

Abstract

THE ARNAPIK AND TYARA SITES: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF DORSET CULTURE ORIGINS

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THIS STUDY seeks to resolve long-standing questions on the nature and origins of the prehistoric Dorset culture which occupied the Canadian eastern Arctic and Greenland between approximately 800 B.C. and A.D. 1300. For that purpose the study presents an analysis of two archaeological sites. Arnapik and Tyara, found and tested during archaeological surveys which the author conducted for the National Museum of Canada in parts of Ungava and its fringing islands during the 1957–58–59 field seasons.

The Arnapik site, on the east coast of Mansel Island in the northeastern extremity of Hudson Bay, produced 1898 specimens of Pre-Dorset culture. The site and its artifact classes are described and, by comparative analyses, its age and cultural affinity to other Pre-Dorset sites are assessed. Further, a reconstruction of the culture of the site's inhabitants is attempted. The Arnapik site was probably occupied at seasonal intervals over a period of one or two centuries in the latter half of the second millennium B.C. by people with an Eskimo way of life.

The stratified Tyara site, on Sugluk Island on the south coast of Hudson Strait, yielded 763 Dorset culture specimens. Following descriptions of the site and its artifact classes, comparative analyses are used to estimate the site's age and its cultural relationship to other Dorset sites. The three culture layers of the site seem to span much of the first millennium B.C. Like Arnapik, Tyara occupants seem to have had an Eskimoan culture with the site being occupied by seasonally-nomadic bands, arctic-adapted, with a mixed economy including notably the

ability to harvest sea mammals. The Tyara site also yielded a human mandible morphologically assignable to the Eskimo physical type.

A sequence of comparisons of Arnapik and Tyara, Arnapik and Dorset, and Pre-Dorset and Dorset artifacts provides a strong argument for cultural continuity from the Pre-Dorset to the Dorset culture. Some 79% of Arnapik artifact classes incorporating 96.5% of the Arnapik artifacts are shown to be related to Dorset forms. Some forty of the sixty Tyara classes of stone material are suggested to have comparative value and they include 476 of the 642 Tyara artifacts. Twenty-five of those forty classes, comprising 83% of the 476 objects considered, show Pre-Dorset affinities.

Next, a reconstruction of the general nature and conditions of Pre-Dorset and Dorset cultures is offered to show that, not only did Dorset follow Pre-Dorset immediately in time, but also that the two shared a similar way of life in closely similar environments and in the same general geographic area.

Subsequent comparisons refer to data from Alaska, the Yukon Territory, the western and central Canadian Arctic, and Greenland. A provisional seriation of Greenlandic materials allows one to offer the hypothesis that there was cultural continuity, rather than a hiatus, between the Sarqaq and Dorset cultures of Disko Bay and that it was subject to influences from the Canadian Arctic.

The recently-revived hypothesis that Dorset culture developed as a result of migration or cultural diffusion from Archaic Indian cultures

of the northeastern forests is examined in detail. The migration proposal is rejected and the diffusion suggestion is construed as possibly applicable to only a few traits.

Each analytic stage of this study demanded a broader geographic framework eventually encompassing most of arctic America and much of the adjacent subarctic forest zone. Growing from site analyses to regional interpretations and then to inter-regional comparisons, the study develops, in turn, a preliminary, an intermediate and then a final conclusion. They are as follows:

a strong current of cultural continuity flowed from Arnapiik to Tyara despite the centuries between their occupations; there was a clear, basic cultural continuity from Pre-Dorset to Dorset culture in the Canadian eastern Arctic and, within this area, Dorset culture developed in situ; finally, the general nature and content of the early Dorset Eskimo culture stemmed predominantly from the Pre-Dorset culture and the arctic environment. Cultural influences from the forests were likely superficial if they occurred at all.