

13 SKRAELING: FIRST PEOPLES OF HELLULAND, MARKLAND, AND VINLAND

BY DANIEL ODESS, STEPHEN LORING,
AND WILLIAM W. FITZHUGH

One morning, as spring advanced, they [Karlsefni and his companions] noticed a large number of hide-covered boats [paddling] up from the south around the point. There were so many of them that it looked as if bits of coal had been tossed over the water, and there was a pole waving from each boat. They signaled with their shields and began trading with the visitors, who mostly wished to trade for red cloth. They also wanted to purchase swords and spears, but Karlsefni and Snorri forbade this. They traded a dark pelt for the cloth and for each pelt they took cloth a hand in length, which they bound about their heads. (Erik the Red's Saga Hreinsson 1997)

THE NORSE ARRIVED IN THE NEW World in A.D. 1000, a time of diverse social and political landscapes for the peoples living on the western shores of the North Atlantic. Members of several different ethnic groups—the Dorset people of the eastern Canadian Arctic and northern Greenland, the ancestors of the Labrador Innu, the Newfoundland Beothuk, and the Maliseet and Micmac of the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence and Nova Scotia—had divided this territory into a multicultural region of discrete homelands where their ancestors had lived for many generations. After A.D. 1200 another people, the Thule—ancestors of the Inuit—would also arrive on the scene. Despite the cultural and linguistic differences that divided them, archaeological evidence shows that members of these groups were linked by trade relationships that involved the movement of goods, ideas, and people over hundreds, or even thousands, of miles. They were no doubt accustomed to meeting strangers in their territories and were adept at negotiating these encounters to sustain mutually beneficial interactions over time. In boundary areas at least, many were probably bilingual or even trilingual.

The degrees of cultural difference between these peoples varied, with the greatest similarities to one another characterizing the ancestors of the Micmac and Maliseet, on one hand, and the Beothuk and Innu, on the other. There were few cultural similarities between any of these Indian peoples and the Dorset people, or between the Dorset and the Thule. The following discussion introduces these peoples, as they are known from archaeology and by extrapolation from historical ethnography, during the time when the Norse were probing the margins of northeastern North America. Understanding the interrelationships, geographic distribution, demography, and cultural features of

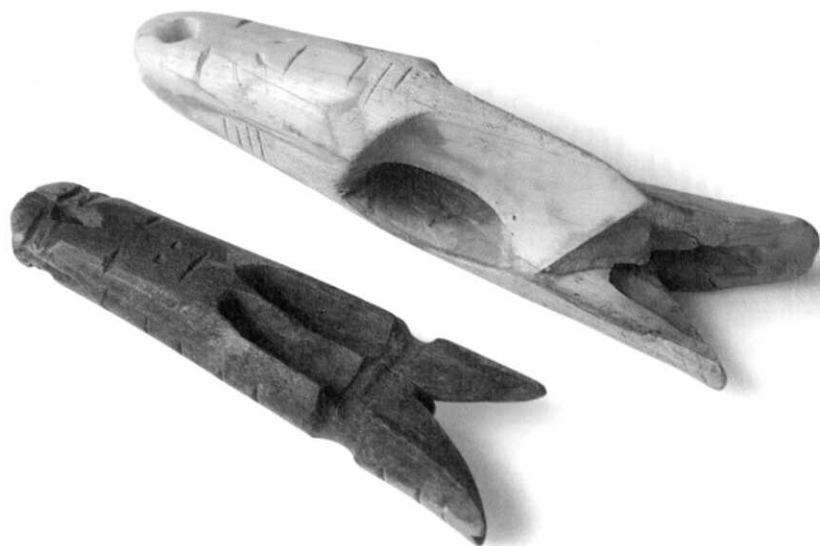
these peoples reveals the dynamics of contact and may also underscore the significance of a quote in *Erik the Red's Saga* attributed to Thorfinn Karlsefni on his departure from Vinland: “a rich and fruitful land, but one that we cannot safely inhabit.”

THE DORSET: SKRAELING OF HELLULAND AND NORTHERN MARKLAND

Dorset, the name given to a cultural tradition that flourished in the eastern North American Arctic for more than fifteen hundred years before the Norse arrived in Greenland late in the tenth century, derived from a location on southern Baffin Island where that culture's remains were first iden-



UNIPEO, PHYSIOLOGUS



13.1 DORSET HARPOON HEADS

The Dorset people made harpoons in different sizes depending on the animal being hunted. The harpoons were attached to a seal- or walrus-skin line and designed to turn sideways and toggle under the skin after it had pierced the animal's hide so the animal could not pull free. Stylized human faces, possibly the hunters' helping spirits, are incised on the tips of these harpoons.

13.2 SHULDHAM ISLAND FIGURINE

Small carvings, such as this soapstone figure from a Dorset site in northern Labrador, show that Dorset parkas had a high collar instead of the hood characteristic of Thule culture and modern Inuit parkas. The absence of hooded parkas in Dorset culture is as puzzling as Dorset peoples' lack of bows and arrows and dogs, which were used by earlier and later arctic peoples.



tified (Maxwell 1984; McGhee 1978). One of the two northernmost groups of *skraeling*, they were descendants of earlier pre-Dorset people who migrated east from Alaska more than four thousand years ago, colonizing the Canadian Arctic and Greenland for the first time. They eventually displaced Maritime Archaic Indians from territories they had occupied in coastal Labrador since about 6000 B.C. Dorset people generally lived in settlements of one or two houses—skin tents in the summer and sod-walled and snow houses in the winter—and changed their place of habitation with the seasons to match the movements of the animals on which they depended for food, fuel, and shelter.

Dorset people were consummate hunters who ate nearly all the birds, fish, and marine and terrestrial mammals available in their country. While they were adept at capturing sea mammals, including seals and walrus, they did not hunt the great baleen whales (fig. 13.1). In some locations, ducks, geese, and pelagic waterfowl were a major part of their diet; at others, the bones of the arctic fox dominate their trash middens. Everywhere they hunted caribou with lances, eating the meat, fashioning tools from the bones and antlers, and using the skins for clothing, bedding, and tents. They were also successful polar-bear hunters.

