

A Preliminary Statement on Neo-Eskimo Occupations in Western Coronation Gulf, N.W.T.

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ABSTRACT. Excavations undertaken in 1980 in the western Coronation Gulf area, arctic Canada, are described. Work concentrated on the Clachan site (NaPi-2), a small Thule winter village. Stylistic analysis of the artifacts recovered suggests affiliation with Alaskan rather than Canadian Thule, despite a comparatively recent date for the site. Also briefly described are two "protohistoric" Copper Inuit sites.

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, nous décrivons les fouilles entreprises au courant de la saison 1980 dans la région ouest du Golfe du Couronnement en Arctique canadien. Les recherches visèrent en particulier le gisement Clachan (NaPi-2). Ce site est un petit village d'hiver thuléen. L'analyse stylistique des témoins façonnés nous suggère une affiliation culturelle avec l'Alaska plutôt qu'avec le thuléen de l'est (Thulé Canadien), et ce en dépit de la datation plutôt jeune pour le gisement. De plus, nous décrivons deux gisements "proto-historiques" des Inuit du Cuivré.

Traduit par Jean-Luc Pilon, University of Toronto.

INTRODUCTION

Following an exploratory survey in 1979 (Morrison, unpub.), the author in 1980 directed a small field party in the archaeological excavation of three Neo-Eskimo sites on western Coronation Gulf, in the western central Canadian Arctic (Fig. 1). The original goals of the 1980 field season had been test excavations of three Thule sites: Clachan, Nuvuk, and a third unnamed site in Basil Bay. However, poor ice conditions resulted in a reorganization of priorities, and excavation was concentrated on the Clachan site. Taking advantage of delays forced by ice conditions, work was also briefly undertaken at two "protohistoric" Copper Inuit sites in the vicinity. This paper describes the results of these excavations.

THE PROTOHISTORIC PERIOD

The Kallak Site (MkPk-3): Site Description

The Kallak site consists of a large tent ring situated on a hill overlooking Bloody Falls on the lower Coppermine River. In 1968 Robert McGhee excavated Thule and Pre-Dorset components at this location (McGhee, 1970, 1972); the Kallak site tent ring lies approximately 30 m WSW, of McGhee's Thule house 5 (see McGhee, 1972: Fig. 5).

When the sod and willow which partially buried the tent ring was peeled off, a flat bedrock and flagstone floor was revealed. Artifactual material was limited to a few shaped and pegged antler fragments, scraps of native copper including a leister prong, and a squared brass peg of apparently European manufacture. This assemblage, such as it is, suggests an occupation dating to sometime in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century.

The significance of the Kallak site lies in its location rather than its productivity. The famous Bloody Falls massacre described by Hearne (1958: 96-103) seems to have taken place on the Kallak site hilltop. It is at least barely possible that the site represents the remains of one of the five Inuit tents whose occupants were slaughtered early that July morning of 1771.

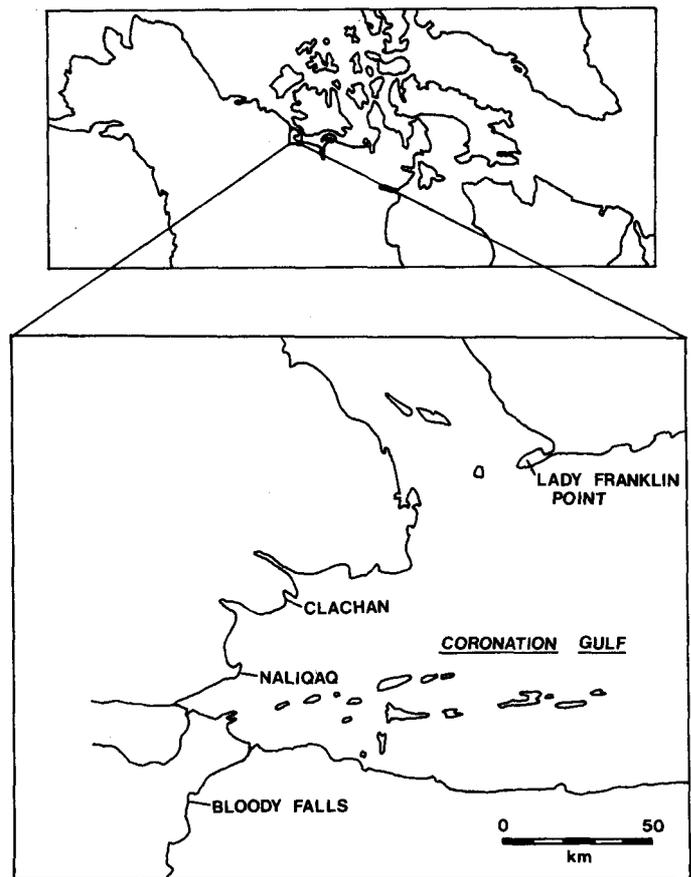


FIG. 1. Western Coronation Gulf.

