

17 THE NORSE AND NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

BY PATRICIA D. SUTHERLAND



OFFERING A DRINK, HEYNESBÓK

SKRAELING WAS THE DEROGATORY Old Norse word for the aboriginal peoples they encountered in Greenland and further west. During the centuries that the Norse occupied southwestern Greenland and made occasional ventures to the northeastern coasts of North America, that portion of the continent was occupied by three discrete aboriginal populations. The forested coasts extending northward from New England to central Labrador were the homelands of several distinct Indian peoples. These groups were ancestral to the Innu of Labrador, the Beothuk of Newfoundland, and the Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, and other Algonquian-speaking peoples of the lands to the south of the Saint Lawrence River. Iroquoian-speaking communities who occupied the Saint Lawrence Valley upstream from the present location of Quebec City may have made summer visits to the Atlantic coast, as did their sixteenth-century descendants.

The treeless tundra of northern Labrador and the Canadian Arctic islands was the home of a Paleo-eskimo people known as the Dorset culture, ancient inhabitants of the Arctic whose ancestors had pioneered these lands more than four thousand years ago. It may have been the remains of Dorset settlements that Erik the Red discovered during his initial exploration of southwestern Greenland, but archaeological evidence supports the saga statements that native people no longer occupied southwestern Greenland between A.D. 1000 and 1400. Dorset people, however, continued to live in northwestern Greenland, perhaps in pockets along the Greenlandic east coast, the Canadian Arctic islands, and the tundra of northern Labrador and the Ungava Peninsula between the Labrador Sea and Hudson Bay. The Dorset people and their way of life disap-

peared from the Arctic some time between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

At about the same time that the Norse reached Greenland, another aboriginal people known as the Thule culture were moving eastward across Arctic Canada from their homelands in Alaska. During the eleventh or twelfth centuries, these ancestors of the Inuit reached the western shores of Baffin Bay. Here they flourished, gradually displacing the Dorset occupants of the area. By the time the Norse colonies disappeared, the Inuit were in possession of all of Greenland and Arctic Canada.

Norse accounts of contact with aboriginal peoples in North American and Greenland are few and vague (McGhee 1984b, Arneborg 1997). The saga accounts were recorded in writing at least two centuries after the events they report, so we cannot be confident that the brief descriptions of



17.1 "BISHOP OF BAFFIN"

The small wooden doll found in a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Thule Inuit site on southern Baffin Island depicts an individual wearing a long split-fronted robe or tunic with edge trim that closely resembles Norse clothing of the period. A faintly incised cross on the chest has led some to suggest this may be an Inuit depiction of a priest, a missionary, or even a Teutonic knight.

17.2 SANDNES ARROW POINT

This chipped-stone arrowhead was found near the cemetery at Sandnes, the location in Greenland's Western Settlement from which the Eriksson family staged their Vinland voyages. Of a type of stone unknown in Greenland but common to Labrador and Newfoundland Indian cultures of A.D. 1000, this small find indicates direct contact between Vikings and Native North Americans. Perhaps it was even brought to Greenland in the body of a Norseman.

aboriginal people, their boats, weapons, or ways of life were accurately preserved through generations of oral transmission. The annals and other accounts that record events during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries were written shortly after the events that they reported, but their reliability may be distorted by political or religious considerations related to the motives for recording the events (see Sigurðsson, chapter 16). In general, the historical records deriving from the Norse colonies can only be considered as indicating when and where some contacts occurred between Norse and aboriginals and providing hints as to the nature of some of these meetings. We must assume that other unrecorded contacts did occur, and perhaps only encounters of a certain nature were thought worthy of record.

The Norse applied the term *skraeling* to all the aboriginal groups they met in the New World, including both those encountered during the early Norse voyages to Vinland and Markland and those who moved into Greenland between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. One of the tasks of archaeology, therefore, is to determine which aboriginal populations encountered the Norse and the nature of the relationships that developed at different places and at different periods. The encounters are best summarized in terms of the four geographical areas the Norse occupied or explored in the northwestern Atlantic: Greenland, Helluland, Markland, and Vinland. Each of these areas had a distinct history of aboriginal contact, with encounters occurring at different periods in the history of Norse occupation, involving different peoples, and probably producing quite different results.