The Norse arrived in Greenland during the time when Dorset artistic traditions were at their zenith. At sites where perishable materials are preserved, archaeologists have found small, meticulously rendered animal figurines, some of which suggest transformation between human form and that of a polar bear. Amulets carved

in the form of a caribou's hoof, polar bears, seals, falcons, stylized animal-figured harpoon heads, or shaman's "teeth" were used in ceremonies, attached to clothing, or worn as necklaces (fig. 13.5). There are rare occurrences of human images: masks (fig. 13.6), individuals wearing parkas with high collars instead of hoods (fig. 13.2), and antler and wood batons carved with multiple human faces (figs. 13.7, 24.7), each so varied and detailed that they probably represent individuals known to the artist. Dorset artists also enjoyed making ivory and soapstone carvings of bird's eggs and other mundane subjects, as well as indulging fantasies or holding fertility rituals with carvings of phalli and copulating humans.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, Dorset interaction networks seem to have been more active than at any time in the previous thousand years. Perhaps as a reflection of the increased flow of ideas and information, the form of their tools, which previously had exhibited regionally distinct styles, suddenly became uniform, so that tools from the northern edge of their country in the High Arctic are very similar to those found at the southern margins of their territory on the coast of Labrador. There is other evidence for interaction as well: distinct types of stone and other materials were being traded hundreds of miles from their sources. Musk-ox hair shed in the High Arctic was collected and twisted into string and rope that was traded as far south as Frobisher Bay and northern Labrador, while Ramah chert from Labrador quarries found its way north to Frobisher Bay sites that also contain chert from Southampton Island, 360 miles (600 kilometers) to the west. This interaction was not limited to trade with fellow Dorset people; Ramah chert was traded between Dorset people in northern Labrador and ancestral Innu people and also appears in Indian sites as far south as Maine.

Although we know much about the Dorset people, there is much of their culture that remains enigmatic. Because they did not possess writing and are not ancestral to any living peoples, nothing is known of their language. McGhee (1984) has suggested that they probably spoke one of the Eskimoan tongues, but it seems equally possible that they spoke unrelated Paleo-Asiatic languages that have since disappeared. In addition, the paucity of Dorset skeletal remains recovered

to date makes it difficult to establish their biological relationships with other arctic populations. They may have been quite similar in appearance to modern Inuit, but they could also have resembled Native Americans or any of several northeast Asian populations, including the Ainu. To add to the mystery, their artistic traditions are distinct from those of other peoples in the circum-polar world and show greater similarity to Yup'ik Eskimo traditions of western Alaska and the Bering Sea than to those of their closer geographic neighbors, the Canadian Inuit and Inupiat Eskimos of northern Alaska (Fitzhugh 1988). Certain aspects of their culture also seem counterintuitive: unlike the pre-Dorset people who were their

ancestors and the Thule people who later replaced them, the Dorset peoples did not use dogs or the bow and arrow, both potentially useful items when dealing with polar bears and the notoriously irascible Norse.

As *skraeling* go, the Dorset were probably the least threatening of the peoples the Norse encountered in the New World. Dorset settlements of the Viking period were generally limited to one or two houses of perhaps eight to ten people each (fig. 13.3). For this reason, it is unlikely that the Norse would ever have encountered them in large groups. Even comparatively small Norse hunting parties of six to eight men would likely have had a numerical and military advantage when the two peoples met.

Ungava Longhouses

Thomas Lee has claimed (1968) the longhouses that he excavated, following their initial discovery by archaeologist William E. Taylor, Jr., in northern Ungava on Pamiok Island were made by Norse explorers. This idea has since been publicized in a delightful if rather fanciful reconstruction of northwest Atlantic history by Farley Mowat (1998). Lee supported his ideas with additional "Norse" evidence in the form of large stone *inuksuit*, stone cairns built by the Inuit, which he interpreted as "hammers of Thor," and other large stone constructions. Since then archaeologists have found longhouses throughout much of the Canadian Arctic and have securely identified them as being made by Dorset people from A.D. 600 to 900 (Maxwell 1984; Schledermann, chapter 18). While their function remains uncertain, it appears that

Dorset people occasionally gathered in large groups for social, ritual, or hunting purposes, building low rock walls to enclose a row of Dorset family groups. Linear structures are not unique to the Norse and have been found in Dorset, Maritime Archaic, and early historic Innu cultures in Labrador and Ungava. Patrick Plumet (1985) demonstrated conclusively that Lee's "Pamiok longhouses" were made by Dorset people circa A.D. 700 (fig. 13.3).

An iron axe, reputedly of "Norse" type, found at Pamiok by a native Inuit is lost and has never been analyzed. Despite confidence in the dating and Dorset interpretation, some scholars continue to promote the idea of a Norse connection involving iron smelting in northern Ungava (Seaver, chapter 20).

13.3 A DORSET LONGHOUSE

Dorset people who lived in eastern Ellesmere Island about one century before the Norse arrived in Greenland made mysterious longhouse-like structures. This one, measuring 148 by 6 feet wide (50 by 2 meters), served as a foundation for adjacent family tents erected at a summer gathering place. When these houses were first discovered in northern Quebec, they were mistakenly thought to be Norse (Lee 1972; Mowat 1998), but excavations produced only Dorset artifacts (Plumet 1982).



13.4 WILLOWS ISLAND, FROBISHER BAY

Fog, ice, and rocky shoals, as well as strong winds and currents, make navigation in the eastern arctic challenging for even the most skilled mariners. Native hunters successfully navigated these waters in skin boats long before the arrival of the Norse.



For reasons that are poorly understood, the area occupied by Dorset people gradually began to contract shortly after A.D. 1000, even as the climate in the area would seem to have been improving with the onset of the Medieval Warm Period. It appears that they withdrew first from northern Ellesmere Island and Greenland, then from areas northwest of Hudson Bay. In the thirteenth century Dorset people continued to occupy northern Labrador, Ungava, eastern Hudson Bay, Frobisher Bay, and the western side of Baffin Island. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the only Dorset people who remained appear to have been in Ungava, and they probably vanished about the same time that the Norse disappeared from Greenland.

What might contact between the Norse and the Dorset have entailed and how would

Dorset people have responded to encounters with the Norse? Given that the sagas probably underrecord the number of voyages west of Greenland, we might expect the Dorset, whose settlements were scattered throughout the eastern arctic regions that were most accessible to the Norse, to have occasionally traded with them. If the Norse were seen as a reliable, or potentially reliable, source of trade goods, Dorset people might have actively sought contact with them. Conversely, if they had experienced hostilities like those described in the sagas, Dorset people would have come to hear of the unpleasantness through their extensive social networks. Given their inferior weapons and numbers, the Dorset would probably have chosen avoidance as the most sensible way to deal with the Norse.

In all likelihood, incidents of contact varied from one to the next. It seems likely that iron, cloth, ivory, walrus skin, and fur would have been the materials of interest in any sort of trading relationship. As consummate walrus hunters, Dorset people were in a position to accumulate surplus ivory and walrus skins. In return, they most likely would have desired iron and, possibly, cloth (see Sutherland, this volume). While the Norse probably never had a surplus of iron, the small scraps from broken or worn-out tools probably would have satisfied the Dorset, who were already acquainted with meteoritic iron from northwest Greenland, which they used when available for knives.

13.5 ANIMAL FIGURINES

Dorset artists carved small figurines from wood, ivory, antler, and soapstone to represent the animals in their world. The skeletal or X-ray motif is common in Dorset art. Dorset people carved exquisite polar bears, some of which are seen in the act of transforming to or from human form. Much of Dorset art is thought to be related to shamanistic beliefs.