The Naliqaaq Site (MIPj-2): Site Description

Cape Kendall is a thumb-shaped point of land thrusting out into Richardson Bay near the southwestern end of Coronation Gulf (Fig. 1). Sheltered by high cliffs and rolling table-land, the Naliqaaq site is located on its southern shore. The site covers about 250 m² and is less than two metres above sea-level. While it is probably identical to the "autumn gathering place" on Jenness's map of 1914 (Jenness, 1922: Fig. 2), most of the site seems to pre-date the twentieth century.

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Naliqaq was first found and tested in 1979, and a few days' further work was undertaken in 1980, with a total of 36 m² excavated. Naliqaq barely meets the criteria of a buried site, since the artifactual and faunal material is situated on an old pebble beach and covered only by a thin, localized sod. No apparent structures were associated with the site.

Artifact Description

Despite the relatively small area excavated, the Naliqaq site has produced a collection of 147 artifacts, including 55 donated by local Inuit, who from time to time joined us in our work. The great majority agree well with ethnographic specimens described by Stefansson (1914), Birket-Smith (1945), and Jenness (1946). The range of artifacts found includes harpoon foreshaft sleeves and ice-picks, wooden bow fragments, shouldered conically tanged arrowheads (Pl.1a), wound pins and plugs, copper fish hooks and leister barbs, bear tooth lures, endblade knife handles, copper-bladed tanged ulus (Pl.1d), toggles, scapula scrapers, a decorated needle case (Pl.1e), a copper needle (Pl.1f), bow-drill mouthpieces, soapstone lamp and pot fragments, etc. Seven pieces of iron and brass were found, including an ulu and a scraper blade. The three harpoon heads are round to flat, with closed sockets and endblade slots parallel to the linehole (Pl.1g-i). They are nearly identical to the "old harpoon heads" described by Jenness (1946:116), and provide a sharp contrast to the harpoon heads from the roughly contemporaneous Kunana site on Victoria Island (McGhee, 1972:76-79).

A few of the artifacts from the Naliqaq collection are of types and materials not recorded ethnographically. It is these, along with the scarcity of Euro-Canadian trade goods, which indicate a predominantly late eighteenth and/or nineteenth century date for the site. Among these are lanceolate and sub-triangular ground slate endblades, of which five were found (Pl.1b-c). Hearne (1958:108) reported slate endblades in 1771, but by 1914 even the memory of their use seems to have vanished (Jenness, 1946:84-85). Similar endblades have been reported from Kunana (McGhee, 1972:84) and also appear in local Thule assemblages (this report; see also McGhee, 1972; Taylor, 1972).

Certainly the most surprising find was a ceramic pot sherd (Pl.1j). It is medium brown in colour, plain, rather hard but crudely modelled, and very heavily tempered with coarse grit. It comes from the base of a flat-bottomed, straight-sided pot, perhaps similar in form to the soapstone pots from the site. In terms of vessel form, at least, it is distinct from the Thule and "Intermediate Interval" pottery of the area (this report; see also McGhee, 1972:36, 51, 64; Taylor, 1972:22, 37), and is perhaps most similar to the late prehistoric pottery of the Pt. Barrow region (Ford, 1959:199-201). The occurrence of this pottery pushes the at least sporadic use of ceramic vessels well into the post-Thule period in the Copper Inuit area, and underlines

Jenness's (1922: 44) comments on the former importance of trade and other ties with the Western Eskimo.

Discussion

Sites such as Naliqaq provide significant information on Copper Inuit culture as it existed prior to the twentieth century. Explorers such as Hearne, and the Royal Navy expeditions which followed, may have ushered in the historic period in the strict sense of the term. However, their influence was negligible or at most indirect, and their ethnographic descriptions are scanty to non-existent. Given the evidence from this past season's work it is proposed that the term "protohistoric" be expanded slightly, to cover the period from the first limited appearance of European trade goods sometime in the eighteenth century (see Hearne, 1958:110) to the full historic period, inaugurated in the first decade of this century by men such as Klengenber, Mogg, Hanbury, and Stefansson.

THE THULE PERIOD

The Clachan Site (NaPi-2): Site Description

Clachan (Scots Gaelic for "stone house") is a Thule winter house site situated about 25 km north of Cape Kendall, on the western shore of Coronation Gulf (Fig. 1). The site consists of two house rings (Fig. 2). It is thus very small by Western or Canadian Thule standards, but seems fairly typical for the western Coronation Gulf area.