MARKLAND AND VINLAND: CONTACT WITH INDIANS

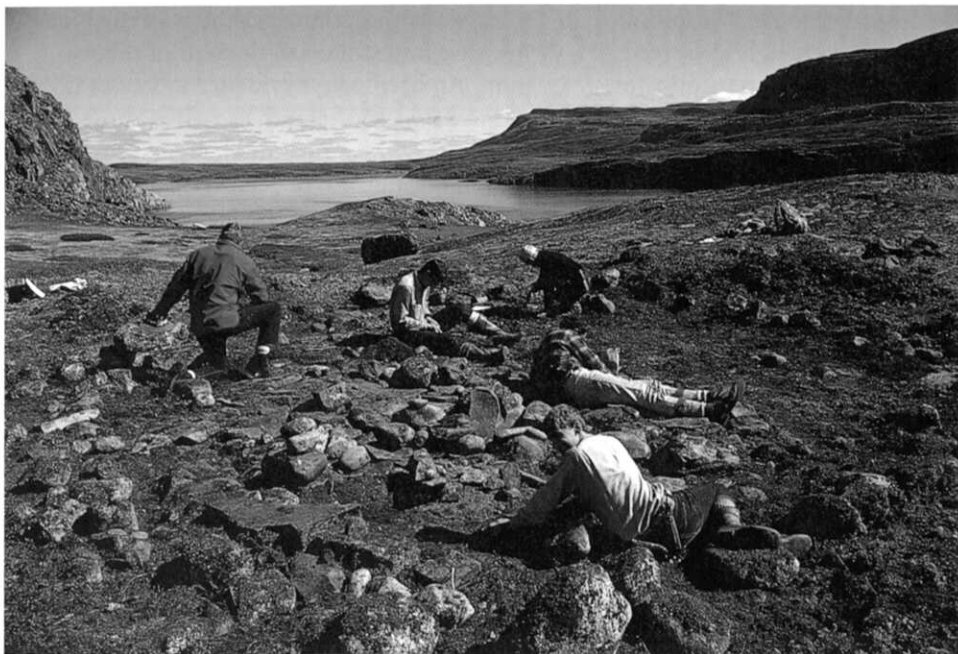
The first recorded contact with Indians occurred around A.D. 1000 in the forested areas named Markland and Vinland during the early Norse voyages of exploration to the west and south of Greenland. The saga descriptions relate to meetings in the vicinity of the Norse stations in Vinland involving trade followed by skirmishes with the natives, and it is clear that the presence of a hostile native

force was an important element in the Norse decision to abandon settlement of the region. Archaeological evidence indicates that the *skraeling* of Vinland, as well as those whom the Norse encountered and fought in Markland, must have been Indians and probably ancestors of the Newfoundland Beothuk and the Labrador Innu. Norse exploration parties probably encountered other groups during voyages around the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. These would have included ancestral Micmac and Maliseet or even Iroquois encountered during summer hunting or trading journeys to the Strait of Belle Isle and the Gaspé. Indian populations around the Gulf of Saint Lawrence must have been significantly larger than those that would have been met along the subarctic coasts of Labrador and Newfoundland, and the Norse would have been extremely cautious in dealing with such groups.

Archaeological evidence relating to Indian-Norse contact is practically nonexistent. Although archaeological remains of Indian occupation have been found in the vicinity of the Norse settlement at the site of L'Anse aux Meadows, there is no indication that the people who left these remains lived there at the same time as the Norse. The only possible hint of contact comes from a stray archaeological find in Greenland; a stone projectile point, very similar in style and material to those used during this period by Indians of Newfoundland and Labrador, was found eroding in the Norse graveyard at Sandnes in the Western Settlement (fig. 17.2) (Roussel 1936: 106).

