

# Copper Inuit

also known as "Copper Eskimo"

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

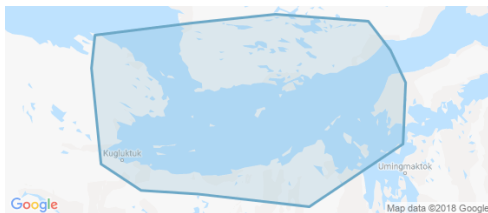
Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Circumpolar Religions, Inuit religion, Native American (North American) Religions, Religion

This entry focuses on the Copper Inuit around the time of 1915, which is prior to extensive contact with outsiders. "The people of the Canadian Arctic most often referred to as Copper Inuit had no name for themselves as a total group, but rather referred only to local groups" (Damas, 1996). The Copper Inuit, at the time this entry focuses on, were nomadic and inhabited the coastal regions of the Coronation Gulf, ranging from Victoria Island in the north and the opposite shores in the south, to the Kent Peninsula in the east and Staphylton Bay in the west. The Copper Inuit did not have official political leadership; power was fluid among these nomadic people. Their religious beliefs centered around non-human and human spirits, as well as strongly held taboos related to the separation of land and sea. Shamans were mediators between the living and supernatural, and their powers were due to control over spirits. Shamans had limited secular influence. Because the religious beliefs were tied up with many aspects and functions of the society, this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society at large.



Date Range: 1890 CE - 1915 CE

Region: Coronation Gulf Region of Nunavut, Canada

Region tags: North America, Arctic and Subarctic, Canada

Mainland division of the Coronation Gulf Region of Nunavut, Canada, circa 1915. At this time, the territory of Nunavut was not yet created, and the land was a part of the Northwest Territories. "The so-called Central or Copper Eskimos live in part on the northern fringe of the mainland coast of North America in the Coronation Gulf region and in part on the great land mass known as Victoria Island, which lies directly north. The region over which they migrate extends from Staphylton Bay on the west to and beyond Kent Peninsula on the east" (Jenness, 1917:81).

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

— Source 1: Murdock, G.P. & Wilson, S.F. (Jul., 1972). Settlement patterns and community organization:

Cross-Cultural Codes 3. *Ethnology*, 11(3), 254-295.

- Source 2: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.
- Source 3: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.

#### Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nd08-013>
  - Source 1 Description: Jenness, D. (1917). *Copper Eskimos*. Geographical Review. New York, N.Y.: The American Geographical Society.
  - Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nd08-001>
  - Source 2 Description: Jenness, D. (1922). *Life Of The Copper Eskimos*. Report Of The Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1918. Ottawa, Ont.: F.A. Acland.
  - Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nd08-003>
  - Source 3 Description: Rasmussen, K. (1932). *Intellectual Culture Of The Copper Eskimos*. Report Of The Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-1924. Copenhagen, Denmark: [s.n.].
- Notes: Jenness, D. (1922). *Life Of The Copper Eskimos*; referred to as Jenness, 1922a throughout this entry

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "First European contact came when Hearne reached the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771. Contacts with explorers during the nineteenth century were so limited that when the ethnologist Stefansson entered the area in 1910 he encountered natives who had not previously seen White men. This may have been the last such encounter in North America. During the first quarter of the twentieth century trading schooners and some Western Inuits entered the area from the west" (Damas, 1996).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that "internal warfare seems to be absent or rare" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that "external warfare seems to be absent or rare" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale,

2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

— No

Notes: Because the religious sphere of life is coterminous with the society as a whole, there is not a conception of assigning religious affiliation. Additionally, there is no ethnographic evidence that the Copper Inuit would assign religious affiliation.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

— No

Notes: Because the religious sphere of life is coterminous with the society as a whole, there is not a conception of recruiting new members. There is no ethnographic evidence that the Copper Inuit actively proselytize.

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

— No

Notes: "The Copper Inuit cannot be said to have had anything that could be properly labelled political organization or government. There were no chiefs. Shaman were believed to have supernatural powers but their secular influence was limited. Certain men were respected for their judgement or helped to organize hunts but such status did not extend automatically beyond the immediate situation" (Damas, 1996). Although the religious group and the society are coterminous, there is not an official political sphere of activity among the Copper Inuit. As such, it cannot be said that the religion has official political support.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

— No

Notes: Because the religious sphere of life is coterminous with the society as a whole, there is not a conception of apostasy.

