

C.C. Uhlenbeck: Collecting and sharing Blackfoot culture and history

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Introduction

Few North American Indian tribal languages have been as extensively documented and analyzed as Blackfoot. It is remarkable that a Dutch ethnolinguist must be largely credited for this circumstance: professor C.C. Uhlenbeck (1866-1951). In 1910 and 1911 he conducted fieldwork on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Teton County, Montana, and collected materials consisting of vocabularies, grammatical notes, autobiographical and ethno-historical accounts, ethnographic data, oral traditions, song texts, and myths.

Uhlenbeck embarked on his academic career as a student at Leiden University specializing in Indo-Germanic and Slavic languages. Gradually he also became interested in Basque and Finno-Ugric. Appointed in 1892 as professor of Sanskrit in Amsterdam, he soon transferred to Leiden where much of his time was devoted to Basque and Inuit, publishing what might be called the first scientific study of the latter (1907). By way of Greenlandic Inuit Uhlenbeck became acquainted with Amerindian languages and for more than a quarter of a century he pursued what he called his “distant American hobbies”. After studying and publishing on North American Indian language families, and more particularly Algonquian, he contemplated doing fieldwork across the Atlantic. Dissatisfied with the rather incomplete and sometimes unreliable collections of individual tribal languages in Native North America, he planned to document a tribal language as completely as possible on the basis of original fieldwork (Uhlenbeck 1908, 1909, 1910; De Josselin de Jong 1953; Swiggers 1988; Hovens and Bakker 1991).

Why Uhlenbeck decided on the Montana Blackfeet is not exactly known. One possibility is the tribe's historic reputation as fierce warriors, propagated in popular fiction, and attracting curious visitors after they had been “pacified” and placed on reservations in Montana and Alberta. Another is their easy accessibility, as their Montana reservation is situated on the Great Northern Railway, and the railroad advertised the Indians as an attraction along with nearby Glacier National Park, even before the park received that official federal status. It

also cannot be ruled out that Uhlenbeck had previously developed contact with the Dutch Jesuit Father Aloysius Soer (1853-1932) who was stationed at the Holy Family Mission on the reservation. The priest's previous work on translating religious texts into Blackfoot must have been of interest to Uhlenbeck (Hinderer 1932; Hovens and Van Santen 2007; Hovens in prep. b). The fact that there was a paucity of linguistic data on Blackfoot, although some basic material was available, must surely have played a role. It is most probable that a combination of reasons motivated Uhlenbeck to cast his eye on the Blackfoot. The linguist carried out his work at a time when the tribe in Montana experienced more interest by scientists, and they had recently been visited by ethnologist Clark Wissler from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, photographer-ethnographer Edward S. Curtis from Seattle, and the British anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon from Cambridge (Wissler and Duvall 1908; Wissler 1910; Gidley 1982).

Before contacting the Superintendent of Indian Affairs of the Blackfoot Agency, Uhlenbeck obtained letters of recommendation from the Dutch government and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences. On February 14, 1910 he wrote the Blackfoot Indian Agent about his plans for ethno-linguistic research, asking permission to visit the reservation for that purpose. In his March 4 letter of reply Indian Agent Clarence A. Churchill informed him that "Foreigners are forbidden to go into the Indian country without a passport from the Department of the Interior, agent, or commanding officer of the nearest military post, or to remain therein after the expiration of such passport, under penalty of one thousand dollars. Such passport must show the object of the visit, the time allowed to remain and route of travel" (NARA 1910). However, the required permission was soon forthcoming from Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert G. Valentine in Washington D.C. Assistance was also obtained from the priests and teachers at the Holy Family Indian mission and school, who assisted Uhlenbeck in practical matters and brought him into contact with several members of the Blackfoot tribe.

From May 11 to August 15, 1910, Uhlenbeck and his assistant J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong were engaged in ethno-linguistic fieldwork on the Blackfoot reservation in Montana. Uhlenbeck returned in 1911, accompanied by his wife Willy, to continue his fieldwork from June 8 to September 17, thus completing six months of research among the Piegan subdivision of the tribe (see Eggermont-Molenaar 2005). During that time he talked to numerous Blackfeet, interviewing a selected number of them on matters of specific linguistic importance. His major informant and interpreter was Joseph Tatsey, but other informants included Blood, Black Horse Rider (Walter Mountain Chief), Bear Chief, Chief All Over, Four Horns and Many Guns (Uhlenbeck and Tatsey 1912:iii-v). The Blackfoot seemed rather willing to share their culture with the professor from Europe, an attitude that was even strengthened when he returned a year later, accompanied by his wife, demonstrating his genuine interest in their language and way of life. Payment for time and services is only part of the explanation of this attitude. Remarkable is that Uhlenbeck specifically credited Joseph Tatsey for his assistance as informant and interpreter by explicitly naming him on the title pages of several

publications (Uhlenbeck and Tatsey 1911, 1912).