13.6 DORSET MASK

Dorset masks, such as this example from Avayalik Island in northern Labrador, often have a simple form. Their visages are haunting but rarely benevolent. This rough-hewn two thousand-year-old mask recovered from permafrost was probably made for a shamanistic ceremony and was discarded after use.

13.7 ANTLER WAND

Dorset artists sometimes decorated pieces of antler, ivory, or wood with a dozen or more faces, each unique and so expressive that they probably depict individuals known to the carver. Clues to the personality and ethnicity of the subjects appear on some; for instance, carvings with long-nosed images may depict Europeans. Similar pieces have been found in Greenland (fig. 24.7).

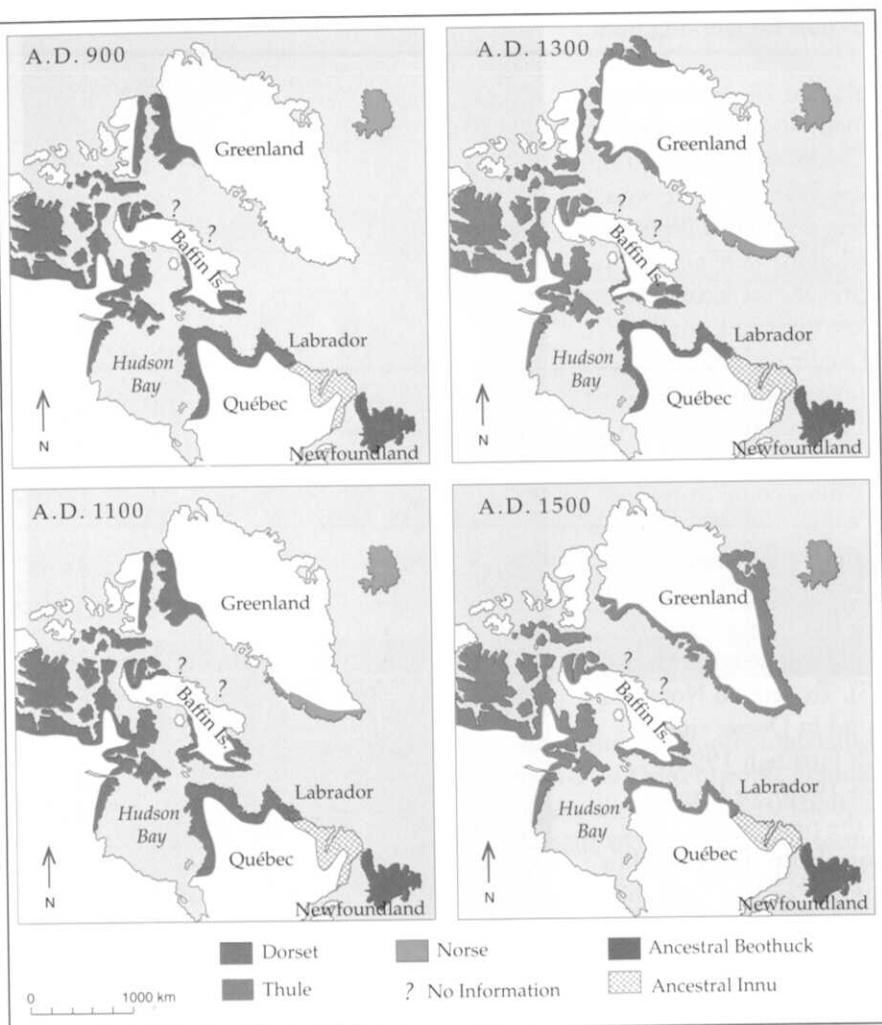
harpoon blades, and tools for working bone and ivory.

It is also possible that Norse hunting parties were occasionally stranded in Dorset territory when their boats were damaged by sea ice or storms. How Dorset people would have reacted to finding a stranded Norseman probably varied. If relations were good, they might have taken him (or her) in or rendered assistance. If they were not good, the Dorset might have left him to die or killed him outright and taken his possessions.

As McGhee (1984) has noted, the direct evidence to date for Norse-Dorset contact is sparse. Most of these finds come from sites in the Canadian High Arctic and northwestern Greenland, and only a few are from south of Hudson Strait. A smelted copper amulet (fig. 17.14) has been found in a Dorset site in Richmond Gulf on the east coast of Hudson Bay (Harp 1974–75). To date no Norse materials have been found in Dorset sites in Labrador (Cox 1978; Fitzhugh 1994), Frobisher Bay (Odess 1998), or Ungava (Plumet 1994), but the presence of a Late Dorset-style soapstone lamp (fig. 14.20) in the L'Anse aux Meadows "smithy" and the fact that the spindle whorl (fig. 14.18) recovered from one of the Norse houses there appears to be made from a fragment of a Dorset soapstone vessel suggest Dorset contacts or Norse scavenging from Dorset sites seen in northern Labrador, where a small Dorset population existed when the Vinland voyages took place.

The question of what ultimately caused the Dorset to disappear is both complicated and controversial. Most explanations have centered on their relationship with the Thule people who arrived from Alaska a century or more before the Dorset demise. Theories on contact between Dorset and Thule include everything from peaceful coexistence and gradual assimilation to a demise owing to adverse competition from the Thule people or outright warfare with them. Park's suggestion (1993) that there was no potential for contact between the two peoples because they never overlapped in the same areas at the same time seems untenable in light of the evidence for contemporaneity in Greenland (Gulløv, this volume), Frobisher Bay (Odess 1998), and Labrador (Fitzhugh 1994). It has also been suggested that the Norse might have precipitated Dorset decline by introducing European diseases (McGhee 1994).





CULTURAL AREA CHANGES

While disease clearly did not wipe them out completely, it may have eliminated them from some areas such as northwestern Greenland and eastern Ellesmere Island and reduced their ability to withstand the onslaught of Thule people from the west.

THE THULE:

SKRAELING FROM THE WEST

Approximately one thousand years ago, as Leif Eriksson was sailing west from Greenland, another group of pioneering explorers departed from northern Alaska for points east. These people, whom archaeologists call Thule, are the ancestors of the modern-day Inuit (fig. 13.10). Within a century or two—the problems of radiocarbon dating in the Arctic make it difficult to be more precise—they had colonized much of the Canadian Arctic and the Thule District of Greenland (Morrison 1989). This migration, like that of the pre-Dorset people three thousand years earlier, was accomplished during a period of climatic amelioration. For the Thule people, the reduced sea-ice cover that accom-

panied the Medieval Warm Period allowed the bowhead whale, a mainstay of their economy and social system in Alaska, to penetrate the rich waters of the High Arctic from both east and west (McGhee 1969–70).

