

Resources of the Northland

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Commencing with this issue and continuing in three additional installments *The Quarterly* presents some authoritative material on Canada's North. The author's genuine interest in the North and knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, is the result of a great deal of study and several tours of northern duty.

I EARLY ESKIMO CULTURES

FROM somewhere out of the dark and uncertain past came a little group of proud and resourceful people whose descendants today live in the most barren and remote part of the world—the Canadian Arctic. They call themselves “Innuits”,¹ but we know them as the Eskimo.²

A great deal has been written about them, especially by the early explorers who came to the North American continent in search of the North-West Passage and wealth, but relatively little is known about the early history of these people. Eskimo archaeology is an almost new branch of science, confined largely to the past few years. Although the various museums have collected a great quantity of material, it is to a degree worthless because it was excavated in a disorderly manner, largely at the hands of untrained archaeologists, and also by Eskimos who found that they could trade artifacts for trinkets. However, the picture is beginning to form as trained men are going into the field. The Canadian government has taken a particular interest in protect-

ing all archaeological sites, and is encouraging students to enter this immensely interesting field.

Indications are that the Eskimo came from the shores of Siberia and across to Alaska, hence along the shores of the Canadian Arctic, and even to the coasts of distant Greenland. Much of this is theory, but it fits well into the picture of recent discoveries. The trek was a gradual migration from the west to the east, its rate governed by the discovery of areas rich in game, and the adaption of new techniques in living. The archaeological picture starts to form about 3000 B.C. with the establishment of the Bering Sea culture,³ so named because traces of it were first discovered in the excavations about the area of the Bering Sea. The cultural development of these people and their stages was higher than that attained by the following Dorset and Thule cultures. It is possible that they may have been favored by climate and an abundance of natural resources at the time. They may also have been influenced to an appreciable degree by the Indians of North-Eastern Asia. Of particular interest is the ornamentation of their weapons, tools and other objects. They took many pains to emboss the most intricate of designs on the ivory and bone materials. These designs consisted of a series of scrolls, wavy lines, and round eye-like objects which were particularly clearly defined on the ivory objects.

Successive stages of this culture show a degeneration from the time of its inception to its conclusion. This may be

¹ Innuits is the Eskimo word which they use to describe themselves. It means “the men”. It is interesting to note that many other primitive peoples also describe themselves thus, and look upon all other peoples in comparison to themselves.

² Eskimo is the Indian word meaning “eaters of raw flesh”.

³ Jenness, Diamond, Archaeological investigations in Bering Strait, 1926. (in: Canada. National Museum. Bulletin, no. 50. Annual report for 1926, pub. 1928. p. 71-80 3 plates.)