33, National Museum, 00023272).

<sup>2</sup> Contact: Kateřina Klápřtová, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, e-mail: katerina\_klapstova@nm.cz

searched the true religion. They left for England where the Moravian Brethren devoted themselves wholeheartedly to proclaiming the gospel and in the eighteenth century began missionary work in America. One example of their success was a missionary activity among the New York Mahicans. But this venture was soon brought to an end by the envious and intolerant local white colonists. The interaction between the Moravian Brethren and the New York Indians stopped and the Moravian Brethren relocated to Bethlehem, Pa.

## **The British Colonial Period in Labrador, 1763–1949**

Since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when the church was revived in England, members of the Moravian Brethren expressed interest in working with the Labrador Inuit. Clearly, they were encouraged by the success of their missionary station in Greenland. But the first attempt to establish a mission in Labrador in 1752 failed. The captain and a part of his crew were swept unwittingly into the protracted animosity between the Inuit and the English colonizers of Newfoundland and were killed by the Inuit. (The Island of Newfoundland and the Labrador coast became England's booty in 1763 when the Anglo-French Wars ended with the Paris Peace Treaty). In 1752 the first missionaries had to return to England to replenish the crew.

Almost ten years later, in 1764, Hugh Palliser, Governor of Newfoundland in control of the Labrador coast warmly welcomed the missionaries' efforts and an appeasement of the Inuits who had been hostile toward the whites. Missionary Haven, a veteran of a five-year stay with the Greenland Inuit and speaker of the Inuit language, won the Labrador Inuits over with his enlightened behavior and became the first European to spend the night among them unharmed. After returning to England, the Moravian Church and the Minister for English colonies in America began negotiations. The territory had to be shielded from the demands of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>3</sup> Finally in 1769, English King George III issued the Moravian Church a charter and a strip of the Labrador coast. The plan to establish missions began to materialize. The Moravian Brethren returned to Labrador and their campaign, led by the same missionary Haven, was welcomed by the Inuit. The bay they chose for their mission was called the Unity Bay and they bought land from the Inuit. Because there was no chief there, they went from tent to tent of all the Inuit and recorded their names to preserve formalities. They marked the land they bought with stones. That was the founding of the first station, Nain, opened in 1771. The Moravian Brethren in Labrador were the first Europeans to settle north of Hamilton Inlet. The stations Okak was founded in 1776 and Hopedale in 1782. The mission continued to expand its operations through the nineteenth century, with new settlements at Hebron in 1830, Zoar in 1865, Daman in 1871, and Makkovik in 1895. In 1904 the Moravians opened a station at Killinek, near Cape Chidley.

The Moravian Brethren had an impact on various aspects of the Inuit life, bringing along with them not only Christianity but economic changes as well. The Inuit had come to depend on a wide variety of European goods and the Moravian Brethern-

---

<sup>3</sup> Hudson Bay Company was founded in 1670 as The Governor and Company of Adventures of England trading into Hudson's Bay and functioned as the de facto government in Hudson Bay.

operated trading store became highly important.<sup>4</sup> By maintaining a regular trade with the Inuit, the Moravians hoped to make their mission self-sufficient while reducing one of the primary motives for Inuit journeys to European traders in southern Labrador.

### **Czech collectors in Labrador Moravian Missions**

No Czechs were members of the Moravian missionaries in Labrador, but the opportunity for non denominational work was taken up by two men of the Czech origin in the early Twentieth Century.

One of them was **Jiří Jaeger** (1894–1975), who worked as a tradesman for the Moravian Brethren Mission stations during the stay in Labrador between 1914 and 1919. He collected a remarkable set of Inuit carvings from walrus ivory, as well as from wood and stone and he also gathered there fishing equipment and a several pieces of clothing which were made for him by Inuit women.<sup>5</sup> Jaeger wrote a book about his life and his employment in Labrador, titled “Six Years Among the Eskimo”, in which he gave a lay eyewitness account of Inuit culture.