In 1910 De Josselin de Jong not only collected texts and stories for Uhlenbeck on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Montana, but also gathered linguistic and ethnographic data for his own research and publications (1912, 1912a, 1914). His major informant was Black Horse Rider, known by his English name of Walter Mountain Chief, the son of Mountain Chief. He supplied the researcher with most texts and stories as well as ethno-graphic data. In addition, the French-Piegian mixed blood Louis Pembrance told several stories that were subsequently corrected and completed by Black Horse Rider. The latter also acted as interpreter during the researcher's interviews with other tribal members. Following Uhlenbeck's example, De Josselin de Jong also credited Black Horse Rider for his work by specifically titling his published Blackfoot texts as collected with the aid of his named informant and interpreter (De Josselin de Jong and Black Horse Rider 1914).

Such explicit and prominent recognition of assistance during research by Native people in North America is relatively rare in early twentieth century academic practice. Frequently Indian informants and interpreters were thanked in prefaces or introductions to scientific works in ethnolinguistics and cultural anthropology, and sometimes they were explicitly named. Only rarely, however, did they make the title page. Clark Wissler from the American Museum of Natural History in New York set the earliest example when he listed David Duvall (*Ta-Nat-Ski* 'Pretty Face') as co-author of a volume on Blackfoot mythology (Wissler and Duvall 1908). By following suit, Uhlenbeck and De Josselin de Jong prominently acknowledged the willingness of the Blackfoot to share their culture with outsiders, and the effectiveness of their work in scientific fieldwork. By doing so, the fieldworkers expressed not only the value of the assistance from Native people they had received, but also the importance of their cultural heritage as a whole that was valued and shared by the Blackfoot amongst themselves. In addition, the action of the Dutchmen might also be regarded as an early example of sensitivity to Native intellectual property rights.¹

In recent years Native Americans have tried to restrict what they regard as exploitation of their cultural heritage by outsiders by an appeal on intellectual property rights. This is not confined to cases involving the reproduction by non-Indians of elements of their cultures for the global marketplace. Their fight against fake shamans performing "Indian healing rituals" has a history of several decades. Native leaders have repeatedly expressed their concern about the way non-Indians try to gain access to traditional medical knowledge or use tribal language resources and oral traditions. Control over archaeological sites on non-Indian lands is another contentious issue. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 has only begun to address the issue of museum collections in the United States (see Brown 2003).

That manmade objects are materializations of his intellectual capacities was widely recognized by evolutionists whose paradigms of human physical and cultural evolution arose at a time of intense European expansion and colonialism around the world in the nineteenth century. As subsequent paradigms emerged, blossomed, and were discarded in a repeating

pattern, collecting the material manifestations of the many different representatives of mankind remained an enduring concern of natural history and anthropology museums. The major ethnographic collections of most natural history and anthropology museums derive from the colonial enterprise of European governments, multinational companies, and missionary representatives of various denominations, both Catholic and Protestant. Another major contribution came from academics who carried out ethnographic fieldwork among Native peoples in the colonies, especially after anthropology gained academic status as a distinct field of specialization in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, in addition a variety of intellectuals from various other disciplines who also went abroad for research brought back small collections that aggregated through accidental gifts and planned purchases. Small collections from botanists, zoologists, meteorologists, geologists, oceanographers, and other natural scientists are frequently encountered in anthropology museums and the anthropology departments of natural history museums. It is not surprising that linguists who carried out fieldwork on non-western languages brought back artefacts made by Native peoples that ended up in such institutional collections. A case in point is the small but significant 1910-1911 collection of Blackfoot artefacts from the state of Montana aggregated by C.C. Uhlenbeck and his wife. Again, sharing Blackfoot culture and heritage, this time the other way around, was a driving force behind Uhlenbeck's decision about the future fate of this group of Indian artefacts.

