

**LABRADOR ESKIMO SETTLEMENTS OF THE EARLY CONTACT PERIOD.** BY J. GARTH TAYLOR. *Ottawa: National Museums of Canada. 6½ x 9¾ inches, 102 pages. No price indicated.*

The Inuit of Labrador were the first group of Eskimos to be in regular contact with Europeans. This contact commenced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when Inuit began to appear in the Strait of Belle Isle area in order to trade with the French fishermen and Basque whalers who occupied the area during the summer months, and to pillage whenever possible. By the late seventeenth century, they had equipped themselves with wooden boats as well as a range of smaller products of European technology. In their home region, between Cape Chidley and Hamilton Inlet, they adapted the new equipment to a pattern of life which remained close to the aboriginal, except for the annual trading expeditions made to the south with cargoes of baleen and other goods. For most of the eighteenth century, their isolation was broken only by the occasional whaling and trading ship, and by epidemics of smallpox brought back from southern Labrador by the trading parties.

This isolation was brought to an end in 1771 with the establishment of a Moravian mission station at Nain in the heart of the Labrador Inuit territory. In 1776 and 1782, mission stations were also established at Okak to the north and Hopedale to the south. One of the tenets of the Moravians was that native peoples should be encouraged to maintain their aboriginal patterns of life, so long as these patterns were consistent with membership in the church. Thus, the Moravians refused to trade firearms or powder until 1785, when the Inuit began to be armed by traders and to make hazardous journeys to the south in order to obtain powder and shot. Until this time, when subsistence patterns began to change rapidly as a result of the new weapons, the Inuit among whom the Moravians worked and observed, followed a way of life which was little changed from that of the aboriginal period. The observations of the missionaries were recorded in a daily journal at each station, and these journals, supplemented by letters and other reports, were sent back to church headquarters. This archival material serves as the basis for the present study of the Labrador Inuit during the early contact period of 1771-84.

Taylor's study was originally written in 1968 as a doctoral dissertation, and although excellent it suffers from some of the problems which are inherent in the publication of such

a work. Anthropological dissertations, according to academic tradition, cannot be merely descriptive but must be analytic; they must focus on the analysis of a "problem" which is generally of great interest to the members of the thesis committee and to anthropologists working in a few related areas, but of considerably less interest to the majority of anthropologists and to the general public. The problem selected by Taylor is a good one: the size of settlements in which people choose to live in relation to the theoretical assumptions of cultural ecology, a branch of anthropological study in which human cultural and social patterns tend to be thought of as systems of adaptation to the natural environment. According to a strict interpretation of cultural ecological theory, the size of social units in any society is conditioned by the natural environment and by the technological means which that society uses in order to make a living from its environment. The upper limits to the size of a settlement, which Taylor calls the "ecological capacities", are set by the resources available; the lower limits — the "ecological requirements" — are set by the need for cooperation in the efficient exploitation of the environment. Taylor attempts to establish these ecological limits as they apply to the Inuit of Labrador, and to relate them to the actual size of settlements as reconstructed from his archival sources.

Taylor makes ingenious use of the sources by piecing together demographic evidence from a small amount of census information and numerous but scattered references to the size and nature of camps observed by the missionaries. From an analysis of the major types of subsistence activities (whaling, sealing, fishing, caribou hunting), and of the proportion of hunters to women and children in the population, he then indicates that the size of these settlements was close to the "ecological requirements".

The establishment of "ecological capacities" is somewhat more difficult. How does one estimate the number of people who can be supported at a certain level of technology, and exploiting a certain environment, unless one assumes that they are living at the limits of their capacity? Taylor's solution to this problem is to compare the Labrador population with Central Arctic Inuit populations who lived in an environment which offered a much less varied and less productive food supply. Although it is not mentioned in the book, one may roughly calculate that the total population density of Labrador Inuit (expressed as number of people per square kilometre of fast winter ice, the late winter environment which would seem most likely

to limit population density) was about five times that of Central Arctic Inuit populations. Yet, despite the fact that they occupied a much poorer environment, the Central Arctic Inuit lived in winter and spring settlements which were about three times as large as those occupied by their kinsmen in Labrador. From this, and from the fact that Labrador settlements were often located in close proximity to one another, Taylor concludes that the size of the settlements in Labrador was not limited by ecological factors, but rather by social or cultural ones: people simply chose to live in much smaller settlements than were allowed by their environment and technological resources. The limiting factors, he concludes, were the poor leadership and social control exercised from outside the family or small group of related families, and the lack of formalized economic arrangements (most importantly food-sharing) above the household level. Good leadership and social control were, on the other hand, an important part of the organization of Central Arctic Inuit groups whose ecological requirements were such that they had to live in larger settlements.

This argument is elegant and plausible, but would be strengthened by further comparative analysis. For example, it could be mentioned that the North Alaskan Inuit had a population size and density comparable to that of Labrador, yet lived in semi-permanent communities of a few hundred people. Were these settlements, like those of the Central Arctic and Labrador, close in size to the ecologically feasible minimum, or had the people in them developed social institutions which would have permitted of an expansion? Taylor's hypothesis gains some support from archaeology, especially the recent work of Peter Schledermann on the Thule tradition in northern Labrador. The ancestors of the Labrador Inuit appear to have arrived in Labrador in fairly recent times, probably during the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. In the early eighteenth century they changed their settlement pattern from one of small individual family houses to the large communal houses described by the early missionaries. Such a recent change in the nature of settlements, perhaps in response to an environmental change which made winter sealing more important than summer whaling, may be related to the poor development of the food-sharing patterns which characterize other Inuit groups dependent on the hunting of seals from winter ice.

The theoretical assumptions of cultural ecology have taken an academic battering during the past few years. The particular targets have been the assumptions regarding

the Malthusian nature of hunting and gathering populations; it has been demonstrated that they generally live well below the theoretical carrying capacities of their environments and choose to take their surplus in the form of leisure rather than in accumulation of goods. Taylor, in questioning a somewhat different assumption, may nevertheless seem somewhat behind the theoretical times. Considering, however, that his book was submitted for publication in 1969, it may be seen as an independent product of the disenchantment evident during the late nineteen sixties with simplistic views of human nature and human social relationships.

As already mentioned in this review, the emphasis on an anthropological "problem", interesting as it is, detracts from the major contribution of the book. This contribution is the construction of an ethnographic description of one of the more interesting and unique Canadian Inuit populations. Perhaps, as a result of their early loss of pristine aboriginality, the Labrador Inuit have been largely neglected by anthropologists. Aside from an extremely superficial description by E. W. Hawkes early in this century, Taylor's work constitutes the first major attempt to describe the life and culture of this population, and use of archival materials lends a certain credibility to the reconstruction. The description is accomplished by piecing together the daily journal and diary accounts of anthropologically naive missionaries whose biases are known and understood. The names and deeds of the famous and infamous have been left unchanged. Taylor's archival mining has produced an ethnography of an extinct way of life which compares favourably with ethnographies written by observers of living populations.

Typographical errors are extremely rare and the book is attractively produced, but one suspects that the binding may fall apart under heavy use.

*Robert McGhee*