The second collector was MD-PhD **Vojtěch Suk** (1879–1967), Professor of anthropology at Brno University. He contacted the Moravian Brethren in London, hoping for free transportation to Labrador. In August 1926 he set out from London on a sailboat *Harmony* and spent four months plying along the coast of the northern Labrador. With the consent of Moravian Brethren, he received board and lodging in



Fig. 1 Jiří Jaeger during 1914–1919.

<sup>4</sup> The Moravian Missions have been severely criticized for the trading establishments which they run side by side with their missions. But for this they can plead extenuating circumstances, as will be shown, and the administration of spiritual and secular matters is kept entirely separate. The principal thing in their work which appeals to the ethnologist is the fact that, as a missionary body, they have encouraged the Eskimo (sic) to continue to live as natives – that is to eat native food and wear native clothing – which wise position has been instrumental in keeping the Eskimo (sic) alive in this distrikt, while they have utterly perished in the south. The general attitude that Moravians have taken toward the Eskimo (sic), of not-too-familiar kindness, and of founding their authority on it instead of on force, is also interesting to a worker among native tribes, particularly as regards the success with which it has been attended. (Hawkes 1916: 10)

<sup>5</sup> This clothing was worn by him, as it is documented on photographs (fig. 1)



Fig. 2 Okak – the Church and the Hospital. Photograph by Jiří Jaeger

exchange for providing medical care for the local Inuits and white settlers from the settlements administered by missionaries and also for the inland Naskapi Indians.

Moreover he is the author of the popular novel “A doctor in Labrador” in which he recounts his experiences and observations from his medical practice there.<sup>6</sup>

The books of both Czech collectors contain observations of Inuit life in the early twentieth century, a time when a cultural change reshaped traditional processes of the native culture.

### **Jiří Jaeger, Tradesman and Collector (Labrador 1914–1919)**

In his popular book Jaeger described in detail living at the Okak, Hebron and Port Burwell missions settlements, his work as a merchant and his travelling and hunting adventures. His observations of the life of Inuit in Labrador are valuable for their authenticity and bright insights, even if he was not an expert in the ethnography. Very valuable are Jaeger’s perceptions of the Moravian Brethren involvement in many aspects of Inuit life outside religion.

---

<sup>6</sup> Suk’s main interest was in obtaining sufficient blood samples for Anthropological research into human racial pathology. This type of research was particularly popular among anthropologists at the start of the 20th century.

Jiří Jaeger (**fig.1**) was the first Czech in the Labrador missions of the Moravian Brethren. This twenty-year old high school graduate found a job here, earning shelter and annual salary. His work involved sorting out merchandise imported by the English ships and commercially distributing them among the Inuit.

"The work was quite difficult and had to be reliable since it involved selling all kinds of wares, from needles and buttons to textiles, guns, etc. The Eskimo /sic/ paid with dollars they received from a merchant to whom they sold furs (red, white and silver fox) and fish (white and red meat trout, dried codfish, etc.). At the station they also sold firewood, i. e. bought Inuit firewood leftovers for the northern stations, Hebron and Port Burwell." (Jaeger 1963:42)

He began his work in Okak (**fig. 2**), where he described the local Inuit winter village of wooden houses made of planks from mission sawmille according to Euro-American pattern (**fig. 3**):

"An Eskimo settlement of small wooden houses that were nailed together from different pieces of wood, all helter-skelter, stretched over the entire slope behind the hospital. In the little gardens under the foothill the villagers grew rhubarb and one beet variety... the beds had to be covered at night with old ship sails to protect the seedlings from frost."