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

— Estimated population, numeric: 816

Notes: "This gives a grand total of about 816 Copper Eskimos, which corresponds well with Jenness' computation of between seven and eight hundred; it needs no saying that it will always be most difficult to indicate the exact numbers of Eskimo groups living such a nomadic life as they do" (Rasmussen, 1932:69-71).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

— No

Notes: Shamans are present among the Copper Inuit, and act as mediators between the human world and the supernatural world. Shamans receive their power by gaining control over spirits (typically spirits of animals or deceased humans). "In addition to the main functions of controlling weather, bringing game and healing, the shaman had to perform certain feats from time to time such as those involving ventriloquism, in order to prove his powers" (Damas, 1996). However the secular influence of shamans was not considerable, and they did not act as chiefly figures. In fact, no chiefs or headmen were officially present among the Copper Eskimo; power was fluid.

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of scriptures among the Copper Inuit.

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

— No

Notes: "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (Murdock and Wilson, 1972, column 6; note, identical to SCCS Variable 66).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

— No

Notes: "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (Murdock and Wilson, 1972, column 6; note, identical to SCCS Variable 66).

# Beliefs

## Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

— Yes

Notes: "The soul is the mainspring of a man's vital strength. A dead man, or more accurately his shade, tarrak, may steal the soul of a living man, who will then pine away and die" (Jenness, 1922a:172). "The soul, nappan, apparently ceases to exist altogether [after death], but the shade, tarrak, is believed to linger for a time round the place where the body was laid" (Jenness, 1922a:177).

#### Belief in afterlife:

##### – Yes

Notes: "Although there is a universal belief among these natives in an existence after death, their conception of that existence is very vague and indefinite" (Jenness, 1922a:177).



Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

##### – No

Notes: "Direct questions as to the fate of the individual after death invariably received the answer nauna 'I don't know'" (Jenness, 1922a:177).

#### Reincarnation in this world:

##### – No

Notes: "Despite the inheritance of the names I could find no trace of any belief in the reincarnation of the souls of dead ancestors or relatives..." (Jenness, 1922a:168).

#### Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

##### – Yes

Notes: "While Copper Inuit beliefs concerning the afterworld were vague, there was a definite belief in and fear of ghosts of the recently deceased and places of death were quickly abandoned. In winter, a corpse might be left in a snowhouse or snowblock enclosure and in summer within a tent which was also abandoned" (Damas, 1996).



Cremation:

##### – No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cremation.



Mummification:

##### – No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.



Cannibalism:

##### – No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.



Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for exposing corpses to the elements.



Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for feeding corpses to animals.



Other intensive (in terms of time or resources expended) treatment of corpse :

– Yes [specify]: Abandonment

Notes: "While Copper Inuit beliefs concerning the afterworld were vague, there was a definite belief in and fear of ghosts of the recently deceased and places of death were quickly abandoned. In winter, a corpse might be left in a snowhouse or snowblock enclosure and in summer within a tent which was also abandoned" (Damas, 1996). For more detailed information, see Rasmussen, 1932 pages 44-46.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of co-sacrifices left with the body in the snowhouse/tent.

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "Some or all of the dead man's implements are broken and laid on the ground beside him for his use in the future life" (Jenness, 1922a:174).



Personal effects:

– Yes

Notes: "Some or all of the dead man's implements are broken and laid on the ground beside him for his use in the future life" (Jenness, 1922a:174).



Valuable items:

– No

Notes: "Often the relatives of a dead man will retain his more valuable property and place only miniature copies on his grave. This is done more particularly with the waterboots, but sometimes too with the bow and arrows. The dead man is able to enlarge the miniatures if he wants them, so there is no necessity to leave the genuine articles" (Jenness, 1922a:176).

Are formal burials present:

– No

Notes: Bodies are not buried in the earth as it remains frozen for the majority of the year. Instead,

bodies are left in a tent or snow-house, which is abandoned. For more information, see Jenness, 1922a:174.