Living along the northern coast of Alaska and on Saint Lawrence Island, these people had gradually developed sophisticated tools and techniques for taking bowhead whales, including the umiak—a multi-passenger skin-clad boat—and large toggling harpoons attached to inflated sealskin floats (fig. 13.9). They also had a complex social structure in which whaling boats were owned by the heads of large families who marshaled and coordinated the efforts of many individuals in pursuit of whales and other goals such as military action or the accumulation of surplus goods for trade.

The richness of the environment and their success in exploiting it allowed Thule people to live in permanent villages of up to a few hundred individuals in some areas. Competition for the best whaling locations was intense: Alaskan villages were sometimes fortified, and organized warfare with other Alaskan and Siberian groups was common. Thule social organization, their tradition of organized warfare (which included the use of the Asia-derived recurved bow), and their use of large boats and dogsleds (which provided rapid transport capabilities for large groups of people) would have made them a formidable force upon appearing in areas occupied by Dorset people and visited by the Norse.

There are interesting parallels between the situation in Iceland at the time of Erik the Red's exile and that in northern Alaska during the same period: desirable habitation areas were filled to capacity, and pressure for new lands and resources had become intense. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that as the yearly whale migrations expanded eastward into Canada, Thule people followed, bringing their complex social structure and sophisticated adaptation to the arctic environment into new lands.

Our current understanding of prehistory suggests that the initial movement of the Thule into the western Canadian Arctic was a migration into unoccupied territory. As they continued on to the central and eastern Canadian Arctic, however, the Thule would have encountered occasional settlements of Dorset people. The nature of contact between these peoples remains an unresolved



13.8 THULE WINTER HOUSE

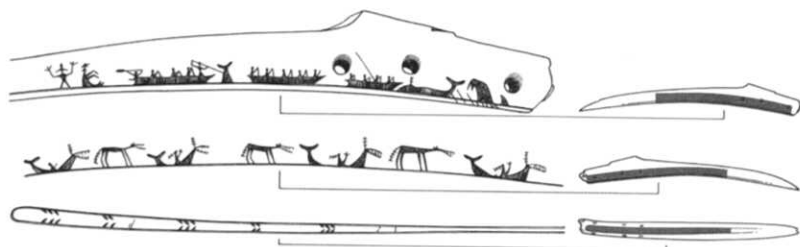
The Thule people built winter houses from sod and earth to provide snug shelters from arctic winters. While temperatures outside hovered around 40° C below zero, human body heat and oil lamps kept the temperature inside above freezing. Ruins of their small, dome-shaped houses are seen at Kamaikyuk in Frobisher Bay as depressions within rock walls; these structures were more suitable than drafty high-roofed Viking longhouses in arctic regions.

question in the archaeology of the region, but over the next three centuries, the Thule settlement areas expanded and the Dorset gradually disappeared from most of their former territories.

Early Thule settlements in the Canadian Arctic were located in areas well suited for hunting the large whales that came north each summer (figs. 13.11, 13.12). They consisted of several houses and were probably occupied by thirty to forty or more people. Thule winter dwellings were pithouses made from stone, turf, and whale bones (fig. 13.8). Each was dug down below the ground level and had an entrance tunnel, which served as pantry and closet and helped to conserve heat. The entrance tunnel of the house was set lower than the floor, allowing the denser, cold air to settle into this cold trap. Burning of seal oil in soapstone lamps provided heat and light, an appliance the Thule people may have learned how to make from the Dorset. Elevated sleeping platforms, arrayed around the interior margins of the house, were covered with caribou skins for padding and insulation.

The numerous whale bones used in constructing Thule houses in the treeless arctic environment reflect their success at whaling during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. But then conditions began to change: the climate grew colder and fewer whales were able to reach areas that then remained choked with ice for years on end. A lifestyle dependent on whales was no longer possible in some places, particularly the central Arctic and the far north. In the Norse settlements in southern Greenland, these changes were felt as well. The increased sea ice meant that travel between Greenland and Iceland became more hazardous, and the lower temperatures reduced the productivity of Norse farms. These changes probably made travel to the north and west of the Norse settlements more difficult. Nevertheless, the presence of Norse materials in numerous Thule sites dating from 1200 to 1350 suggest that Norse-Inuit contacts continued, if not increased, during this period (see Sutherland, this volume).

Unlike the Greenland Norse, the Thule adapted to the onset of the Little Ice



13.9 WHALING

In this pictograph carved on an ivory boat hook, crews of Alaskan hunters in large skin boats are shown pursuing whales and walrus. Cooperative hunting from boats allowed Thule Inuit in Alaska and the eastern Arctic to take enough food to sustain their villages through the long arctic winter. Dorset people did not hunt whales.



13.10 INUIT DRAWING

This drawing depicts a stylishly dressed Inuit woman leaving offerings at a monument erected in the 1570s by members of the Martin Frobisher expedition, the first Europeans to visit the Canadian Arctic. The rendering was made for explorer Charles Francis Hall by an Inuit in the 1860s.

Age (A.D. 1500–1750). Their economy had always been flexible, with car, caribou, birds, seals, and walrus providing dietary diversity and raw materials. The cooling trend that reduced the bioproductivity and accessibility of resources in some areas—for example, northernmost Greenland—forced the Thule people to abandon them, and they have remained unoccupied to this day. In other areas, when whales ceased to be a dependable resource, the Thule shifted to those species that remained. For some groups, this meant an increased emphasis on seals, particularly the ringed seal, which they hunted at breathing holes in the ice and at the edge of open water. This was facilitated by adopting another Dorset innovation, snow houses, that allowed Thule groups to establish seasonal villages on the sea ice for better access to ring seals.

The Thule people also told stories of a variety of human and humanlike beings that populated the land. These included stories about Dorset people and members of other Thule societies, but also about dwarfs and giants and other mythical peoples. They probably interpreted the Norse from this perspective when they first encountered them, but no such records exist except perhaps in western Greenland, where they were recorded in the stories collected in the eighteenth century by Henrik Glahn and in the nineteenth by Henrik Rink (Kleivan 1996).

The Thule have received the bulk of attention in discussions of contact between the Norse and the native peoples of North America, and the specific evidence of contact has been discussed at some length (see McGovern 1979 and other chapters in this volume). But what might that contact have been like?

At some point during the period of Norse occupation in southern Greenland, Thule people established settlements in northern Greenland, and on Ellesmere, Devon, and probably eastern Baffin Island,

as well as much of the central and western Canadian Arctic. Current evidence suggests these settlements were in place by the end of the thirteenth century. This means that while Thule people may not have been present in some areas during initial Norse exploration and hunting voyages to the north and west of their settlements, at some point these two peoples would have encountered one another and possibly the Dorset as well.