The Uhlenbeck ethnographic collection

During the two periods of fieldwork among the Blackfeet, the Uhlenbecks acquired several gifts from their Indian friends on different occasions. These Blackfeet had been assisting the professor in his research, and the gift-giving signifies the value the Indians placed upon the relationship with their visitors, going beyond immediate economic interest. The Uhlenbecks cherished the gifts very much and kept these mementos until 1935 when they offered their small private collection of twelve Blackfoot artefacts to the National Museum of Ethnology ['Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde: RMV'] in Leiden. Of each specimen they provided some background information, notably an identification of the artefact, and from whom they had received it (RMV 1935). The collection was catalogued as series (RMV) 2294, and included three carved and painted wooden bowls, two pairs of beaded moccasins, a stone hammer, a paint bag, an asperger, and a belt. That the Uhlenbecks donated the artefacts with their accompanying documentation to the museum indicates that they were aware of their importance and value, as embodiments of Blackfoot culture and history. They too wished to share Blackfoot culture and history, this time with a wider Dutch public.

On several occasions during their stay among the Blackfoot, the Uhlenbecks wanted to acquire souvenirs. In her diary Mrs. Uhlenbeck writes on June 25, 1910: "On a high hill is a very large Indian graveyard. I count 13 large and small coffins. Most are closed or completely empty. Four coffins have lost their lids completely or partially, and the skeletons are visible to

some extent. The face is uncovered. Some fingers still have rings, one arm still a bracelet. Bodies are wrapped in blankets and animals skins. All kinds of household items lie around: pans, spoons, combs, etc. Some of the bodies still wear a necklace of beads and a leather belt studded with copper tacks lies beside them. We don't take anything with us. Not one ornament, not one little bone, completely bleached by rain and sun. And yet we so much want a souvenir of this morning. A skull lies unattached in a coffin, also completely bleached, but although we want to we do not dare to take anything with us. These graves have been terribly vandalized. Some coffins are partly plundered, either by human hands or by cattle searching for food ..." An entry on September 10, 1911 reads: "... we find a few Indian graves, partly destroyed, partly intact. Finding a few strings of beads, a few bracelets beside a grave, I pick these up and take them to Holland with me" (Uhlenbeck-Melchior 1911; Eggermont-Molenaar 2005:66, 170). Clearly, the Uhlenbecks were not prevented from collecting from Indian grave-yards by religious sentiments or a humanistic respect for the dead, but by the presence and possible reaction of their hosts to taking skeletal parts or artefacts from graves if they were to be observed, showing the same attitude as so many other collectors during fieldwork in the decades around 1900.²

The first specimens of the Uhlenbeck collection are three wooden bowls:

- **2294-1** Round wooden dipper, drinking or serving bowl with handle, and painted pictographic designs; wood, oil paint, ink, crayon; l. 34,5 cm., incl. handle, w. 13 cm., h. 10.8 cm.; 1910-1911;
- **2294-2** Rectangular/oblong wooden bowl with handle, and painted designs; wood, oil paint; l. 35 cm., incl. handle, w. 15 cm., h. 11.5 cm.; 1910-1911;
- **2294-3** Wooden bowl with painted designs; wood, crayon, l. 30 cm., h. 10 cm.; 1910-1911.

The bowls were carved and painted during Uhlenbeck's fieldwork by Bear Chief (*Nínoxkyàio*, alt. *Nínauxkyàsio*; RMV 1935), born in 1857 and formerly a prominent war leader. The headman believed to be protected from enemies by a magical shirt, decorated with perforated designs and painted red crosses, obtained from Big Plume when the latter was too old to go on the warpath. Bear Chief was among Blackfoot leaders visiting Washington D.C. and Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1892 to negotiate land rights and consider the relevance of the prominent Indian boarding school to Blackfoot children. Four years later he demonstrated traditional Blackfoot life and pictographic painting during an exhibition at Madison Square Garden in New York City, an event organized by the Sportsmen's Association, while the travel costs were sponsored by Forest and Stream Magazine. In 1903 he was again in the capital to independently brief authorities on reservation conditions (Ewers 1958:192-193; Farr 1984:37, 64-65; Dempsey 2007:92-94,220). Bear Chief and his (second) wife Elk-Yells-In-The-Water bestowed kinship ties on the Uhlenbecks, denoting the professor as their brother, and Willie as their sister-in-law, a sign of great respect. Mrs. Bear Chief was later a principal informant of

John C. Ewers (1958:ix).