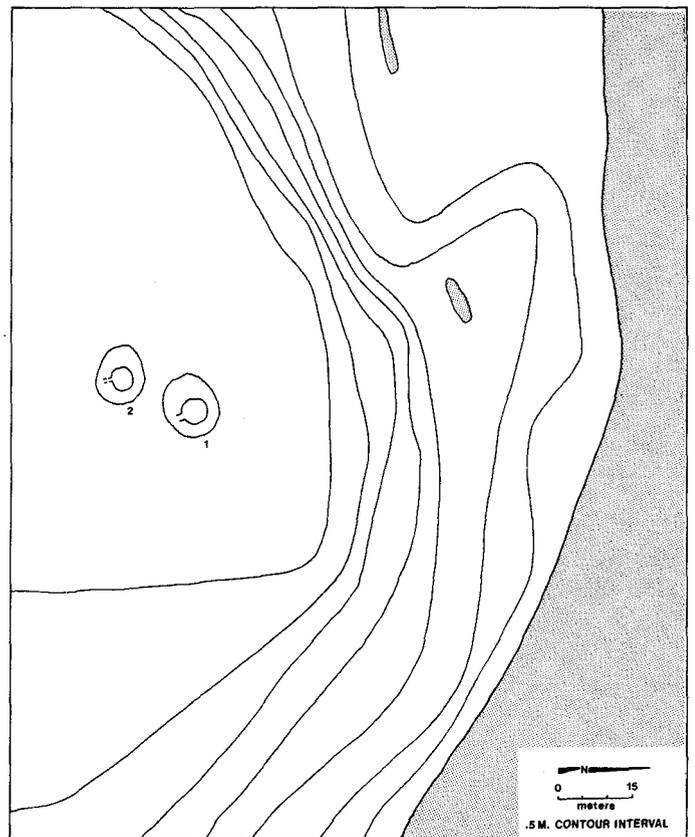


FIG. 2. The Clachan site (NaPi-2).

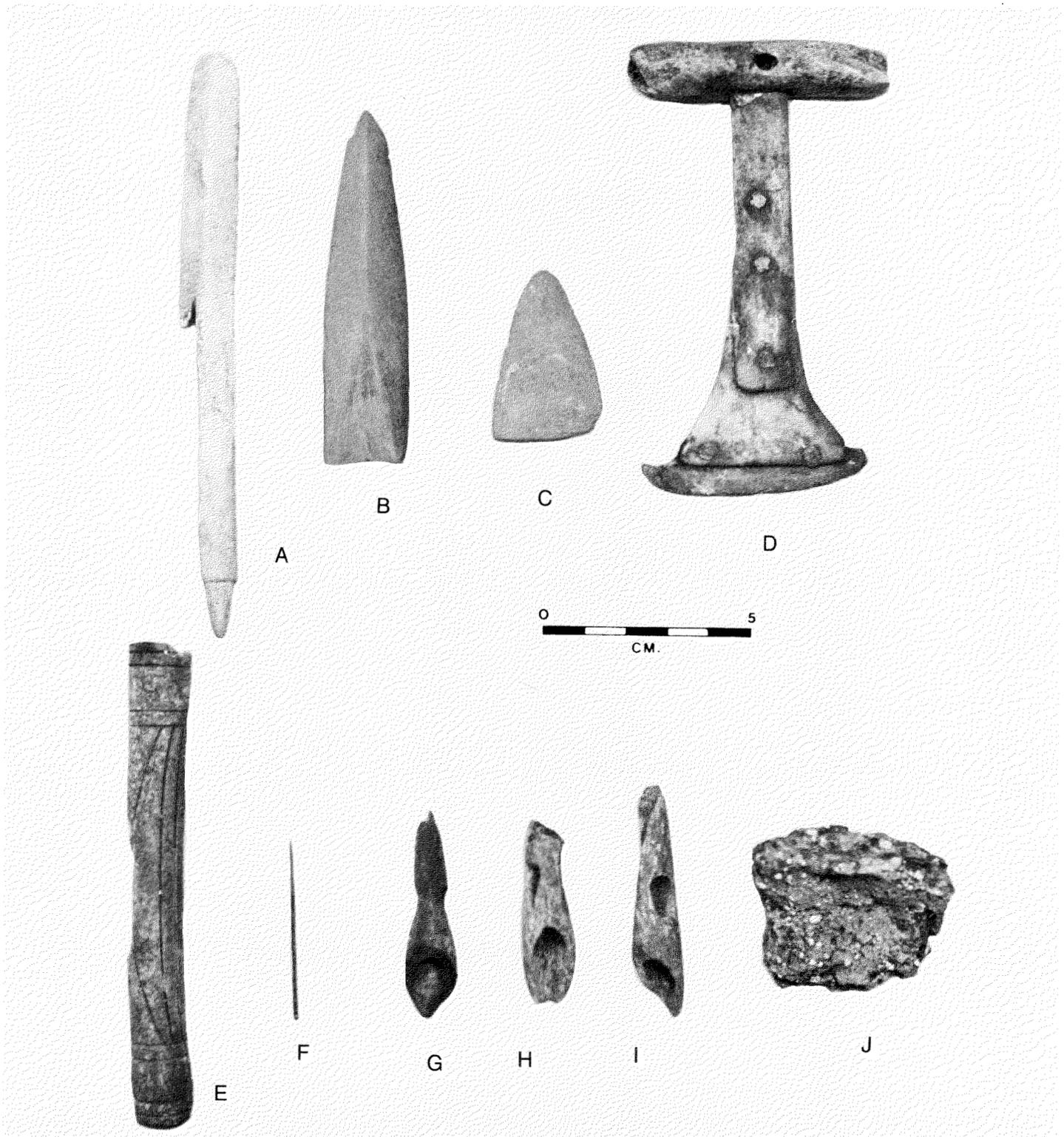


PLATE 1: Protohistoric Copper Inuit artifacts from the Naliq site. A: antler arrowhead; B-C: ground slate endblades; D: copper-bladed tanged ulu; E: decorated needle case; F: copper needle; G-I: antler harpoon heads; J: pottery vessel sherd.