The conditions of contact and interaction were probably broadly similar to those previously described for Norse-Dorset contact, at least with respect to the resources and desires each side brought to any potential encounter. The Thule people had access to ivory and could have harvested walrus in greater numbers than the Dorset if they viewed production for trade with the Norse as worthwhile. In addition to iron the Thule obtained from the Norse, they also used iron from the Cape York meteorites to make small knives and to tip their harpoons. Thule people may have learned where these meteorites were located from the Dorset, and some have suggested that the presence of iron in the east was an additional motivating factor in their decision to colonize the area (McGhee 1984; McCartney and Mack 1973). If their acquisitiveness with regard to iron during the early twentieth century (Jenness 1928) is any indication, they might have been eager to trade for that material with the Norse; or, they might also have decided to take Norse iron and other possessions by force. Such a scenario may be represented by the trove of varied and valuable Norse materials found in a Thule village on Skraeling Island in eastern Ellesmere, if it does not result from scavenging a wrecked Norse ship (Schledermann, chapter 18).

ANCESTRAL INNU AND BEOTHUK PEOPLES

Once the Norse longships passed the imposing mountainous facade of Baffin Island and northern Labrador, the eyes of different *skraeling* would have observed their every move. As they made their way southward into the Markland and Vinland territories, Norse mariners would have passed a succession of Native American groups whose lives, like those of the Dorset and Thule, were also closely linked to the sea and its resources. These *skraeling* were ancestors of the Innu (Naskapi-Montagnais), Beothuk, Micmac, Maliseet, and Abenaki. Like the Dorset and

13.11 THULE ARROWHEADS

Like the Dorset, Thule hunters took seals and walrus with harpoons, but they also hunted caribou and musk ox with sinew-backed bows and arrows tipped with polished slate or jadeite points, or with ivory and bone arrowheads like these. Similar weapons would have been used in hostile encounters with the Norse.



13.12 THULE NEEDLECASES

Thule women made tailored clothing from the skins of birds, fish, and mammals using delicate needles of bone and ivory and thread made from animal sinew. The similarity of these Skraeling Island Thule needlecases to Alaskan prototypes confirms radiocarbon dating evidence that the Thule migration from Alaska occurred in less than one hundred years.



Thule peoples to the north, they were skilled mariners. In a variety of skin, bark, and wooden craft, the Indian peoples of the northern Atlantic coast were at home on the seas as much as they were in the forested interior. In addition to its food resources, the coastal waters provided an arena where young men sought prestige by trade and travel to distant lands.

Around two thousand years ago, a new group of Labrador Indians began expanding their settlements northward and started using the quarries of Ramah chert in northern Labrador. The exact circumstances that prompted this movement are not certain, but it coincided with the disappearance of Dorset settlements from the forested coastal regions south of Okak (after A.D. 500) and the onset of the Little Climatic Optimum (A.D. 1000–1250).

The ancestral Innu groups who occupied Labrador during this period are known archaeologically as the Daniel Rattle (circa A.D. 200–1000) and Point Revenge (circa A.D. 1000–1500) complexes (Fitzhugh 1978; Loring 1988). Daniel Rattle sites (fig. 13.13) are found mostly near the inner ends of the bays where they had ready access to caribou hunting in the interior. The later Point Revenge sites are found in similar locations but also occur on the outermost islands, suggesting a greater orientation toward coastal travel and maritime resources. In general, sites found on the coast appear to correspond with summer occupations while those on the interior seem to have been occupied in fall or winter.

Ancestral Innu lived in small, family-oriented bands scattered widely along the central Labrador coast. Their settlements usually consisted of a single skin-and-bark-covered structure with a central interior hearth (fig. 13.14). Occasionally, after an especially favorable hunt, several families would join together to build a *shaputuan*, a longer, multihearth wigwamlike structure of bark or skin, in which they passed the winter months in the shelter of the forest (fig. 13.13).

Like the historic Labrador Innu, most of the tools used by Daniel Rattle and Point Revenge people for hunting, fishing, and skin preparation, as well as for clothing, snowshoes, canoes, and toboggans were made of perishable materials such as animal skins, bone, wood, and bark. Because these



13.13 DANIEL RATTLE SITE

Indians living on the central Labrador coast from A.D. 800 to 1400 used both round tipi-like tents and elongated dwellings with long hearths in their centers. The historic descendants of these Indians, known as Innu, continued to use longhouses, which they called *shaputuan*, during certain seasons and for ceremonial purposes.

materials do not survive well in acidic subarctic soils, our understanding of ancestral Innu material culture is poor and relies heavily on what can be learned from their descendants and from documentary sources.

Furthermore, the deep respect and spiritual relationships that linked humans and animals required special disposal techniques for animal bones. In most cases animal remains were burned or were thrown into the water to keep them from being profaned by dogs or other creatures (Armitage 1991; Loring 1997). These ways of disposing of animal remains were practiced by many northern Indian groups. Nevertheless, the small amounts of calcined animal bones that have been recovered from early Labrador Innu sites have yielded walrus, black bear, caribou, and other species, which provide some inkling of their economy at the time of the Viking voyages (fig. 13.16). This lack of organic preservation also makes it difficult to determine much about ancient Indian technology and subsistence, but site locations on the outer islands and fragments of walrus and seal bones indicate a capability to hunt these marine mammals. The absence of gouges, which often indicate the building of dugout canoes, suggests that early Innu used bark- or skin-covered boats.

The sites known from this period are small and widely dispersed, suggesting a relatively small population that used coastal regions primarily during the summer season. Similarities in stone tools, widespread use of

Ramah chert from northern Labrador, and the presence of exotic southern raw materials, including pottery, all suggest a highly mobile population with wide-ranging trade and social contacts.

Site distributions provide important information about the relationship between these early Indian groups and their northern Dorset neighbors. Daniel Rattle and Point Revenge sites are most prevalent on the central coast south of Nain, whereas contemporaneous Dorset sites are found primarily north of Nain and encompass the area of the Ramah chert quarries. While Dorset people would have been eager to protect their access to this important lithic resource, the corner-notched Point Revenge projectile points that form an ad-hoc "trail" between Nain and the Ramah quarries suggest that Indian groups made periodic trips into Dorset territory to obtain this valuable material (fig. 13.15; see Cox, p. 207). Most of these points are solitary finds from obscure, even hidden, locations, that could be interpreted as evidence of clandestine chert-collecting forays into Dorset lands, but the reality might have been quite different. The huge amount of Ramah chert used by Daniel Rattle and Point Revenge groups, and the fact that blocks of this material and points made from it occur at Indian sites far south of Labrador, raise the possibility of systematic trade between early Innu and Dorset peoples.

