

ANCIENT MEN OF THE ARCTIC. By J. LOUIS GIDDINGS. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, 6½ x 9½ inches. 367 pages, bibliography, glossary, index, 97 halftones, 45 drawings, 9 maps. \$10.00.*

Behind a mask of deliberate scholasticism and gentle, naive inquiry Louis Giddings lived hard. From this book of narratives and anecdotes, written by Giddings and prepared for posthumous publication by his wife, his profile emerges clear and only a little less vital and complex than the man I knew; yet I think that those who knew him better than I will also be thankful for this self-portrait. It gives an image of the man against a background of 8,000 years of prehistory of which he did much of the writing, and it sketches an era in Alaskan development which now is history.

Like many a youngster, Giddings came to Alaska "to make it on his own." For him this meant arriving in Cordova during the depths of the depression, when survival there without money was dependent on one's ability to dig clams. By one means or another the young Giddings a) established in his own mind that the work was not suited to him, b) managed to get from Cordova to Fairbanks, and c) enrolled in the University of Alaska (at that time the Agricultural College and School of Mines). There is no doubt in my mind, although my knowledge of the events is sketchy, that these decisions were sound, and by Giddings' own statement I would judge the first to be the soundest. This brings us nearly to the beginning of the book. It begins with a long, straightforward, appreciative introduction by Henry B. Collins, who is the best able of any of us to summarize Giddings' impact on northern archaeology.

The book is a collection of tightly planned, highly informative essays on Giddings' work in northwestern Alaska given in narrative, so that the human context of events—graduate students, Eskimos, pilots, traders, and missionaries—and the progress of archaeology seem to compete, both for survival and for the reader's attention. Generally speaking, the Eskimos win on both counts, and the graduate students and pilots fare well—pretty much as one would expect. Archaeology, however, outclasses all of these: it gives us a resolution of some modern anomalies, and clues to the solution of problems that remain, like the origin of sea-mammal hunting and cultural intercourse between Indians and Eskimos—did it happen, did it matter? It gives us, in short, the ways of human evolution at Bering Straits,

one of the crossroads of the world.

Of the sixteen essays (each chapter seems to have been written to stand alone) some are explanatory like the first on "Why Do We Dig?"; some are expository and historical like the fourth, "Thule: Arctic Archaeology Begins"; but the majority are flashback narratives of Giddings' own work in the field. By far the greatest amount of space is given to the strategy and accidents of discovery on the beaches of Kotzebue Sound. In recent years this was the focal point of Giddings' interest, and indeed it may have been so throughout his professional life. At any rate, we read of his participation in the near-revolutionary work before World War II on Ipiutak, at Point Hope, and of the question of inland or maritime economic orientation among the earliest Eskimos. This question led Giddings to the forest-bordered Kobuk River, where he both began the science of subarctic dendrochronology and defined a theretofore unrecognized variant of Eskimo culture. His discoveries there were to lead to spectacular work in the 1960's; this, however, should not obscure the fact that Giddings in 1940 and shortly after World War II defined and dated the progress of Eskimo culture during the last 800 years in that part of Alaska. This definition and chronology still are the belying pins of western arctic archaeology of the late prehistoric period.

But the inland-maritime question, and that of the origin of Ipiutak, remained unanswered. Giddings, with his colleagues Larsen and Rainey, decided that strategic considerations required a search of the coast south of Bering Straits to see if sites related or ancestral to Ipiutak could be found there. Giddings and his University of Alaska students went to Norton Sound and in this archaeologically unknown terrain discovered rich Eskimo sites spanning much of the last 2,000 years, and at Cape Denbigh, a new culture which put the prehistory of the Eskimo in a new and very different perspective.

Giddings' 1948 discovery of the Denbigh Flint complex, well below layers of Ipiutak-like and later Eskimo cultures at Iyatayet, marked a turning point in arctic archaeology. Before this many thought that it was scientific to try to infer the evolution of Eskimo culture from insights into Eskimo ethnology, with a dash of archaeological evidence to suggest time depth. Now scarcely anyone thinks so; although we cannot afford to ignore the theorems of Crantz, Steensby, Boas, and Birket-Smith, the Denbigh Flint Complex, because it is unrecognizable to ethnologists and modern Eskimos, must be

considered in the context of archaeology and world prehistory. But there is little doubt that Denbigh is a progenitor of modern Eskimo culture, for some of its distinctive traits recur in Norton and Ipiutak, which in turn contributed to northern Eskimo culture of the modern era.

Giddings' book, and to some extent his life, were coloured by events at Iyatayet. He was led to survey Norton Sound, then Wales, and then Kotzebue Sound, in a search for other, perhaps older, Denbigh sites. This led to his recognition of the significance of the vast gravel beaches of Kotzebue Sound: they had built outward from the shore where waves and currents favoured this; in many such spots people camped near the outermost beach and left their souvenirs to remain while subsequent beaches were built. The sequence of old beaches from ancient cliff to modern sea front gives a measure of relative time: the Denbigh-bearing beaches were farthest in, and as one moved outward there came Old Whaling, Choris, Norton, and later Eskimo cultures.

Archaeology being what it is, and Giddings the man he was, a third triumph did not deter him more than a few years from going to a fourth. He pioneered the use of beach ridge sequences in the study of palaeo-environments in the meantime, and outlined the amazingly varied prehistory of Kotzebue Sound. But an outline was not enough: the idea of interplay between coast and inland cultures, and the recollection of some anom-

alous cores and microblades found in 1940 on the Kobuk River at Onion Portage, drew him away from the coast once more.

At Onion Portage he quickly saw that there was more to be learned than could have been recognized readily in the earlier stage of Eskimology during which Giddings had first worked there. His excavations have shown that the cultural deposit many feet deep is subdivided into as many as 30 occupation layers, giving a vertical measure of relative age to compare with the horizontal one on the coastal beaches. But the oldest cultures at Onion Portage are far older than Denbigh; they are now known to date prior to 6,000 B.C. It is a spectacular site to the geomorphologist and palaeoecologist as well as to the archaeologist; the interested onlooker will share Giddings' mounting excitement as he recounts the removal of layer after layer of cultures older than Denbigh and new to the study of prehistory.

This would have been a book easy to recommend to anyone interested in life in the north, in prehistoric archaeology, or in scientific adventure. But Giddings' tragic death just as the book was completed makes it incumbent on a reviewer to acknowledge it as Giddings' testimony of a life of humanistic science. Rarely are we privileged to look so closely at another man's work; that the work be as worthy of our attention as is his, is rare indeed.

*William N. Irving*

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