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

— Yes

Notes: Shades of the dead, spirits of animals, as well as non-human supernatural beings are present among the Copper Inuit. For more information, see questions below.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Note, identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34), Religion: high gods, indicates that "a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

— Yes

Notes: "The natives say that the shades of the dead, inyuin tarrait , often become spirits, tornrait , and in fact malignant shades that work the Eskimos harm are often called by this name" (Jenness, 1922a:186).

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish:

— Yes

Notes: "It behoves the Eskimo therefore to be very careful in all his actions. Not only must he propitiate the shades of the Eskimo dead, lest they should become offended and strive to slay him and to convert him into a tornrak like themselves; but he must never forget to propitiate also the animals he kills" (Jenness, 1922a:181).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

— Yes

Notes: "The supernatural agencies with which the Copper Eskimo has to reckon are not confined to the shades of men and animals, tarrait . Over and above these are the tornrait, spirits that never had a normal life like human beings, though they are semihuman in their form" (Jenness, 1922a:186).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "The greatest of all the spirits, tornrait, is Kannakapfaluk, who lives in a snow hut just like the Eskimos, with a lamp and sleeping-platform and all the usual household paraphernalia...There is a dwarf who lives with her, a man about three feet high whom the Eskimos call Unga because of the cry he utters when the shamans drag him up to the surface. If the Eskimo women sew too much on the ice, or break any of the taboos in reference to either sewing or cooking, Unga gathers all the seals inside the hut, and the Eskimos in consequence have no success in their sealing" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "Kannakapfaluk has other powers besides this one of hoarding the seals. She can send bad weather in winter, and so keep the Eskimos indoors till they starve; or she can break up the ice and drown them" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for specific examples of supernatural monitoring.

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

Notes: "The greatest of all the spirits, tornrait, is Kannakapfaluk, who lives in a snow hut just like the Eskimos, with a lamp and sleeping-platform and all the usual household paraphernalia...There is a dwarf who lives with her, a man about three feet high whom the Eskimos call Unga because of the cry he utters when the shamans drag him up to the surface. If the Eskimo women sew too much on the ice, or break any of the taboos in reference to either sewing or cooking, Unga gathers all the seals inside the hut, and the Eskimos in consequence have no success in their sealing" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

↳ Food:

– Yes

Notes: "The two [taboos] that should never be violated are the prohibitions against



sewing new deerskin clothing on the ice during the weeks when the sun never rises, and cooking on the ice deer-meat that was obtained in the preceding summer and fall" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

— Yes [specify]: sewing new deerskin clothing on the ice during winter solstice

Notes: "Nigsillik, another spirit who lives in the sky; the Eskimos are very much afraid of him, for he carries a great hook, nigsik, which he stabs into his enemies. Like Kannakapfaluk, he too is wroth if the women sew new deerskin clothes during the dark days, and will break up the ice and drown the natives" (Jenness, 1922a:189).

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

— Yes [specify]: Propitiation of the shades of the dead

Notes: "It behoves the Eskimo therefore to be very careful in all his actions. Not only must he propitiate the shades of the Eskimo dead, lest they should become offended and strive to slay him and to convert him into a tornrak like themselves; but he must never forget to propitiate also the animals he kills" (Jenness, 1922a:181).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

— Yes

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

— Yes

Notes: See questions below for the specific agents of supernatural punishment.

↳ Done only by high god:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Note, identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34), Religion: high gods, indicates that "a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

— Yes

Notes: Done by the shades of the dead, as seen in Jenness, 1922a:181, as well as the spirit Unga, as seen in Jenness, 1922a:188.

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

— Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

— Yes

Notes: "It behoves the Eskimo therefore to be very careful in all his actions. Not only must he propitiate the shades of the Eskimo dead, lest they should become offended and strive to slay him and to convert him into a tornrak like themselves; but he must never forget to propitiate also the animals he kills" (Jenness, 1922a:181).