Bear Chief; 1910. Photo J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

The Uhlenbecks obtained the bowls during a visit on June 10, 1911, to the log cabin of Bear Chief. Mrs. Uhlenbeck described the occasion of the gift as follows: "Bear Chief gets up, goes to the wall and takes out a little grimy looking bag. It is carefully tied together. He pulls off the little cord and takes out three wooden artefacts, which he brings me with great satisfaction. ... It is a big wooden drinking bowl with a stem cut out of wood and also an even bigger bowl for soup and a shell-shaped bowl for bread, also hollowed out of wood. All pieces have colourful drawings: of Indians, scalps, tipis, guns, etc. ... I leave my presents in his cabin until our suitcases arrive" (Uhlenbeck-Melchior 1911; Eggermont-Molenaar 2005:38-39).

The Blackfoot used to make wooden bowls for serving food from burls they found on trees, preferably ash or cottonwood. After the burl was cut out, the outside of the bowl was trimmed and fashioned into the desired shape. Subsequently, the interior was chiseled out, and its surface hardened and smoothed by rolling red hot stones inside it. Metal tools soon replaced stone tools for such difficult tasks. Sometimes these containers were stained with mineral pigment. The finishing touch consisted of application of a layer of buffalo grease that was polished with a piece of hide. It was women rather than men who made these bowls. As their manufacture required much effort and time, they were soon displaced when western tin, enamel and porcelain wares became available through white traders. Clark Wissler, who carried out fieldwork among the Montana Blackfeet in the early years of the

twentieth century, was unable to collect any original wooden bowls. Only in ceremonials, especially those centering on the medicine pipe bundle, did the use of wooden bowls continue to a limited extent, although in this sphere machine-turned wooden bowls obtained in trade replaced the Native-made specimens over time. Blackfoot ceremonial bowls tended to be largely undecorated with sculpture, as the manufacture of wooden effigy bowls was restricted to the Siouan-speaking groups and the Pawnees (Wissler 1910:28; Ewers 1945:58-59; 1986:169-170; Walton 1985:185,187).³

The painted designs on bowl 2294-1 include seven human figures, five guns, a cross, a shield, six scalps or human heads with long hair. The designs are applied with black oil paint, black ink, and red, blue, and yellow crayon. The outer sides of bowl 2294-2 exhibit painted designs of 21 tipis. On both sides of where the handle is connected to the bowl, a design possibly indicating a shield with scalps hanging from it is painted. The tipis around the sides probably represent a camp circle. The scenes painted on the flaring sides of bowl 2294-3 depict an encampment consisting of three tipis, a number of Indian men and women in a row, and what appears to be a battle scene, involving two mounted warriors and two white people.



Wooden dipper or bowl. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-1)



Wooden bowl. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-2)

The Blackfeet were frequently at war with their neighbours: Flatheads and Crows to the south, Assiniboines, Crees, and Sioux to the west. Indian men painted pictographic records of their war exploits on skin robes and lodge linings, later on canvas and muslin supplied by Indian traders. Blackfoot pictography is simple in style, more informative than aesthetically pleasing, as John C. Ewers has pointedly remarked. The narrative structure usually remains oblique, as the figures are often spread across the surface without apparent narrative design, resulting in “pictorial shorthand”. However, singular motifs, as well as groups of single designs, readily convey messages that were understood by tribal members, as well as nearby tribes. Severed heads, horses, and weapons usually stood for scalps, animals and arms taken from enemies. Some such paintings contain pictographic signatures of their maker (Ewers 1945:20-24; 1983; Walton 1985:222-230). The Blackfeet refer to pictographs and writing by the same term: *sinàksin*, meaning ‘made marks’ (Uhlenbeck 1930:66,255).

It is tempting to interpret the pictographic paintings on Bear Chief’s bowls by trying to relate these to known events in his life, some of which were recorded by Uhlenbeck when he wrote down memories of war exploits. In addition to these bowls, Bear Chief’s tipi, covered with picture writing, was acquired by Clark Wissler in 1903 and is preserved at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH cat.nr. 50/4485). Unfortunately, the notes on the iconography the anthropologist took at the time are lost, although parts have been published (Brownstone 2005; Dempsey 2007:214-223). Blackfoot iconography is an

idiosyncratic form of history and therefore only partially understood by all tribal members, as Ewers (1983:56) has pointed out. Themes such as numbers of enemies and kinds of war trophies are commonly identified by most, but the identity of neither the pictographer nor his enemies is revealed in most paintings. Sometimes peculiarities of dress or hairstyle do reveal this information. A cautious approach to the interpretation of the pictographic paintings on Bear Chief's bowl should therefore be employed.