Fig. 3 Inuit winter village with wooden houses in Okak. Photo by Jiří Jaeger

Jaeger confidentially describes the interior of Inuit wooden house he visited on his way from Port Burwell to Okak. "Onalik, an Inuit friend, welcomed me warmly and asked me to enter his house. I had to crawl in on all four after him. He opened the door and I was assaulted by smelly, steamy air. The room was about five meters long and four meters wide, with no ceiling. Its roof was held by two poles with belts fastened between them for a clothesline. Bunk beds covered with bear and caribou skins were on both sides of the room. The narrow aisle between them was littered with all sorts of trash. The little roof window made of sewed-up seal gut let in meager light. The interior was lit by a large stone lamp placed by the door on a large flat stone that functioned as a table ....They could make tea and sometimes meat above the lamp but the meat was always undercooked." (Jaeger 1963: 107)

The quote is a part of Jaeger's description of traditional winter wooden hut. (Taylor 1984: 514) It is interesting to note that Jaeger became unknowingly an eyewitness of a transformation that begun in the early nineteenth century when the long low entrance tunnel was replaced by a much shorter porch. Jaeger's description shows that in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional blubber lamps still existed in wooden houses, and were used as a light and also for heating and cooking despite the widespread availability of wood burning furnaces, according to ethnographic sources. (Kleivan 1966: 37)

In his book, Jaeger also described the annual cycle of the seasonal subsistence, during which hunting of caribous in early August alternated with hunting of sea mammals – such as seals and whales running from December to January and the hunting of walruses that started in February and ended in March, and fishing from March to April.

Besides traditional hunting techniques such as fishing with a help of closed off river estuaries, usually shallow ones, with stone barriers, or sealing off the breathing holes, Jaeger many times mentioned the Inuit using nets for hunting, and this information contributes to a discussion on whether the Labrador Inuit used nets in the pre-European time. Jaeger specifically mentioned nets for the seal hunting which the Moravians from the mission store lent the Inuit for fall hunts. The discussion is over whether the Inuit used nets in aboriginal times. In his book Hawkes (1916) thinks it probable that nets may have been used in aboriginal times, while Bowling (1910) argues that the Inuit did not use nets for catching until after the arrival of the Moravians.<sup>7</sup> Documentary sources tend to support view suggesting that the Inuit had not their own nets when the missionaries first arrived but by the mid 1780s they were obtaining nets from traders (Cartwright 1972): as well as making their own. (J. G. Taylor 1974)

Jaeger mentioned (1963: 120) using nets to catch cod and even seal, a practice started by the Moravian Brethren company several years before he arrived in Labrador. According to Jaeger, some Inuit at southern stations made their own nets but borrowed them or used them mostly while hunting directly for the Moravian Brethren commercial company. Using nets assured the Eskimo a far greater catch than in the old way. Jaeger in his book confirmed that the Moravians assisted by lending the Eskimo nets which were too costly to buy. (Jaeger 1963: 120 and the following pages)

---

<sup>7</sup> It is not definitely known whether before their contact with the whites the Labrador Eskimo (sic) used fish nets or not. (Hawkes 1916:88)

## Jiří Jaeger´s collection

In the forefront of Jaeger´s collection is a set of carvings, primarily of walrus ivory, stone, and wood. Labrador Inuit carving does not offer realistic details, but its form and overall execution surpasses other Canadian Inuit, almost rivaling the ambitious art of the Alaskan Inuit and Jupik in terms of style and artistic sensibility. Although the Labrador Inuit stylized animal bodies, they masterfully captured their characteristic determinants (e.g., ears, tail, or tusks). An important factor was using well-made or appropriate tools brought in by whites.<sup>8</sup> A favorite design is a hunter, seated in kayak. The carvings of animal forms are older. Of these the seal, the whale and the bear are most common. Fox and walrus also take place at the Jaeger´s collection, although they occur more rare in general (figs. 4–6).