↳ Other [specify]

— Yes

Notes: Breaking taboos. "The greatest of all the spirits, tornrait, is Kannakapfaluk, who lives in a snow hut just like the Eskimos, with a lamp and sleeping-platform and all the usual household paraphernalia...There is a dwarf who lives with her, a man about three feet high whom the Eskimos call Unga because of the cry he utters when the shamans drag him up to the surface. If the Eskimo women sew too much on the ice, or break any of the taboos in reference to either sewing or cooking, Unga gathers all the seals inside the hut, and the Eskimos in consequence have no success in their sealing" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

— Yes

Notes: "The greatest of all the spirits, tornrait, is Kannakapfaluk, who lives in a snow hut just like the Eskimos, with a lamp and sleeping-platform and all the usual household paraphernalia...There is a dwarf who lives with her, a man about three feet high whom the Eskimos call Unga because of the cry he utters when the shamans drag him up to the surface. If the Eskimo women sew too much on the ice, or break any of the taboos in reference to either sewing or cooking, Unga gathers all the seals inside the hut, and the Eskimos in consequence have no success in their sealing" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

↳ Other [specify]

— Yes

Notes: "It behoves the Eskimo therefore to be very careful in all his actions. Not only must he propitiate the shades of the Eskimo dead, lest they should become offended and strive to slay him and to convert him into a tornrak like themselves; but he must never forget to propitiate also the animals he kills" (Jenness, 1922a:181).

— Yes

Notes: "The greatest of all the spirits, tornrait, is Kannakapfaluk, who lives in a snow hut just like the Eskimos, with a lamp and sleeping-platform and all the usual household paraphernalia...There is a dwarf who lives with her, a man about three feet high whom the Eskimos call Unga because of the cry he utters when the shamans drag him up to the surface. If the Eskimo women sew too much on the ice, or break any of the taboos in reference to either sewing or cooking, Unga gathers all the seals inside the hut, and the Eskimos in consequence have no success in their sealing" (Jenness, 1922a:188).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

— I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic examples of supernatural reward.

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of an eschatology.

## Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

— I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic examples.

# Practices

## Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

— No

Notes: "In the eyes of the Copper Eskimos, celibacy in either sex is a contemptible condition. A man is the natural complement of a woman, a woman of a man; neither is complete without the other" (Jenness, 1922a:158).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

— A band

Notes: "One of the most noticeable features in Eskimo society almost everywhere is the absence of chiefs, and the Copper Eskimos are no exception. A man acquires influence by his force of character, his energy and success in hunting, or his skill in magic. As long as these last him age but increases his influence, but when they fail his prestige and authority vanish" (Jenness, 1922a:93). Additionally, the Copper Inuit have no political authority beyond the local community, which is reflective of autonomous bands and villages (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

### Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of formal education among the Copper Inuit.

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

— No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of formal education among the Copper Inuit.

### Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock

and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

— No

Notes: It can be assumed that transportation infrastructure is not present, as routes of land transport are "unimproved trails", according to Murdock and Morrow (1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004; SCCS Variable 14).

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: It can be assumed that transportation infrastructure is not present, as routes of land transport are "unimproved trails", according to Murdock and Morrow (1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004; SCCS Variable 14).

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

— No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972) column 10, Police (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 90, Police) indicates that "police functions are not specialized or institutionalized at any level of political integration, the maintenance of law and order being left exclusively to informal mechanisms of social control, to private retaliation, or to sorcery."

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

— No

Notes: "In a society such as has just been outlined, without law-courts, judges or chiefs, without laws even save the time-honoured customs handed down from one generation to another, crime can be held in check only if the majority of the people of their own accord unite in punishing the wrongdoer" (Jenness, 1922a:94).

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

— No

Notes: Because justice and social control are not institutionalized (see previous questions), it follows that punishment is not institutionally forced.

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

— No

Notes: "The only law is custom, handed down from generation to generation; it alone upholds the structure of society, maintains the taboos, and regulates the relation of family and of man to man. Its sanction is religion, and violation of custom is punished, through spiritual powers, by sickness and death, or ill-success in hunting and fishing" (Jenness, 1917:86).

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: "The natives came into conflict with civilized law for the first time in 1916, when a patrol of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police arrested and deported the murderers of the two French missionaries" (Jenness, 1922a:96).

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

— Yes

Notes: The Copper Inuit rely on fishing and hunting for subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232. Seal and caribou are staples in the diet. (See Damas, 1996 for an overview on the Copper Inuit subsistence activities)



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

— Hunting (including marine animals)

— Fishing

Notes: The Copper Inuit rely on fishing and hunting for subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232. Seal and caribou are staples in the diet. (See Damas, 1996 for an overview on the Copper Inuit subsistence activities)