Excavation at the Clachan site was concentrated on house 1, which, with adjacent middens, was excavated *in toto*. A 2-m grid was employed, and a total of 130 m² was excavated to depths ranging from 20 to 110-cm. The midden was excavated using 10-cm arbitrary levels, while the house was taken out by architectural levels. Bipod photo-

graphs taken from a height of 9 m were used as a supplement to mapping.

House 1 (Fig. 3) was a single-roomed ovate structure, measuring approximately 7 × 9 m (outside), with a shallow, scantily flagged floor. There was a southward-facing cold-trap entrance passage, and along the northern peri-

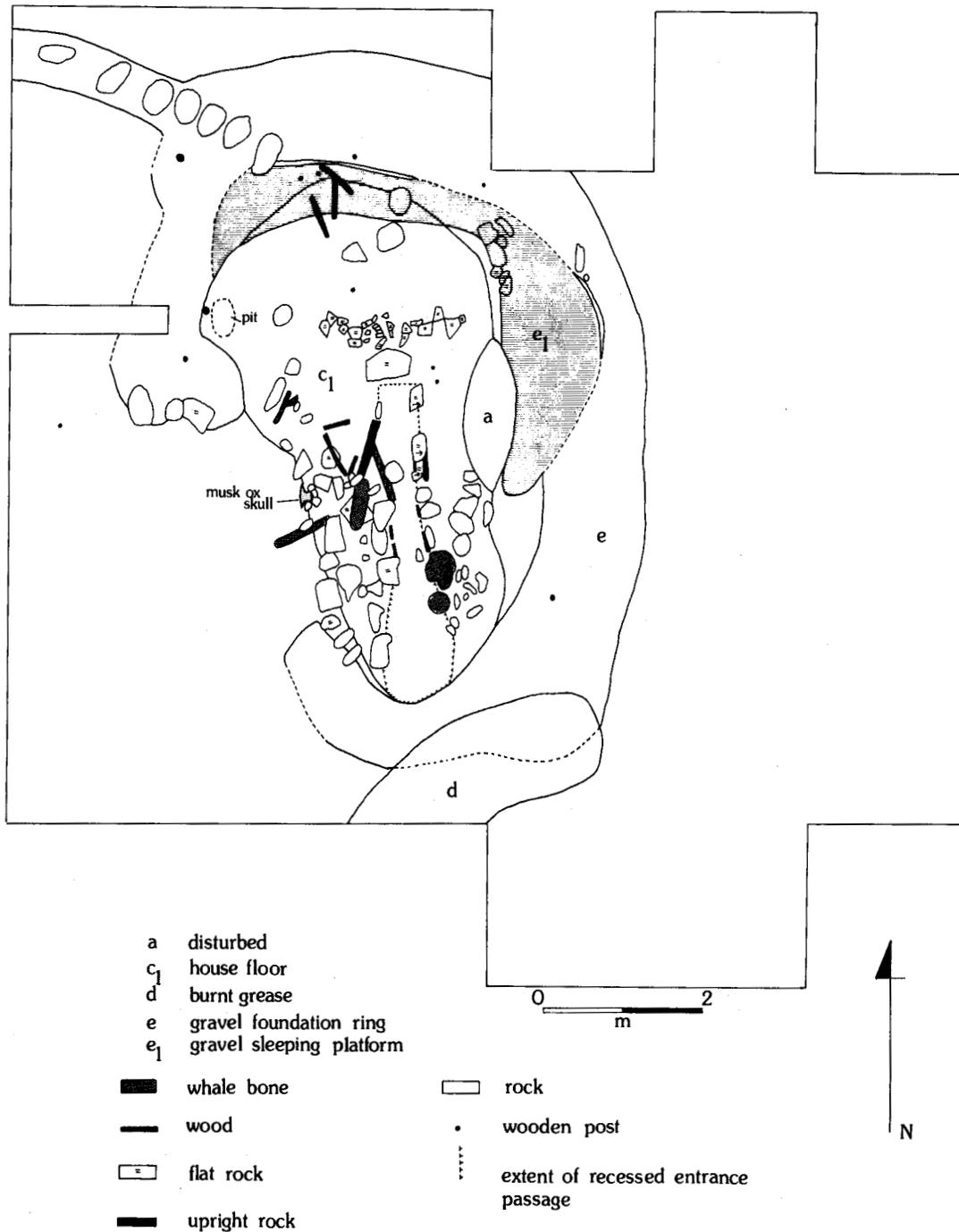


FIG. 3. NaPi-2 House 1 floor plan.

meter of the house interior, a poorly-defined gravel sleeping platform. The house walls were defined by two architectural strata: a gravel foundation ring and the wall proper, composed of stacked sod with some rock. Posts indicate a wooden structural framework. Whale bone was very rare, and restricted to vertebrae and other blocky chunks used in lieu of wall stones.

Good structural evidence of architectural refurbishing was encountered, including a house support post found beneath a wall stone, and the presence of "house floor tromp" beneath the flag stones. Moreover, artifactual and

faunal material was as common in the wall sods as in the middens, suggesting that construction had taken place on top of an older midden, or that the walls had been rebuilt.