Wooden bowl. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-3)

The seven men depicted on the first bowl (RMV 2294-1) are clearly warriors, wearing scalp-lock war shirts. The guns indicate war trophies, and these are a common part of war record paintings, as are traditional Indian weapons (bows, clubs), shields, feathered lances, and horses. The seven men could either be members of Bear Chief's war party, or a group of enemies he confronted in a battle. The guns are probably war booty. Except in one case, the six human heads are only depicted by long hair, indicating scalps. The facial features of one may indicate a head trophy, or was meant to facilitate the interpretation of the story on the bowl. This group of figures might be related to episodes in his life-story which Bear Chief told to Uhlenbeck, more particularly his and his brother Weasel Moccasin's (*A'paitzikina*) exploits against the Crees, Gros Ventres, and Sioux (Uhlenbeck and Tatsey 1911:70-90). The circular figure in the triangular frame could represent the buffalo hide shield that provided Bear Chief with factual and super-natural protection during his daring exploits. The frame either

indicates the tripod on which powerful shields were displayed, or a hide shield case or cover (Wissler 1910:162-163). The black cross is placed next to the shield. Because of its shape and yellow outlines it probably refers to interest in Christianity by Bear Chief who attended church services at the Holy Childhood Mission, but was not a convert. He thus placed two strong spiritual symbols of his Native beliefs and western religion side by side.

This is as far we want to take the preliminary interpretation of the pictographs on the Bear Chief bowls for the present time. When Clark Wissler (1911:38) discussed the pictographic painting on Bear Chief's tipi cover, he remarked that "a great deal is left for the memory, though a little practice will enable one to determine the character of the exploit suggesting each drawing". L. James Dempsey, of Blackfoot descent and an associate professor of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, concludes his study of Blackfoot war pictography as follows: "While the images selected by the warrior artists were based on well-known symbols used by the tribe, only those involved in creating the biographic robe or those who had been told the story knew the specific incident behind each representation. The figures or symbols themselves can be recognized for what they are but not for what they mean in a specific narrative sense. While viewing such a record, one might interpret broadly the kind of events depicted, but there is no way of knowing the full story behind the figures. Those who could interpret the events could do so not because they could understand what was 'written,' as with a book, but rather because they had been present when the exploits were explained at a ceremony or other event. It is for this reason that stories behind many pictographs are cloaked in mystery" (2007:404). For two forthcoming publications on Dutch museum collections from Native North America the possibilities to take the analysis of the iconography on these specimens one step further will be explored by Pieter Hovens and Caroline van Santen (in prep.), and Mary Eggermont-Molenaar (in: Hovens, in prep. a).

- **2294-4** Paint bag (*skinétsimani asani*; Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930); hide, pigment, cotton string; h. 6 cm., w. 3.5 cm.; can 1910-1911.

This small paint bag, containing red ochre pigment, was given by the elder Eagle Calf (*Pítàunista*) to Mrs. Uhlenbeck for painting the professor's face during the sea voyage to Europe (RMV 1935), presumably to ward off sickness. After the Uhlenbecks returned to The Netherlands, Eagle Calf, whose English name was John Ground, undertook a journey with a group of ten Blackfeet to the eastern U.S. He was later hired by the Great Northern Railway to greet tourists at the railway depot on their way to see Glacier National Park, and sold picture postcards of his portrait in traditional attire, adding his pictographic signature for an extra fee. Artist Langdon Kihn painted his portrait.



Paint bag. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-4)

Body painting with vegetal and mineral pigments was a common practice among Blackfoot men and women, both for aesthetic purposes as well as protection against the sun, wind, and cold. Various clays produced different colours: white, green, brown, yellow, blue, and black. Some were found in Blackfoot territory, others obtained in intertribal trade. The yellowish gray clay was called *isaani* 'paint before baking'. When heated by fire it turned into red pigment and was called *niyitsisaan*, variously translated as 'real paint', 'burned yellow earth' or 'many-times-baked-paint'. The pigment was applied directly on the skin, or first mixed with tallow or glue boiled from beaver tails in a clam shell. Women used to paint the part of their hair with red pigment. Sometimes these pigments were used to paint skin clothing, tipi covers, bags, and drums, using pointed bone sticks. The pigments were kept in special skin pouches. The larger type of paint bags resembled tobacco bags in form, but was smaller. Those used in daily life had beaded and fringed decorations, but those meant for ceremonial body painting usually were plain (Wissler 1910:72-73, 133-135; Ewers 1945:14-15).