This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the earlier Daniel Rattle sites are literally paved with Ramah chert. This apparently flagrant disregard of conservative stone-usage practices is dramatically reversed during the late Point Revenge period. By 1300, Indian sites became smaller and the amount of lithic materials was much reduced, suggesting that Ramah chert had become expensive and difficult to acquire. While Ramah chert remained linked to Indian cultural identity, whatever social mechanisms that had existed to facilitate its transportation and distribution to the south appear to have broken down when Dorset people were replaced by the more powerful and aggressive Thule people after about 1350. After this date, in a period of climatic cooling, the Thule expanded rapidly south into former Indian-held territories and took possession of most regions of the northern and central Labrador coast. While the Innu retreated from many of their former coastal regions, they maintained settle-



13.14 INNU TIPI

Innu also used conical spruce-framed tipis, which they covered with caribou hides. Spruce boughs served both as fuel and cushioning material to insulate them from the ground. The Innu rarely left the shelter of the forest, where tent poles were always available, and so they could easily move camp as hunting conditions in the northern forest required.

ments in many of the inner bays south of Nain, as well as on the Labrador interior, an area they continue to use today.

INNU-NORSE CONTACTS

One morning Karlsefni's men saw something shiny above a clearing in the trees, and they called out. It moved and proved to be a one-legged creature, which darted down to where the ship lay tied. Thorvald, Erik the Red's son, was at the helm and the one-legged man shot an arrow into his intestine. Thorvald drew the arrow out and spoke: "A fat paunch that was. We've found a land of fine resources, though we'll hardly enjoy much of them." Thorvald died from the wound shortly after. The one-legged man then ran off back north. They pursued him and caught glimpses of him now and again. He then fled into a cove and they turned back (Hreinsson 1997).

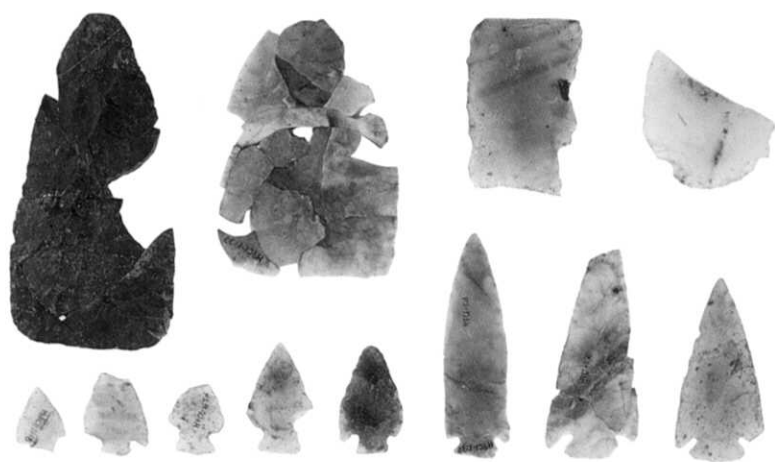
The presence of small Indian parties scattered along the central Labrador coast, from the outermost islands to the innermost sheltered bays, suggests that little in the way of Norse coastal movements would have gone unnoticed, especially as the Norse must have come ashore occasionally for water and food, to explore, or seek shelter in storms. Even if they chose to sail off the coast their passage around prominent headlands would have been easily observed.

A tantalizing suggestion of Norse contact with the Indians of Labrador or Newfoundland is hinted at by a pair of Indian projectile points, stylistically identical to Newfoundland-Labrador specimens, which were recovered from Norse sites in western

Greenland (Berglund 1981; Meldgaard 1961; Rowlett 1982). One made of chert was found in 1930 at Sandnes in the Western Settlement (fig. 17.2); the second, made of quartz, was a stray find recovered from rocks on the shore below the Norse ruins at Brattahlid, the very site from which Thorfinn Karlsefni left on a Vinland expedition in about 1003. Were these projectile points from stray arrows lodged in the deck of a Viking boat or in one of the Vikings themselves? Were they trophies gathered from a raid on a *skraeling* camp or were they gifts cautiously exchanged?

It would not have been until midsummer that the pack ice cleared off the Labrador coast sufficiently to enable the Norse voyagers to make their way south. Borne along by the two- to three-knot Labrador current and accompanied by the still massive icebergs from Greenland, Norse mariners would have passed the bleak, stony coastline of Baffin Island and northern Labrador and moved south along the wooded coasts of central Labrador and across the Strait of Belle Isle to Newfoundland. In Newfoundland the air was warmer; there were forests close at hand; and berries, birds, and fish were abundant. It was here that the Norse established at least one short-lived settlement in North America. While they may have made their initial landfall in quiet seclusion, it would not have been long before their presence was known to the native inhabitants of Newfoundland.

At the time of the Vinland voyages, Newfoundland was the home of an Indian people who were probably ancestors of the Beothuk. The Beothuk have the dubious distinction of being perhaps the first Indian people encountered by Europeans, as well as among the first to be exterminated: the last known member of their society died in captivity in 1829 (Howley 1915; Marshall 1996). Like the Innu, the Beothuk lived in small, dispersed family bands pursuing a seasonal round that included salmon fishing and caribou hunting in the interior of the island and seal hunting, fishing, and birding on the coast. Communal hunts in which the Beothuk drove caribou into elaborate systems of fences and traps would have been the occasion of much celebration and enabled large groups to spend the winter season together (fig. 13.16). The archaeological culture that occupied Newfoundland at this



13.15 POINT REVENGE ARTIFACTS

Point Revenge Indians, who lived in Labrador at the time of the Vinland voyages, made knives and points from Ramah chert, a translucent stone found north of the forest boundary in northern Labrador. These points are very similar to the arrow point (fig. 17.2) found at the Norse cemetery in Sandnes, Greenland.

time is known as the Little Passage Complex (Pastore 1992), but to date no archaeological evidence has been found in their sites that indicates contact with the Norse. Their way of life and technology were similar to the late prehistoric Indians of Labrador, and they sometimes made tools from Ramah chert, indicating contacts with mainland peoples to the north.

Farther south in the Canadian Maritimes and along the Gulf of Maine dwelt a succession of other Indian groups, the ancestors of the Micmac, Maliseet, and Eastern Abenaki (Bourque 1989; Prinns 1996; Sanger 1987). All these peoples were skilled hunters and fishermen whose populations were generally larger and more settled than that of their neighbors to the north. An abundance of shellfish, rich inshore fisheries, and the possibility of growing garden crops such as maize and squash provided resources for substantially larger populations than were possible among the hunting societies of the northern coasts (fig. 13.17). Norse voyagers appearing in any of the territories south of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence during the summer boating season would have discovered these coasts to be filled with Indian villages in nearly every bay and river mouth. Had they traveled west toward the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River they would have encountered an even more formidable force than the coastal Algonquians—the Iroquois, who were then aggressively expanding eastward into Algonquian territories.