Ivory flat-bottomed images of birds were used as dice for gambling or games of chance (fig. 6). There are fifteen to eighteen figures used in the game. Small flat-bottomed images of men and women are also used. The players sit around a dressed sealskin. The images are taken in the hand, shaken, and thrown up. In falling, those that stand upright belong to the player. The one who succeeds in petting the greatest number is declared the winner. (Hawkes 1916: 121)



Fig. 4–6 Ivory and stone carvings. Jiří Jaeger Collection 1914–1919. Photograph by Jiří Vaněk.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is due, as in Alaska, to the introduction of better material tools, as a reset of early contact with whites.(Hawkes 1916: 100)



Fig. 5

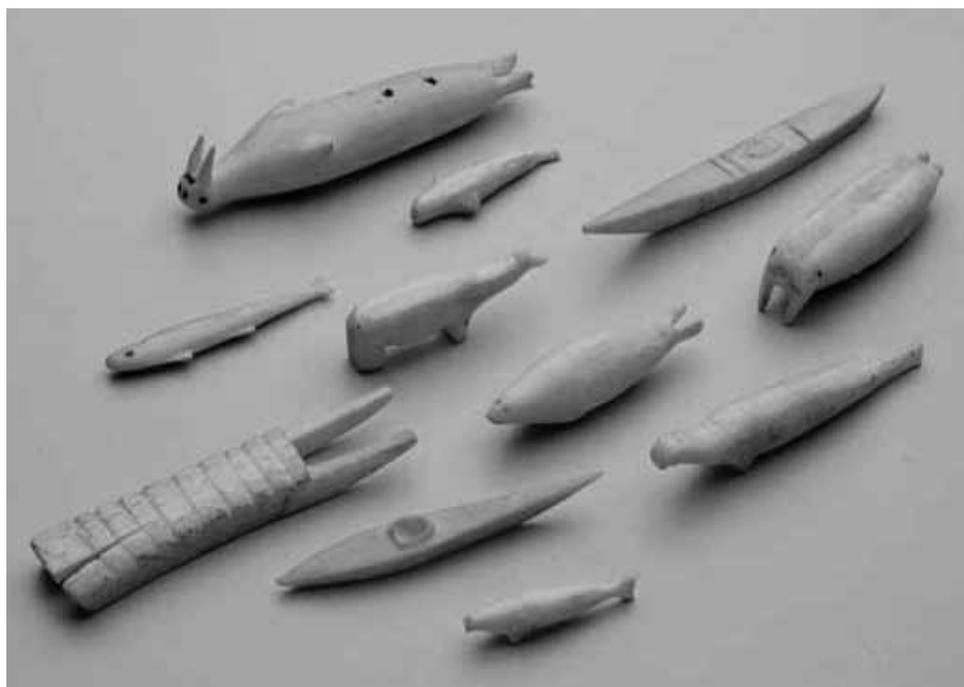


Fig. 6

## The Clothing

His collection, now part of the Náprstek Museum, dates back to the period when the native way of sewing of clothing radically changed. This changes were connected with the new materials. Originally, the materials that had been used came from hunted animals. Traditional women's parkas or dickies<sup>9</sup> with hoods had the significant front and back coattails on the bottom edge (fig. 7). Clothing made of skin with coattails symbolized its connection to the animal world. Animal tails – the strikingly elongated tongue-shaped tail projections on the bottom of women parkas were incorporated into the garments. The tail motif was further used to mark the division between men and women (Chaussonnet 1988).

The most common was a caribou skin hooded parka with skin trousers (either of sealskin or caribou), and sealskin boots. In stormy wather, raincoats of seal-gut were worn over parkas. Coats made of light summer caribou skins, or birdskin vests, were used as underclothing in the winter. In summer, the outer clothing was shed and these undergarment served as the only clothing worn.

Parkas, required up to three complete deerskins. In winter, two parkas would be worn: one with the fur against the wearer's skin, and another with the fur turned out. The layer between the two coats acted as insulation, preventing the escape of body heat. Coats made of light summer caribou skins, or birdskin, were used as underclothing in the winter. In summer, the outer clothing was shed, and these undergarments served as the only clothing worn. Great care was taken to make a variety of sealskin boots *kamik*. First the skin would be cleaned, scraping all the pieces of fat from inside with a woman's knife *ulu*. Next all the hair was scraped from the outside. To soften the skin for sewing, a woman might chew the edge. Often, women bleached the skins in urine, so the soles of their boots would be white (fig. 8), (Borlase 1993: 103).