Artifact Description and Comparison

A total of 756 artifacts were recovered from house 1 and adjacent middens. The stylistic analysis of these artifacts suggests that the Clachan site represents a reasonably distinct regional phase of Thule culture, one affiliated with Alaskan rather than Canadian Thule.

The abundant pottery is perhaps the clearest indication. Despite the fact that the Clachan site is situated only about 30 km from a good soapstone source, the artifact assemblage indicates an almost total lack of interest in soapstone on the part of the site's inhabitants. Nearly 300 ceramic vessel sherds were recovered, as compared to only three soapstone vessel fragments. Abundant pottery is an Alaskan rather than a Canadian Thule trait, and east of Coronation Gulf pottery is found in low frequencies and only on early sites (Mathiassen, 1927b:105-107; Schledermann and McCullough, 1980). However, only Barrow Plain Ware was found at Clachan. The Barrow Curvilinear pottery found in both early and late Thule contexts in North Alaska and the Mackenzie Delta (Taylor, 1972:10,22; McGhee, 1974; Stanford, 1976) seems to be absent this far east. Vessels are characteristically globular in form, and sherds are thick, friable, and heavily tempered with weathered grit.

Harpoon heads were gratifyingly abundant: the 49 specimens included eight wooden toys and two male-tanged dart heads. The most common type, represented by 16 specimens (Pl.2a-c), is "new" in the sense that it has not yet been named. In essence, it consists of a Thule type 2 head, without the barbs but with an endblade slit at right angles to the linehole. As with Thule type 2 heads, specimens have a long "neck" and distinct shoulders marked by lateral ridges. Distal ends come to a rounded point, and all specimens are equipped with a rivet-hole for the endblade. One specimen with the copper endblade still in place (Pl.2c) illustrates the close similarity to Thule type 2, with the endblade taking the place of the barbs. Similar harpoon heads have been previously referred to as variants of either Thule type 2 (Taylor, 1972:39) or the Tasik Open-Socket type (McGhee, 1974:77). They are here designated the "Clachan type."

There is some variation in the sample, including two closed-socket specimens and three specimens with drilled rather than slotted lashing holes. Decoration is fairly elaborate, and all specimens are decorated with incised line and recessed triangle motifs. Two specimens have incised ovals on the lateral margins between the endblade slit and the point of the shoulder. One (Pl.2a) also has a double spur, such as characterizes Birnirk phase harpoon heads (Stanford, 1976:107); however, the lashing holes are drilled rather than slotted.

Clachan type harpoon heads exhibit a discrete western Central Arctic distribution from the Mackenzie Delta to western Coronation Gulf. They thus represent another western cross-tie. McGhee (1974:Pl.23a) illustrates a single specimen from Radio Creek at the delta; Mathiassen (1930:Pl.1-2), another from Point Atkinson; single closed-socket specimens are represented at the Jackson and Morris sites (Taylor, 1972:Pl.IIe,IVa), and six specimens have been reported from Lady Franklin Point (Taylor, 1963:458, 1972:39, Pl.VIa). Finally, the single harpoon head from Bloody Falls (McGhee, 1972:Pl.VIa) is of this

type. East of Coronation Gulf, a somewhat similar specimen has been reported only by McCartney (1977:226) from Silumiut. The Silumiut example, however, is described as a re-worked Thule type 2 head; none of these other specimens show any sign of re-working.

Other harpoon heads are less distinctive, but again tend to support the suggestion of a western affiliation. Included here are single examples of the Tipirik (Ford, 1959:80) and Barrow (Ford, 1959:92) types (Pl.2f&j, respectively). The former has scalloped ornamental sideblade slots, and both exhibit the facial facets which distinguish these Alaskan types from their Canadian Thule analogues (cf. Mathiassen, 1927a:Pl.1-1,40-3). Thirteen Thule type 2 specimens were recovered (Pl.2d-e; see Mathiassen, 1927b:15), including two with asymmetrical barbing. All have slotted lashing holes, and decoration is identical to that described for the Clachan type specimens. Seven harpoon heads fall within the general Thule type 3 category (Mathiassen, 1927b:18), including one Sicco specimen (Pl.2g; see Ford, 1959:83) which has incised decorations, a distinct "waist," a faceted cross-section, and ornamental sideblade slots. Others retain the general Sicco morphology, but are plain and have drilled lashing holes (Pl.2h). One small specimen (Pl.2i), with the copper endblade still in place, has a lenticular cross-section and is plain except for ornamental sideblade slots accentuated by spurred lines. Both Thule type 2 and Thule type 3 have a wide geographic distribution within Thule.

Two male-tanged dart heads were found. The illustrated specimen (Pl.2k) has asymmetrical bilateral barbing, a drilled lateral linehole, slight shoulders, and a conical tang. The barbs and linehole are set off by incised lines, and the scallop beneath each barb on the lateral margins is accentuated by an ovate incised line, similar to the shoulder decoration noted on two of the Clachan type harpoon heads. This and the unillustrated specimen have almost exact duplicates in the larger post-Ahteut dart heads from the Kobuk valley in northwestern Alaska (Giddings, 1952:Pl.XXVIII,1-5). A small wooden dart head, lacking a linehole and apparently a toy, is also illustrated (Pl.2L).