- **2294-5** Buffalo stone (*einískim*, Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930:38; RMV 1935; *i.nísskimmí*); stone, paint; l. 3 cm., w. 3 cm., h. 2,5 cm.; ca. 1850-1880.



Buffalo stone. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-5)

Oddly shaped stones, including fossils of ammonites, were often picked up by Indians, and when they inspired positive thoughts and emotions were regarded as inhabited by supernatural powers. In such cases these stones were treated as spiritual objects. They were painted, fed, and kept reverently in a bundle or bag. Their powers were addressed by prayer

when needed, such as before a man went on a hunt or the war path, or when a woman was about to give birth. Sometimes shamans used such magic stones to lure buffalo before a communal hunt was staged, the latter use mentioned in Uhlenbeck's letter to the Leiden museum (RMV 1935; Hungry Wolf 1977:169-171; Sriver 1990:178-179; Dempsey 2001:606-607). The buffalo stone from the Uhlenbeck collection shows remains of red paint.

- **2294-6** Asperger; wood, buffalo hair, hide, sinew, glass beads; l. 51 cm.; ca. 1890-1910.



Asperger. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-6)

Aspergers were used in Native North America in a variety of ceremonies. This specimen was part of the Plains sweat lodge ritual (*tsískani*, *tsiskáni*, or *ixtsískàni*). This took place in a dome-shaped circular hut, covered with buffalo hides, evocative of the shape of the sun and overarching sky, and was regarded as a sacred space. Stones, the oldest living beings on earth according to Blackfoot traditions, were heated, taken inside and wetted with the asperger, creating clouds of steam. Thus the participants purified themselves physically as well as spiritually, communicating with the supernatural protective powers through the rising steam. This was often done in preparation for other ceremonies. Depending on the latter, the sweat lodge ritual was adapted to appropriate religious requirements (Ewers 1955:223-224; Harrod 1987:128-131; Sriver 1990:197; Dempsey 2001:613). The Leiden asperger is made from buffalo hair, attached to a wooden stick, wrapped in hide, and beaded in red, yellow, and blue. Often horsehair was used in the manufacture of this type of ceremonial paraphernalia

(Ewers 1955:223-224).

- **2294-7** Hammer (*páksàtsis*, Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930:213); stone, hide, sinew; l. 32 cm.; 1860-1880.



Hammer. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-7)

This hide-covered stone hammer was obtained by Mrs. Uhlenbeck on Sunday, August 20, 1911, when they visited the Duck Head family to take a look at the gambling wheel the old man had in his possession which had formerly belonged to Chief Gambler. After their visit, one of Duck Head's two wives gave the hammer as a present, explaining that this was an old type used in earlier days to make pemmican. Pemmican was made from dried buffalo meat, bone marrow, and dried cherries or berries that were pounded with such hammers. The resultant mush was formed into cakes that could be stored for a long time in parflèches, square or rectangular rawhide envelope-type containers. Pemmican thus was a much needed source of fat and vitamins during wintertime to ameliorate dietary stress. Pemmican hammers or mauls consisted of a stone head with a wooden shaft, and were always tightly covered with animal hide, a process facilitated by applying the skin when wet and soft. When it dried it drew tightly around the head and shaft. Wet intestines were often used as additional binding material. Similar hammers were used for crushing bones to extract marrow. According to Joseph Tatsey such hammers were also used to kill buffalo calves

(Wissler 1910:21-22; Uhlenbeck-Melchior 1911; RMV 1935; Eggermont-Molenaar 2005:152; also see: 2294-10).

- **2294-8** Beaded belt (*ipsàtsis*, Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930:26); harness leather, glass beads, brass tacks; l. 85 cm., w. 4 cm.; ca. 1910.



Beaded belt. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-8)

This woman's belt was obtained by Mrs. Uhlenbeck from Walter Mountain Chief (a.k.a. Black Horse Rider, *Síkimiàxkitopi*; RMV 1935; cf. De Josselin de Jong 1914:120), the son of (Frank) Mountain Chief (a.k.a. Big Brave). Earlier she had given him a piece of red and white embroidery she had probably made herself to decorate his hat. In return she received a short beaded belt that she put around her straw hat. Later she got this larger one from Walter Mountain Chief, after he had worn it during the Sundance ceremony (Uhlenbeck-Melchior 1911; Eggermont-Molenaar 2005:58-59, 405).