Jaeger's depictions dealing with traditional women work with skins: "Before turning skins into clothing, Eskimo women softened them by rubbing them in their



Fig. 7 Inuit woman in sealskin clothing. Photograph by Jifi Jaeger

<sup>9</sup> The word dicky, in common use among the white traders and settlers of Labrador, is a corruption of the Eskimo (sic) word atige. In Alaska we find the whites using the Russianized Kamtschatkan word parka, for the Eskimo atige. (Hawkes 1916: 10)



Fig. 8 Sealskin boots, V. Suk collection 1926 (Inv. No. 45662-3). Photograph Jiří Vaněk

hands. They chewed on shaved skin before sewing the boots to help ease the needle through the skin. Dried sinews of caribou backs 'ivalo' served as threads. The stitches only went half way into the skin to keep the shoe waterproof. After walking in wet conditions the boots might have been soaked but the foot stayed dry. After drying them out, the Eskimo women had to soften boots again by rubbing. Contrary to popular belief they did not chew them. The woman normally wore trousers that looked like swim trunks made of soft sealskin. The Eskimo didn't know nightgowns or pajamas. They lied down between the furs stark naked." (Jaeger 1963:94).

During Jaeger's stay in Labrador, the Inuit gradually replaced hide with textiles they obtained from traders. The biggest supplier was the Hudson Bay Company, which bartered with cotton canvas, woolen cloth, and colorful galloons. Jaeger's collection includes garments made from traditional Inuit material such as sealskin and caribou fur. Among them is a male sealskin hooded parka and boots (fig. 9). In the largest part of the collection are Inuit style men's parkas made of wool, cotton and gallons (fig. 10).

Moreover, the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed noticeable changes in the material as well as the style of female clothes, as seen in photographs taken by Jiří Jaeger. Inuit women at the mission stations customarily wore the duffle coats *amaulik/amauti* with big woolen hoods and coattails, complementing them with skirts rather



Fig. 9 Male sealskin parka, winter outer clothing. Jiří Jaeger Collection 1914–1919. (Inv. No. 68 531)  
Photograph Jiří Vaněk

than the traditional trousers<sup>10</sup> (**fig. 11**). These changes were mainly caused by increasing activities of the Hudson Bay Company. To boost its own economic interests, the Company increased pressure on Inuits and influenced the way of Inuit women dressing especially.

“As early as 1916 the Hudson’s Bay Company set up a commercial station in Port Burwell and named it Fox Harbor. Now that the sale of rum was illegal the Company would sell the Eskimo luxurious and utterly useless items: thin ladies’ stockings, silk blouses, etc. After buying these, the Eskimo had to get the necessary ammunition and

---

<sup>10</sup> The *amautik* is traditional mother’s parka worn by Inuit women of the eastern Canadian arctic. This parka has a built-in baby pouch *amaut* just below the hood. The pouch *amaut* is large and comfortable for the baby nestled against the mother’s back. The mother can bring the baby from back to front for breast-feeding. It was also possible to carry a baby in the large hood.



Fig. 10 Male woolen parka. Jiří Jaeger Collection 1914–1919 (Inv. No. 68 538) Photograph Jiří Vaněk

provisions in our (mission) store on credit. I called the Eskimo for a meeting and explained it all to them. They realized such items were useless because their women could not wear them in the Labrador climate. I succeeded in limiting such trading though I didn't make any friends among the Eskimo females." (Jaeger 1963:154)

Jiří Jaeger stay in Labrador ended during the great epidemics of devastating illnesses. He stated that aside from the smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, typhus and tuberculosis epidemics, the Spanish influenza of 1918 caused a true calamity. In 1914, the population dropped from 5,000 to 1,500 and after the wave of the Spanish flu the population was further reduced to a meager six to seven hundred people.