The antler arrowheads again suggest an Alaskan stylistic affiliation. Arrowheads were comparatively rare; only 11 specimens were found which were intact at the diagnostic proximal end. Of these, only three employ the characteristic Canadian Thule style of spurred tang (Mathiassen, 1927b:45). The remainder exhibit the "knobbed" and "conically knobbed" tangs of Alaskan Thule (Stanford, 1976:33-36).

Two other artifacts can be brought to bear on the question of cultural position. One is a composite labret (Pl.3g), the most easterly labret yet reported. It consists of a plano-convex groundstone ring 3.3 cm in diameter. An ivory screw was found *in situ* within the central hole. Similar labrets have been found in the Ambler Island and Intermediate Kotzebue phases on the Kobuk (Giddings, 1952:87-88), dated to the eighteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively.

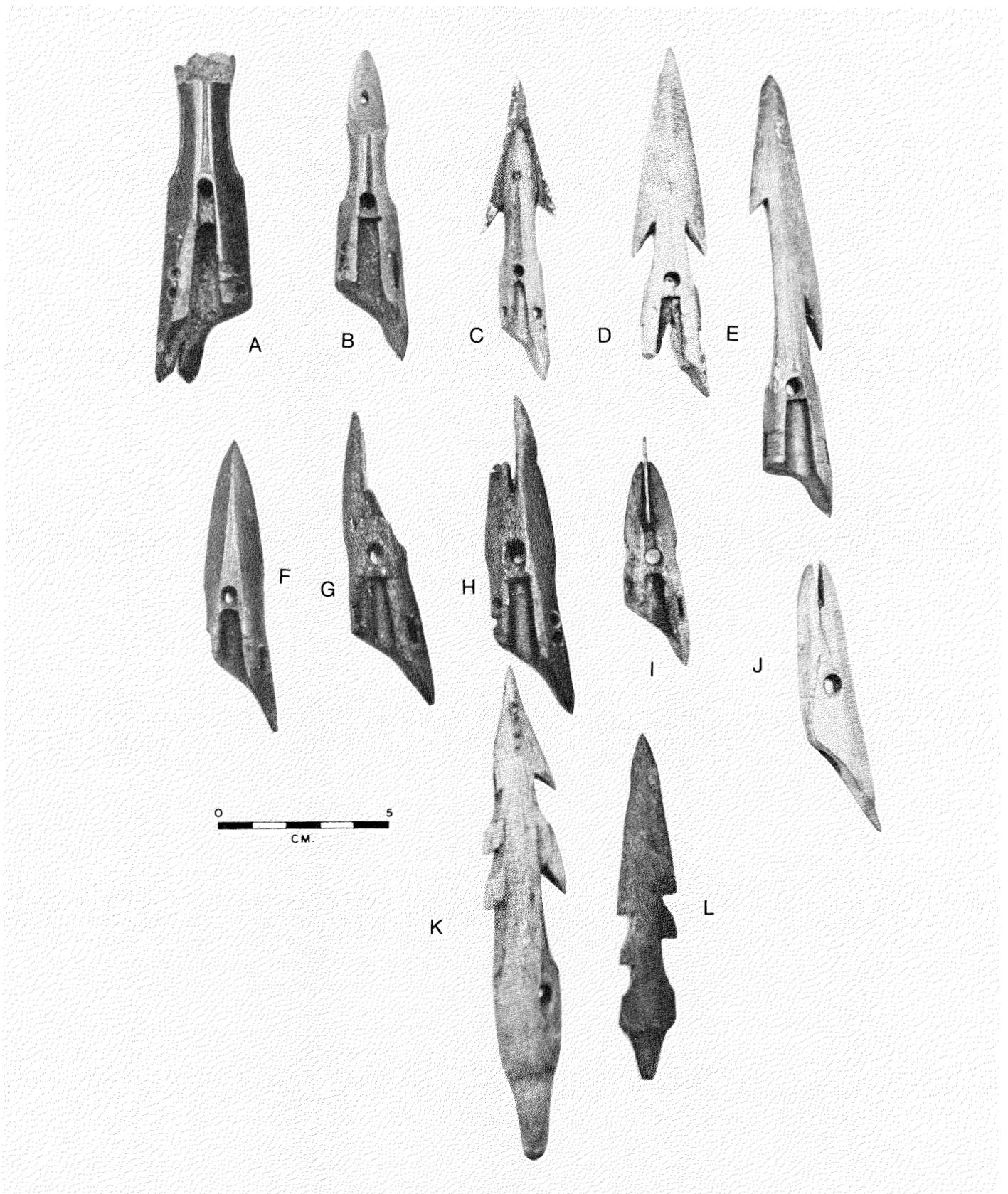


PLATE 2: Thule culture artifacts from the Clachan site. A-J: antler harpoon heads; K: antler dart head; L: wooden dart head.

