



Kenojuak, **The Enchanted Owl**. Stone cut, 24 x 26, 1960

When the Vikings discovered Greenland in the tenth century they did not see any Eskimos but they found signs of earlier inhabitants. The first contact between Europeans and Eskimos probably took place during the Vinland voyages in the first years of the eleventh century when the Vikings visited Labrador and possibly Baffin Island. They found and fought with a race whom they called Skraelings and who seem to have been Eskimos. The next heard about the Eskimos is in the fourteenth century when they moved south down the west coast of Greenland and met the Norse colonists. Some time after this the contact between Greenland and Europe was broken. When it was restored at the end of the sixteenth century, the Eskimos were in complete possession of Greenland. Mystery surrounds the fate of the Norse. They may have died out, they may have been killed by the Eskimos or by pirates, they may have been absorbed into the Eskimos, or they may have returned to Europe.

The question most frequently asked about the Eskimos is "Where did they come from?" This is easily answered because their physical type shows that they came from Asia and in fact there is really nowhere else that they could have come from. The question which follows from this is "Where did they learn to become Eskimos?" — in other words, where did they learn to hunt sea mammals and to build up this remarkable culture that enabled them to spread right across North America to Greenland? There have been two main schools of thought. One was that they were

a people who moved from inland North America down the rivers to the Arctic coast or Hudson Bay and there learnt to become Eskimos — in other words, that the Eskimo was a Canadian invention. Others believed that it was around Bering Strait, and probably on the Asian side, that the Eskimo culture evolved. There has been a long controversy, but the evidence seems to be very much in favour of a Bering Strait origin.

In the greater part of the Canadian Arctic, four main Eskimo cultures have been distinguished. The latest is the modern people, the Eskimos who are living there today. Eight or nine hundred years ago, a people, called by archaeologists the Thule people since they were first identified from excavations at Thule in Greenland, spread from Alaska over the Canadian north and into Greenland. They lived almost exclusively on sea mammals and dwelt in stone houses and they usually have been believed to have been a different people from the modern Eskimo, but it now seems probable that the modern Canadian Eskimos are the direct descendants of the Thule people.

The Thule people seem to have replaced an earlier people, called the Dorset people because they were first identified from specimens collected at Cape Dorset. Traces of the Dorset people have been found all over the Eastern Canadian Arctic and as far west as King William Island and well into Greenland. They were certainly completely different from the Thule people but little is known about them, and in particular it