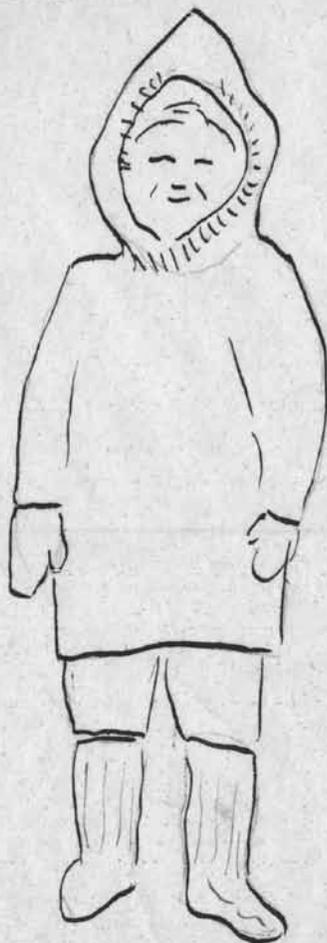


Fig. 11 Inuit woman with a baby (duffle coat and European skirt), approximately dating between 1914–1919. Photograph Jiří Jaeger

In 1919 after six years Jaeger left Labrador and returned to the Czech lands with his collection that is now part of the Náprstek Museum.

After WW I, the Hudson's Bay Company took advantage of the poor state the Moravian Brethren company found itself and bought them out with all their warehouses and buildings. In 1925, a contract was signed handing the Hudson's Bay Company the monopoly on all business on the Labrador coast. The living standard of the coastal Inuit deteriorated after 1925. It was in part because the Hudson's Bay Company, not interested in seal oil, refused to lend them nets for seal hunt. The Hudson's Bay Company demanded that the Inuit give up seal hunt for hunting of fur animals. When they traded with the Inuit, the Company charged high prices for goods.

oblek muže



Kabát a kalhoty  
ze sobí kůže  
Hřivana č. 3  
fotografie č. 4

K tomu  
rukavice z  
americké a přes  
to z tuleň  
kůže, lemované  
pro kočičí nohy  
boty z kůže  
sobí kůže

Lačnové hlavě  
muže  
kolovane

Dr. V. Suk,  
Brno,  
Kounicova 38.  
Czechoslovakia

Fig. 12a. Male clothing. Caribou-skin coat and trousers, ... with woolen and sealskin mittens lined with dog fur, boots made of fur from caribou legs. ... footnotes and drawing by Vojtěch Suk



Fig. 12b. Male clothing (caribou hooded parka, hood is lined with dog fur, short trousers and boots made of sealskin and fur from caribou legs. Vojtěch Suk Collection, 1926 (Inv. No. A 8 150, 61 912, 45 648-9). Photograph by Vojtěch Suk



Fig. 13 Inuit woman's clothing composed of various colors of sealskin, the hood is lined with dog fur. Hebron. Vojtěch Suk Collection, 1926 (Inv. No. 45658, 45 572, 44 574). Photograph by Jiří Vaněk



Fig. 14 Female duffle coat *amautik* lined with galloons. Hebron. Vojtěch Suk Collection 1926. (Inv. No. 45 659). Photograph by Jiří Vaněk

### **Vojtěch Suk, Doctor and Collector (Labrador 1926)**

Vojtěch Suk, MD, came to Labrador seven years after Jiří Jaeger's departure from Labrador.

He spent in Labrador four months of the year of 1926<sup>th</sup> and then he returned to his homeland with the collection of items he received from grateful patients. In 1936, he offered it to the Náprstek Museum in Prague administered in this time by the Curatorium who purchased it from him in 1937. Although Vojtěch Suk, who worked in Labrador just

after an disastrous influenza epidemic, was not a trained collector of ethnographic material, he perfectly documented the objects, furnishing his list with footnotes, adding details of the types of furs and textiles featured in the artifacts, and supplying photographs and drawings of the clothing on figurines (fig. 12ab).<sup>11</sup> Originally, the collection included plaster casts of Inuit faces made by Vojtěch Suk. The Náprstek Museum later passed the casts to the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum.