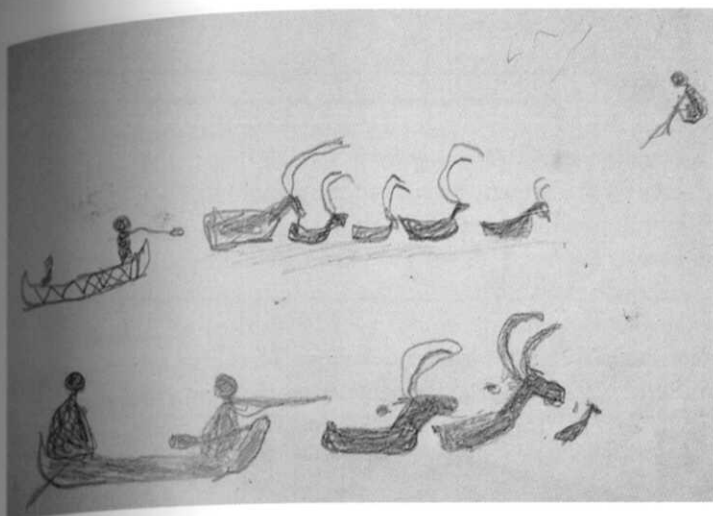
Throughout the maritime northeast all coastal peoples shared a common focus on the sea as a provider of foods, material goods, and social exchange. It is through such an elaborate system of exchange, perhaps linked

to ritual celebrations and gatherings, that materials and objects traveled great distances. The one unequivocal Viking artifact to be recovered south of Newfoundland is a Norwegian penny minted between 1065 and 1080 that was excavated from the Goddard site, a fourteenth-century Late Woodland Indian encampment near Naskeag Point on the central Maine coast (Bourque and Cox 1981). Because the coin (p. 206) was perforated for use as an ornament or pendant and because the site also contained artifacts (a Dorset graver, jadeite knife, and flakes of Ramah chert) from Labrador, it is thought that the coin may have been traded south to Maine together with these other exotic northern materials (see Cox, sidebar, p. 206).

CONCLUSION

The sagas tell of battles fought, of enemies slain, of lands discovered, and heroes fallen. But the peaceful encounters and successful trade, if they occurred, seem not to have been epic events worthy of song and scribe. It was only the unusual, the extraordinary, superlative, and noteworthy events that the Norse recorded. And even then, it was sometimes a century or more before these oral histories were committed to paper, their details fading from memory and lost or embellished as tales were told and retold. While the sagas tell of great men and women and their deeds, they provide surprisingly little information about those whom the Norse met on the shores of North America, though some interpretation suggestive of distinctions derived from Indian and Inuit ethnography is possible (Collins 1970). While archaeology has given us a good sense of who the *skraeling* were, we are left to wonder how and to what extent they interacted with the newcomers from Greenland.

In the North Atlantic, as in other parts of the world, popular imagination has sought to distill the drama of contact between members of different cultures into simple themes—hostility or peace, trade or conquest—but the reality is doubtless more nuanced, contingent on the vagaries of circumstance, the idiosyncratic personalities of individual actors, and on their perceptions of those they encountered. The on-the-ground reality is that individuals, rather than entire cultures, came into contact during the Norse visits to the New World. When they met, each sought to make sense of the situation through refer-



13.16 INNU CARIBOU HUNT

Innu hunters in birchbark canoes took caribou when the animals crossed the lakes and rivers in Labrador during their annual migrations. This drawing was made by an Innu for William Duncan Strong in Labrador during the winter of 1928 to illustrate their method of hunting caribou.

13.17 INNU LEAVING CAMP

Birchbark canoes could carry several people or hundreds of pounds of cargo. Their lightweight design allowed the Innu to travel the rivers and lakes of interior Labrador and portage the canoes with relative ease. The *Vinland Sagas* do not mention bark canoes, but they note *skraeling* (natives) used hide boats and double-bladed paddles—cultural elements that are more descriptive of Inuit than of Indian watercraft.



ence to what he (or she) knew from firsthand experience or had heard of the other. As they negotiated these encounters, each person probably sought some self-perceived advantage as defined in their own cultural terms. In some instances, these advantages would have been material—for example, the acquisition of ivory, iron, or strips of red cloth. At the same time, they may have been geopolitical, involving the earliest attempts by native people to control access to European goods.

Over the four centuries or so that they remained in Greenland, the Norse continued to make periodic trips to the west, occasionally encountering native peoples. Whether these ventures were planned in part to take advantage of trading opportunities is not known, but the growing number of Norse objects being found in Dorset and Thule sites during the past three decades suggests that contacts between these groups were not uncommon (Sutherland, this volume). Like

the Maine penny, most of these finds or the sites in which they have been found postdate the period of the Vinland voyages. For the native people living along the shores of the North Atlantic, the Norse were only one of several ethnically distinct peoples who traveled along the coast to trade or make war.

While much remains unknown about the frequency and particulars of Norse voyages to the shores of North America, it seems apparent that their presence west of Greenland was never more than ephemeral. Incidents of contact may have had profound effects on individual lives on all sides of the cultural divide but in the aggregate, their arrival does not seem to have altered the history of native peoples or changed their cultures in any way. One thing it certainly did do, however, was to acquaint Native Americans with the ways and means of Europeans with whom they would be dealing more extensively in future centuries.

A Norse Penny from Maine BY STEVEN L. COX

On the morning of September 13, 1956, Guy Mellgren and Ed Runge, two avocational archaeologists from Massachusetts, were digging in a shell midden at Naskeag Harbor in the town of Brooklin along Penobscot Bay on the central Maine coast. One of the onlookers, DeWitt Goddard, mentioned that he thought there was an Indian site on his property at the tip of Naskeag Point and invited them over to look.

The two men started digging into the very black soil, and as soon as they stripped off the sod they were rewarded by the sight of a thick concentration of flakes, artifacts, and pottery sherds in a rich black-soil midden. By the time they had to leave Maine two days later they had collected about 375 artifacts, exclusive of pottery fragments, from the Goddard site.

Mellgren and Runge had stumbled on the richest site in coastal Maine and perhaps in New England. Not only was it tremendously rich in artifacts from a variety of time periods, it was situated at one of the most beautiful locations on the Maine coast, overlooking broad expanses of both Penobscot and Blue Hill bays. To the north lies the rich fishing and shell-fishing grounds of Blue Hill Bay, with the mountains of Mount Desert Island looming in the distance; to the southeast are the islands of Penobscot Bay; and to the southwest, the islands surrounding Deer Island, with Isle au Haut in the distance. Virtually all waterborne traffic along this section of the coast travels within view of the site, and during the summer it is a rare day when large yachts or sailing schooners are not in view.

Mellgren and Runge returned to the Goddard site in March of the following year, digging in still-frozen ground, and every year for the next twenty-two years, spending a

week or two of their vacation time. By the end of their last visit to the site in 1978 they had dug more than 2,400 square feet (225 square meters) of the site and had amassed a collection totaling some fifteen thousand stone artifacts and thousands of pottery sherds from more than one thousand prehistoric vessels.