Men and women traditionally wore rawhide belts to which they attached a variety of beaded cases containing knives, sewing and fire-lighting materials, pigments, etc. However, those of women were most often decorated with colourful beadwork, metal tacks, and hide pendants. Soon harness leather belts of western manufacture were adopted and decorated with beadwork in overlay (also called spot) stitch, and brass tacks (Wissler 1910:127-128; 1945:36; Walton et. al. 1985:76, 155, 166-169; Sriver 1990:78-79).

The Leiden specimen is made from commercial harness leather. Its extremities and the central panel are decoratively studded with brass tacks. Over its whole length the belt has a beaded rim, executed in white glass beads. Various beaded panels with geometric designs are applied, sewn to the belt in an overlay (also called spot) stitch. The diamond-shaped design with white center results from the triangular stepped "mountain" design, executed

twice, base to base, as a mirror-image (Ewers 1945:36-38). The metal buckle, obtained from white traders, is missing.

- **2294-9** Candleholder; bone; w. 23 cm.; 1900-1910.



Candleholder. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-9)

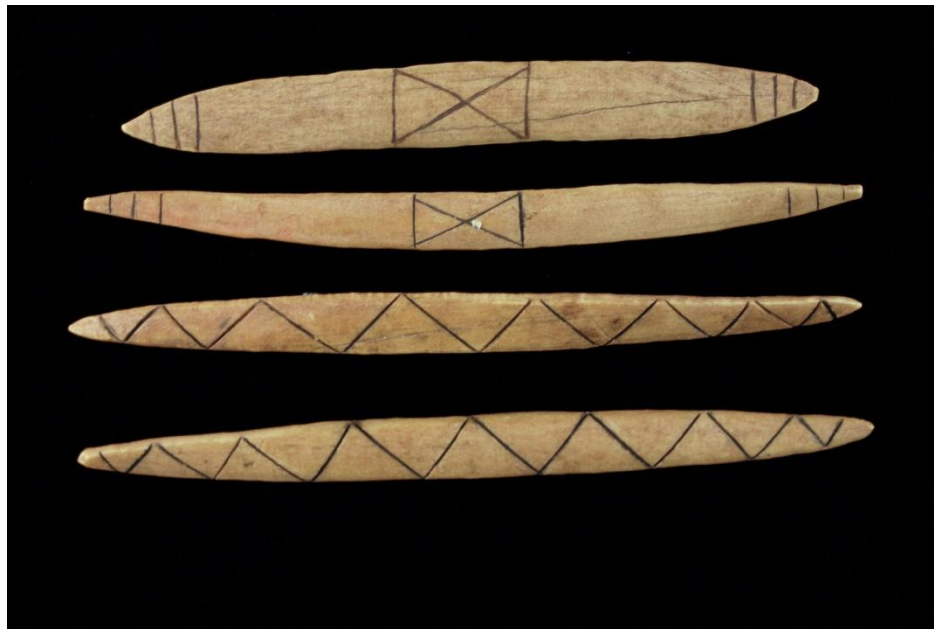
According to information supplied by Uhlenbeck (RMV 1935), this vertebrae of a buffalo was used as a candleholder by Adam White Man, who presented it to Mrs. Uhlenbeck as a gift. Adam White Man was among the informants of John C. Ewers when he did fieldwork for his ethnohistorical monograph on the Blackfeet (1958:ix).

- **2294-10** Set of four gambling sticks for playing *onesteh*; bone, pigment; l. 18.5 to 21.5 cm.; 1870-1900.

This set was a gift to Willie from the other wife of Duck Head (see 2294-7). The way the game was played was then demonstrated to her (Uhlenbeck-Melchior 1911; RMV 1935; Eggermont-Molenaar 2005:151-152).

As a pastime the Blackfoot liked gambling, and a number of competitive games

were played, including “*onesteh*,” played by women. According to naturalist and avocational ethnographer George Bird Grinnell, they used four stick dice, manufactured from flat pieces of buffalo rib, tapering at the ends. Each had a different pattern of grooves on one side, painted in one or more colours. Two single women or two groups of women could play against each other by throwing the stick dice and counting and adding up the result, the totals being recorded using a pile of wooden sticks (Culin 1907:56-58).