Vojtěch Suk notable collection mostly of Inuit clothing consists of a complete male garment made of caribou skin, two male woolen hooded parkas, a child hooded parka made of seal skin, a remarkable female garment composed of various types skins (fig. 13) and several pairs of mittens and boots as well as with inserts. To our delight it also includes a female duffle coat *amautik* with a short front coattail and a large back coattail, together with baby pouch *amaut* on its back and with large woolen hood (fig. 14).<sup>12</sup> Around 1914 these types of duffle coats were commonly worn by Inuit women as we can see from Jiří Jaeger's photograph (fig. 15). But by the late 1920s this



Fig. 15 Inuit women's clothing from around 1914. Photograph by Jiří Jaeger

---

<sup>11</sup> The North Labrador collections can outfit three mannequins, as seen in the accompanying photographs and in my drawings. (Suk 1936)

<sup>12</sup> See note 10.



Fig. 16 Inuit doll in women's cotton parka amautik.  
Vojtěch Suk Collection 1926 (Inv. No. A 5 183 b).  
Photograph by Jiří Vaněk

type of parkas or duffle coats were very rare, which Suk himself remarks upon in his comments on the collection.<sup>13</sup> Suk great collector's success is that he acquired and brought for Náprstek museum this type of Inuit duffle coat *amauti*. Moreover the traditional use of it demonstrates Inuit doll that comes from Suk estate (fig. 16).

A chapter titled "The Old Corset", from Suk's book, characterizes his professional approach to collecting. He recounts the surprise he felt when he discovered, while conducting a medical examination, what an Inuit woman wore in place of underwear: "It was Sunday, and she was in her holiday finery. Under her fur coat, she was clad in a black tulle blouse with black glass beads of Jablonec provenance. Her skirt was made of color calico... On her feet were tall Eskimo sealskin boots... She had put Eskimo reindeer pants over her knees... When she took off her tulle blouse I saw she wore directly on her body an oversized old corset."

Suk's attempt to buy the corset was unsuccessful. "I failed. I did not get the old corset. What a pity! I was excited to snag such a catch for the Náprstek Museum in Prague. The bodice would have been a fascinating, tangible testament to the

<sup>13</sup> "Woman's coat with a coattail, made of American woolen blanket, trimmed with red and black woolen galloon. The special hood for carrying babies is bordered with fur of the Inuit dog. A Hebron woman wore and subsequently sold this item. Today, this style is an old-fashioned and regarded only as unique to the Far North." (Suk, 1936)



Fig. 17 Inuit woman (on the left) and three men – all dressed in the same parkas. Labrador 1926. Photograph by Vojtěch Suk

trappings of white culture, enduring from the last century to this one. This absurd hodgepodge of reindeer trousers worn along with a corset would have evidenced the effect of spreading a cultural contamination all the way to the shores of Labrador.”<sup>14</sup> (Suk 1975: 114)

## Conclusion

### Cultural change in the garment

A close look at the costumes in the collections of Jiří Jaeger and Vojtěch Suk calls attention to the work of women as the messengers of cultural values. The clothing they sewed helped to distinguish one group of the people of the North from another, and to preserve their cultural uniqueness. Their clothing reflected their natural conditions as well as every individual’s ethnic identity and social rank, including gender, age, and, notably, the magical faith and symbolic values of each community.