Following their spring trip in 1957, the two men returned again in both July and August. They established a grid and began digging. On August 18, Mellgren found a small silver coin about five inches deep in the midden. He did not think much of the coin at the time, only marking its location on his square map with a "C" but not noting it in his daily journal. Mellgren brought the coin to the American Numismatic Association for identification and was told that it was a British coin dating to the reigns of Stephen and Henry I (1135–1154). This identification was published in a 1958 article on the Goddard site by Mellgren and Runge and in a short 1978 article on the coin by Bert Farmer. Fortunately, a copy of Farmer's article, which included pictures of the coin, was sent to British coin dealer Peter Seaby through the good offices of Riley Sunderland of Bar Harbor, Maine. An expert on British coinage, Seaby immediately recognized that the coin was not British at all but was probably an eleventh-century Norse coin. With this news, the Maine State Museum arranged to have the coin examined by Kolbjørn Skaare, curator of the coin collection at the National Museum of Norway and a leading authority on medieval Norse coinage. Skaare's analysis, including neutron-activation testing of a small piece of the coin, confirmed the coin's identity as a Norwegian penny minted during the period A.D. 1065 to 1080 (Skaare 1979).

Not surprisingly, this news generated a great interest in the Goddard site, and funding was obtained from the Maine state legislature and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for further studies (Bourque and Cox 1981). Inspection of the amateurs' collection indicated that the major occupation dated to the Late Ceramic Period, circa A.D. 900 to 1500 and was characterized by side-notched points, small end scrapers, and pottery decorated by a cord-wrapped stick. Particularly striking in this component was a large number of stone artifacts made of materials foreign to Maine.

We now know that eight centuries or so ago, at the time of the Norse coin's arrival at the site, Naskeag Point was very likely the largest seasonal village in Maine. Occupied yearly from late spring to early fall, the village was an important hub within a broad-ranging native trade network extending northward to Labrador, eastward to Nova Scotia, westward to the Great Lakes, and south at least as far as Pennsylvania (map). The site's strategic location, controlling access to the resources of the Penobscot drainage as well as

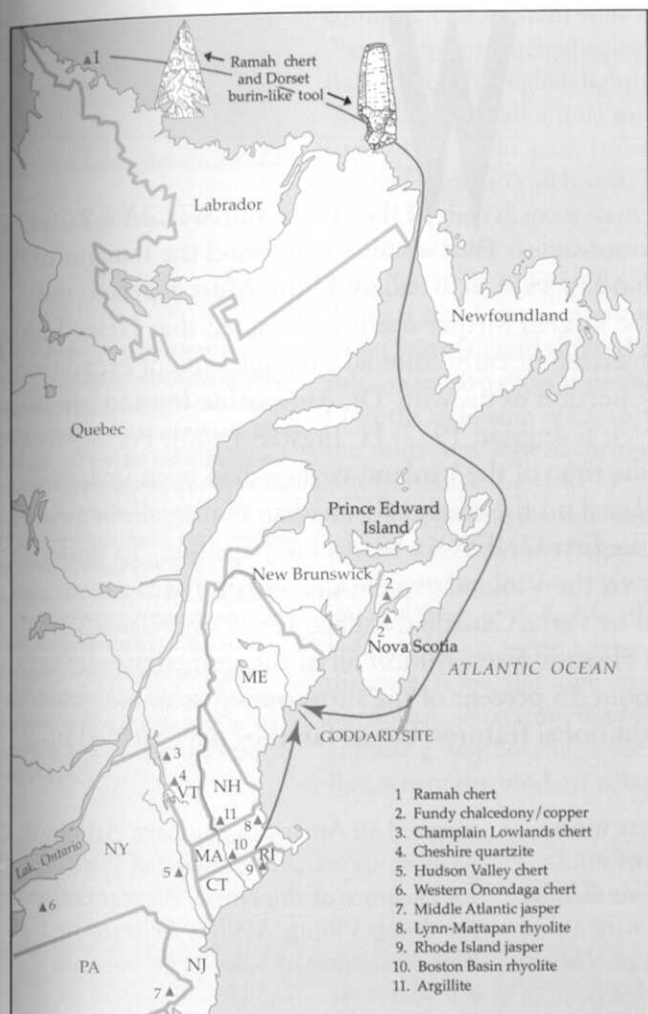


MAINE PENNY

This small coin, minted in Norway between 1065 and 1080 during the reign of King Olaf Kyrre, was excavated on the coast of Maine in 1957. It probably arrived at the Goddard site from Newfoundland or Labrador by way of native trade networks. A small hole had been drilled on one edge, suggesting it had been worn as a pendant or a clothing ornament.

coastal travel routes, put it in a central and probably controlling position within a regional exchange network, which would help explain its large size and rich cultural remains.

Many of the unusual stone artifacts in the collection are from the north, including more than thirty tools and several hundred flakes of Ramah chert, an unusual translucent quartzite-like stone that outcrops only in northern Labrador and was used widely by native coastal peoples



GODDARD SITE TRADE CONTACTS

The Goddard site on the northeast coast of Penobscot Bay, Maine, was one of the most important trade centers in northeastern North America in the centuries before Columbus arrived in the New World. In addition to its famous Norse penny, excavations recovered Labrador or Newfoundland Dorset tools and artifacts made of Labrador Ramah chert, as well as objects traded from the Great Lakes, Pennsylvania, and Nova Scotia.

GODDARD SITE ARTIFACTS

Woodland (Ceramic) period occupation of the Goddard site was contemporaneous with the Point Revenge occupation in central Labrador, and its tools (axes, points, scrapers, knives, and harpoons) show a close cultural relationship. In addition to corner-notched points made from local materials, specimens of translucent Labrador Ramah chert (bottom center) occur as well.

north of Newfoundland. In addition, one the artifacts found by Mellgren was a Labrador or Newfoundland Dorset-culture burinlike tool that had been reworked into an end scraper. The artifact, a tool type used for bone and ivory working by the Dorset people (whose early Eskimo-like culture dates to circa 500 B.C. to A.D. 1200 in Labrador), has highly polished faces and edges. A second possible Eskimo (most likely, Dorset) artifact, a small polished jade knife, was recovered recently during a field school conducted at the site by the Maine State Museum.

It is unlikely that a Dorset Eskimo could have kayaked down to the end of Naskeag Point, and so these artifacts were almost certainly obtained through Indian trade channels that must have extended north to Newfoundland and Labrador, where Dorset people lived side by side with Indians. We suspect the Norse coin, which had been perforated for use as a pendant or a clothing ornament, arrived at the site in a similar manner. There are no other Norse artifacts from the site, and no evidence of a Norse settlement here or elsewhere south of northern Newfoundland. Certainly the Norse could have visited the site; indeed, it would have been a logical place to stop if the Norse were in the region and were interested more in trade than conquest. Perhaps someday the Goddard site on Naskeag Point or some other site in the Maine or Canadian Maritimes region will shed additional light on the events of eight centuries ago, when there must have been rumors of blond or red-haired strangers with pale skin and unusual, dazzling artifacts, fearsome weapons, and huge wooden ships with wings.