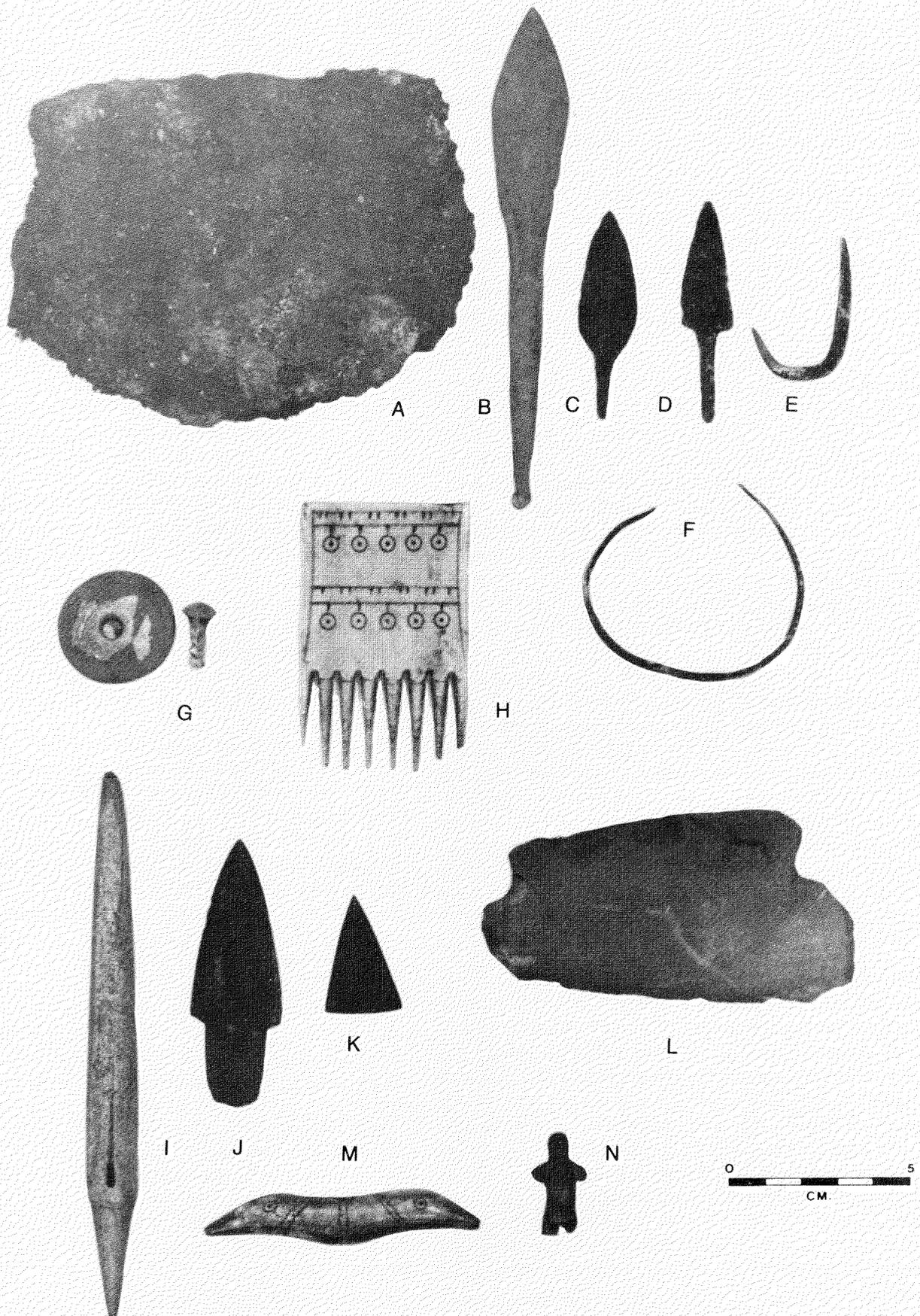


PLATE 3: Thule culture artifacts from the Clachan site. A: pottery rim sherd; B-D: tanged copper endblades; E: copper fish hook; F: copper bracelet; G: ground stone labret plate with threaded ivory plug; H: decorated ivory comb; I: antler foreshaft; J-K: ground slate endblades; L: ground slate ulu blade; M: ivory handle or toggle with duck-head terminals; N: wooden human figurine.

The second artifact is a flat, rectangular ivory comb (Pl.3h), decorated with incised spurred lines and compass-drawn nucleated circles. This circle-and-dot motif is unknown in Canadian Thule (Mathiassen, 1925b:124-125). However, in Alaska it appears during the Punuk phase on St. Lawrence Island (Collins, 1937:302-303), and during the "Middle Period" at Nukleet (A.D. 1250-1400) on the mainland (Giddings, 1964:100). Giddings (1952:Pl.XLI-2) illustrates an almost identical comb from the Intermediate Kotzebue phase on the Kobuk.

Thus far the emphasis has been on those artifacts indicative of a strong stylistic affiliation with Alaskan Thule. However, and inevitably, the great majority of artifacts from the Clachan site are of types and styles common to Thule culture in general. Included are harpoon socket-pieces and foreshaft sleeves, loose foreshafts (Pl.3i), a harpoon finger rest, ice-picks, bladder mouthpieces, wound pins and plugs, fishing equipment, triangular and stemmed ground-stone endblades (Pl.3j-k), slate ulu blades (Pl.3-l), ulu and endblade knife handles, tubular needle cases, toggles (Pl.3m), a tiny wooden figurine (Pl.3n), and a great range of other items. But there is also a third category of artifacts, those which are distinctive to this area alone. These are artifacts made of native copper.