In the Inuit spiritual tradition, clothing made of skin and fur continued its connection to the animal world. Animal skin, transformed into a second skin for humans, still maintained its animal identity. As such, it had to reach that world through its

---

<sup>14</sup> “It is also possible to clothe an additional mannequin of an Eskimo female to illustrate the sort of tainted style on mission stations today. To do this, we need to obtain a calico color skirt and a colorful apron of the kind our rural women wear. We also need an Eskimo duffle coat, itemized in the list as number 5 (i.e. male short coat without coattail), and black sealskin footwear.” (Suk 1936)



Fig. 18 Inuit woman in a straight bottom edge parka and skirt. Labrador 1926. Photograph by Vojtěch Suk

arrangement and positioning. A skin garment worn by a human had to correspond with its place on the animal body. For instance, trousers, boots, sleeves and mittens were sewn from animal paws, while hoods were always made from the animal's head. The animal's tail was typically added to the lower rim of overcoats in the form of a shallow or deep 'U'. These flaps or coattails on the bottom of women's parkas remained a Labrador fashion statement into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Ironically, the elements of fur coats migrated to textile garments. The duffle coat, brought by Vojtěch Suk, has the same oblong protrusions as earlier skin coats. However, in fabric garments, the tongue-shaped extensions mimicking an animal tail had lost their *raison d'être*.

In 1926, when Vojtěch Suk sailed by the Labrador shores, this old type of women's duffle overcoat with a coattail was no longer used. Women, like men, began wearing a short jacket with a straight bottom edge, and supplemented it with a skirt (fig. 17, 18). Textile clothing had left the animal kingdom's realm.

Inuit clothing collected by both Czechs in Labrador in early 20<sup>th</sup> century document the transition period when the skin and fur used for centuries began to be replaced by factory fabric which began to flow here through contacts with whites. Woolen and cotton textile, cotton yarn and gallons facilitated the work, but also the garment made of these materials became fashionable.

### **Literature:**

- BOAS, Franz. The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay. *Bulletin of the American museum of Natural History* 15. New York, 1901–1907
- BRANTENBERG, Anne and BRANTENBERG, Terje. Coastal Northern Labrador After 1950. In Sturtevant, William C. ed. *Arctic. Handbook of North American Indians*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1984, pp. 689-699
- BORLASE, Tim. *Labrador Studies. The Labrador Inuit*. Labrador, New Foundland: Labrador East Integrated School Board, 1993
- BOWLING, W.G. *Labrador: Its Discovery*. New York, 1910
- CARTWRIGHT, Sir Georgie. *A Journal of Transactions and Events, During a Residence of Nearly Sixteen Years on the Coast of Labrador*. Newark, England: Alin and Ridge, 1972
- CHAUSSONNET, Valérie. Needles and Animals: Women's Magic. In Fitzhugh William W. and Crowell, Aron. *Crossroads of Continents*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1988, pp. 209-226
- HAWKES, Ernest W. *The Labrador Eskimo*. Canada, 1916
- HILLER, James K. *The Origins and the Early Years of the Moravian Mission in Labrador, 1752–1805*. MA thesis, Memorial University, 1967. Typescript
- JAEGER, Jiří. *Šest let mezi Eskymáky (Six years among the Eskimo)*, Praha: Orbis, 1963
- KAPLAN, Susan A. *European goods and economic change in early Labrador Inuit society*. Cultures in Contact, William W. Fitzhugh (ed.), Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1985.
- KLEIVAN, Helge. The Eskimos of Northeast Labrador: A History of Eskimo White Relations, 1771–1955. *Nors Polarinstitutt Skrifter* 139. Oslo, 1966
- SUK, Vojtěch. *Po stopách Holubových. Lékařem na Labradoru*. Brno: Blok, 1975
- TAYLOR, J. Garth. *Labrador Eskimo Settlement of the early Contact period*. Ottawa, 1974
- TAYLOR, J. Garth. Historical Ethnography of the Labrador Coast. In Sturtevant, William C. ed. *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 5 Arctic. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1984, pp. 508-521

### **Sources:**

- SUK, Vojtěch. Collection of Photographs of the Náprstek Museum. Photographs from Labrador (Am II 541-632, Am II 3445-3503).
- SUK, Vojtěch. Itemized list of collected subjects sent to the Curatorium of the Náprstek Museum in 1936. Accompanying documentation of Suk Collection, Náprstek Museum.
- SUK, Vojtěch, drawings, 1936. Accompanying documentation of Suk Collection, Náprstek Museum.