

News of the arts

Ancient Inuit carving evidence of early Viking visit

A small wood carving, apparently depicting a thirteenth century European, was discovered recently on the southern coast of Baffin Island by two Michigan State University archaeologists.

The object, which predates Columbus by two centuries, appears to have been carved by an ancestor of the Inuit of Arctic Canada. It is a human figure dressed in a long hooded gown or cassock, with an incised cross on the chest. Canadian and Danish experts have identified the clothing as consistent with that worn by Europeans, including those living in the Norse colonies of Greenland, during the thirteenth century; the Greenlandic colonies were christianized early in the eleventh century, after which time crosses may have been worn by the inhabitants.

Since it is unlikely that the Inuit of southern Baffin Island visited Greenland some 450 miles to the east, where they could have seen people dressed in this style, the figure, according to Michigan State University professor of archaeology, Dr. Moreau Maxwell, "provides concrete evidence of contact between European and Baffin Island at a very early date and introduces new horizons in the study of the effects and influences of Europeans upon the aboriginal culture of the Canadian Thule* Eskimos".

The carving was recovered from the floor of a Thule winter house by George and Deborah Sabo, graduate students at Michigan State University, working under a U.S. National Science Foundation grant.

At one site, called Okivilialuk, they found ten abandoned Thule houses, with stone slab floors, stone and sod walls, and roofs of whale ribs covered with sod. The houses apparently were used in fall and winter, and were devised in pit form, with gravel-bedded sleeping platforms and subterranean areas arranged against the winter weather.

Details on the Viking figure, shown by very thin incised lines which were probably cut with a quartz crystal, consist of the line of a yoke running between the shoulders at the front of the robe, two seams or decorations running vertically



This fine-grained wood carving, probably fir, measures just over two inches. It was discovered recently at an ancient Eskimo site on a peninsula in the Hudson Strait, south-east of Lake Harbour, Baffin Island, and suggests to archaeologists that Europeans may have penetrated the Canadian Arctic to a greater extent than had been previously believed.

from the yoke to the slit which begins at the hip, and similar seam lines bordering the slit from hip to ankle, and encircling the hem of the robe. On the chest, midway between the yoke and the top of the slit, is an incised cross. Two stump-like legs or feet project below the hem. One is eroded but the other is complete. There is no indication of footwear.

"Based on the date and style of the clothing," the Sabos reported, "we be-

lieve that this figurine is most likely the depiction of a Viking man as seen by a Thule carver."

The Thule figurine and other artifacts recovered are the property of the Government of the Northwest Territories and will be deposited with the National Museum of Man in Ottawa until suitable storage and display facilities are available in various parts of the Northwest Territories.

Films for the over-seven audience

A National Film Board documentary series that appeared on CBC-TV as a Christmas holiday special, earning public and critical acclaim, will be rebroadcast over the same network.

Each of the seven films in *Children of Canada* is about a child with a different background, who lives in a different region of Canada. The children's ages range from nine to 11.

The first film scheduled for telecast, *I'll Find a Way*, is about Nadia De Franco, a nine-year-old Toronto girl who shows that life on crutches isn't all grim.

Then in *Beautiful Lennard Island*, there is Steven Thomas Holland, aged "ten and one-twelfth", from British Columbia, who has lived his whole life at

isolated lighthouse stations where his father has been lightkeeper.

All the films seem to respond to the sense of curiosity possessed by children (and even some adults). "What's it like to wear a turban, to live on an Indian reserve, to be blind," explains Beverly Shaffer, who directed the series.

These documentaries are designed to "give kids a chance to meet other kids in a totally different living situation," says Beverly.

"When I was growing up in Montreal," she adds, explaining how the idea for the series began to take shape, "all my friends were white and *anglophone*. And I really had no idea how kids live in the east end of the city, let alone in the rest of the province or the country."

Beverly was very careful to gather opi-

*Thule is the term given by archaeologists to the prehistoric ancestors of modern Eskimos who call themselves Inuit.