Copper artifacts are found widely in Thule — for instance, there are two copper ulu blades from Naujan (Mathiassen, 1927a:60) — but it is their sheer range and abundance which distinguishes sites in Coronation Gulf. There are more than 20 copper artifacts from the Clachan site, including large and small tanged endblades (Pl.3b-d), a graver or burin found still within its wooden handle, tangless ulu blades, an asymmetric knife endblade, fish hooks (Pl.3e), leister barbs, two small axe or adze blades, and a number of three-quarter hoops which appear to be bracelets (Pl.3f). This abundance of copper reflects the close proximity of the site to the lower Coppermine Valley, one of the most important native copper sources in the New World Arctic.

Discussion

The artifacts described above suggest that the Clachan site has its strongest stylistic affinities in Alaskan rather than Canadian Thule. The abundant pottery, the harpoon heads and antler arrowheads, and individual items such as the labret and decorated ivory comb all point to such a western affiliation. However, before we can fit the site into any larger framework of Thule prehistory, it is necessary to arrive at some conclusions as to its date.

Radiocarbon dates for the Clachan site have not yet been returned. As we have seen, architectural evidence suggests that the Clachan site house had been occupied over a considerable period of time, and this is reflected in the artifacts recovered. The Sicco harpoon head, at least, argues for a fairly early initial occupation of the site. In mainland Alaska this type appears to have gone out of use by about A.D. 1250 (Giddings, 1964:40; Stanford,

1976:109), and it is possibly an even earlier horizon marker in the Canadian Arctic (McGhee, 1969/70; Schledermann and McCullough, 1980). However, the Clachan specimen lacks the vestigial second spur which characterizes the earliest Sicco type harpoon heads, and in this respect it possibly resembles best the "modified Sicco" heads found in the basal levels of Naujan (Arnold, 1981). At the other end of the Clachan occupation we have a number of late Thule traits, including: 1) the closed-socket Barrow harpoon head, a type which does not appear in mainland Alaskan sequences until about A.D. 1400 or perhaps slightly earlier (Giddings, 1952:54; Ford, 1959:92; Stanford, 1976:22); and 2) the composite labret and ivory comb, both of which seem to compare best with Intermediate Kotzebue specimens dated to the sixteenth century.

Probably the majority of the Clachan site, then, dates to the period between about A.D. 1200 and 1500. This suggestion receives some further support from radiocarbon dates of A.D. 1350 ± 105 (Taylor, 1967:230) and A.D. 1350-1450 (McGhee, 1974:85) for the Jackson and Radio Creek sites respectively, both of which produced an example of the distinctive Clachan type harpoon head.

The occupation of the Clachan site appears to span the middle to late Thule period. Unlike certain High Arctic sites (Schledermann and McCullough, 1980), the site does not owe its specifically western stylistic affiliation to any particularly early date. It appears to be too late to relate to the earliest movement of Thule culture into arctic Canada.

According to the presently-accepted model (McGhee, 1969/70, 1975), Thule moved into the Canadian Arctic following this High Arctic route, probably sometime in the eleventh century A.D. This movement is represented by the stylistically earliest sites in Canada and northwestern Greenland, including M-1 (Collins, 1952), Skraeling Island (Schledermann and McCullough, 1980), Ruin Island (Holtved, 1944), and Nūgdliit (Holtved, 1954). During the later "Classic" phase (McCartney, 1977), there is a southward movement leading ultimately to the Thule occupation of the Eastern and east Central Arctic, as represented by sites such as Naujan, Kuk (Mathiassen, 1927a), and Silumiut (McCartney, 1977). It is during this Classic phase that what we can now term "Canadian Thule" begins to adopt certain technological and stylistic traits which distinguish it from its Alaskan relative.

This southward movement of Canadian Thule has been felt to have encompassed areas as far west as Coronation Gulf (McGhee, 1975:71); indeed Thule sites as far west as Cape Parry have been described as Canadian Thule, albeit Alaskan-influenced (Taylor, 1972:26). The analysis of the Clachan site would suggest that this is not the case. Clachan, and other sites in the western Central Arctic, are stylistically distinct from Canadian Thule. Instead of being the product of a High Arctic migration, they appear to document a secondary expansion from the west along the mainland Arctic coast.

CONCLUSION

Nearly twenty years ago, Taylor (1963:461) predicted "... that Nunagiak, or something closely akin, existed as far east as Lady Franklin Point on Victoria Island." Excavation at the nearby Clachan site indicates that Taylor was essentially correct. However, while Taylor saw this eastern extension of Nunagiak, or Alaskan Thule, as a staging ground for the Thule colonization of arctic Canada, it now appears to have little to do with Canadian Thule. Instead, it seems to be the product of a second migration from the west, one which followed a mainland coast route and penetrated at least as far as western Coronation Gulf.

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