Gambling sticks. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-10)

- **2294-11 and 12** Two pairs of beaded moccasins (*matsikists*, Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930:137-138); the first pair was unfortunately lost; hide, glass beads, sinew; l. 23 cm.; ca. 1900-1910.

Many Algonquian and Athapascan-speaking peoples in Canada made moccasins in a pattern requiring a U-shaped insert as a vamp, to gather the edges of the upper. It is often decorated (Cree, Saulteaux, Montagnais, Naskapi, Déné, Thompson, Shuswap), sometimes after being covered with a piece of red or blue cloth (Cree and Montagnais around Hudson Bay). Although the one-piece pattern of the old-style Blackfoot moccasin does not require such an insert, a U-shaped design element executed in beadwork is found on many, often applied on a piece of coloured trade cloth. Clark Wissler therefore concluded that the Blackfoot copied the design from their neighbours. He further concluded that the

tribe formerly made moccasins in the pattern requiring the U-shaped insert, but in the course of time adopted different patterns, including the hard-soled variety, in which this element had no structural function, but retaining it as a valued decorative element. One Blackfoot informant interpreted the U-shape, with or without outward radiating lines, as representation of the aurora, but Wissler points out that he regards this as an individual rather than generally shared view (1916:105-107, 113). Moreover, Ewers (1945:54) emphasized that Blackfoot names for their beaded designs are descriptive rather than symbolic.



Beaded moccasins. Courtesy National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (2294-12)

The Blackfoot called the soft-soles variety of their footwear 'real moccasins'. By the mid-nineteenth century hard soles, often cut from worn and damaged parflèches, became increasingly common. Coloured trade cloth often covers the cuff around the ankles, while in earlier times important men had a strip of weasel fur attached as a pendant to the heel. In contrast to other northern Plains tribes, the front of Blackfoot moccasins is rarely fully covered in beadwork. Instead, separate geometric and naturalistic motifs are the accep-

ted style. From the 1870s bilaterally symmetrical floral designs, executed in seed beads, such as on the remaining Leiden pair, were typical (Ewers 1945:38-42; Walton et.al. 1985:80, 89-99; Sriver 1990:39-43, 74-75). The two pairs of moccasins were a gift to the Uhlenbecks from Walter Mountain Chief (RMV 1935).

Conclusion

The above is the result of a preliminary description and analysis of the collection of Blackfoot artefacts which the Uhlenbecks donated to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden to be preserved there for posterity. Further analysis will be undertaken, especially regarding the carved and decorated wooden pictographic bowls. However, several conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary study. The Blackfoot were proud of their cultural heritage, and ready to share it with outsiders who displayed a genuine interest in their way of life. Through their generous cooperation, they enabled a Dutch professor to record their language and traditions for posterity, a legacy which is still a valued resource today for a new generation.

The small ethnographic Uhlenbeck collection exemplifies a seminal transitional period in Blackfoot cultural history, marking the end of the buffalo hunting era and the gradual encroachment of the global economy onto their territory by tourism, agribusiness and energy extracting corporations (e.g. McFee 1972; Bryan 1985:56-71). The Uhlenbecks were keenly aware of the cultural and historical importance of their small collection of Blackfoot artefacts, and therefore donated it to the museum for preservation for future generations, to share Blackfoot culture and heritage with a wider public.⁴

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NOTES

¹ It could not be ascertained whether Uhlenbeck or De Josselin de Jong sent copies of their publications to their Blackfoot informants and interpreters in Montana (pers. comm. Mary Eggermont-Molenaar, August 30, 2007).

² Eggermont-Molenaar (2005:23) argues that the Uhlenbecks adopted an inherently ethical attitude towards collecting in the field, but the diaries of Mrs. Uhlenbeck suggest otherwise.

³ Unfortunately John C. Ewers does not discuss painted wooden bowls in his monograph on Plains Indian Sculpture (1986).

⁴ Gerald T. Conaty of the Glenbow Museum made available a copy of the diaries Willie Uhlenbeck-Melchior kept in 1911 during her stay on the Blackfoot Indian reservation in Montana. Ted Brasser's comments on an earlier draft of this article are greatly appreciated. The Collections Department of the Leiden museum, notably Sijbrand de Rooij, Dorus Kop Jansen, and Monique Koek assisted in archival searches and the photography of artefacts. The photography was carried out by Ben Grishaaver of the audio-visual department of Leiden University.