Perhaps the absence of archaeological evidence of contact in North American sites is not due to chance. As will be seen later, a relatively low-level relationship between the Norse and the Inuit in Arctic Canada resulted in the transfer of metal and other European artifacts into native hands, and this material has been widely recovered from archaeological sites. If Norse-Indian encounters had been relatively extensive, a similar result would be expected. It therefore seems quite possible that Norse-Indian contact was no more extensive than that which was actually





**17.3, 17.4 RICHMOND GULF
PENDANT**

This pendant (fig. 17.4) made from reworked Norse copper was found at a twelfth-century site on the east coast of Hudson Bay (fig. 17.3). One of the first Norse-related objects found in a Dorset site in the Canadian Arctic, it was probably transported to Hudson Bay through native trade networks from Labrador or Baffin Island, where Norse contacts would have been more likely to occur.

described in the *Vinland Saga* accounts: brief attempts to trade quickly undermined by misunderstandings and outbreaks of violence. Such situations would have been exacerbated by the fact that the Norse in Markland and Vinland were far from their Greenlandic home base. Norse exploration parties in these distant regions would have been small relative to the size of communities they would have encountered in Indian lands. In these lands, the Icelanders and Greenlanders would have found themselves in an alien forested environment, which must have contributed to their unease and insecurity. Contacts between Norse and Indians may have been limited to rare and cautious encounters, and the one archaeological hint of such contact—the projectile point from the graveyard at Sandnes—may be an accurate reflection of the nature of relations between the two peoples.

**HELLULAND: CONTACT WITH DORSET
PALEO-ESKIMOS**

The slight historical evidence for later Norse voyages to North America is limited to an account of a small Greenlandic ship being storm-driven to Iceland in 1347 while on a voyage from Markland. It has been suggested that the motive for such voyages was most likely the acquisition of timber for Greenlandic construction needs (Seaver 1999). Logging expeditions would most likely have been directed to the most northerly forested

regions of the Labrador coast, adjacent to the tundra regions occupied at the time by Dorset peoples, that were probably a portion of the treeless country the Norse named Helluland. Contact between Norse and the Dorset occupants of these regions is evidenced by two archaeological finds of small objects made from smelted copper, products of a technology unknown to aboriginal peoples of northern North America. One object was recovered from a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Dorset site in Richmond Gulf on the eastern coast of Hudson Bay (fig. 17.4) (Harp 1974–75) and the other from a similar site on Hudson Strait (Plumet 1982: 262).

A coin recovered from an Indian settlement site on the coast of Maine was at first thought to be further evidence of Norse-Indian trade and possibly as evidence that the Norse had penetrated regions as far south as coastal New England. The Goddard site, where the coin was found, represents the remains of what may have been the largest coastal settlement in Maine at the time of the Norse voyages (Bourque and Cox 1981; Cox, sidebar, p. 206). The coin, however, probably does not represent evidence that the Norse traveled this far to the south of Greenland. The specimen is a Norse penny minted between 1065 and 1080, more than fifty years later than the Vinland voyages recorded in Icelandic sagas. Reexcavation of the Goddard site, which was probably occu-



17.5



17.6

17.5, 17.6 WOODEN FIGURINES

This figure, which has been symbolically killed by having a hole gouged through its body, may have been made by a shaman to cause injury to the person or spirit represented. The horned figure (fig. 17.6) reveals the Dorset artist's ability to draw inspiration from raw material, in this case the potential of eroded driftwood.

piated during the thirteenth century as well as at other times according to radiocarbon dates, yielded evidence that the occupants of the site chipped some of their stone tools from Ramah chert, a particularly valuable type of stone that derives from a quarry in northern Labrador. At this time the region was in the hands of the Dorset, who must have traded local resources with their Indian neighbors to the south. The northern Labrador stone supplies, the Norse penny, and two distinctive Dorset artifacts also found on the site in Maine must have reached its occupants through an extensive trade network leading from the north (Bourque and Cox 1981). The penny probably reached North America on a Norse ship and passed into Dorset hands somewhere on the coast of Labrador, either through trade or as the result of a skirmish with a shore party. It then could have been traded southward to Indian groups, along with a shipment of stone.

Contacts between the Norse and the Dorset occupants of northern Labrador may have begun significantly earlier than the date of the Norse penny. A small soapstone lamp carved in a characteristically Dorset form (fig. 14.20), which was associated with the

Norse remains at L'Anse aux Meadows, provides evidence of such encounters. The Dorset people had deserted Newfoundland and southern Labrador several centuries before the arrival of the Norse in the region, and this lamp is most readily explained as an object the Norse obtained from the Dorset or from an abandoned Dorset site in northern Labrador or the eastern arctic prior to a visit to the Newfoundland settlement (Ingstad 1985: 92, 217).

Norse contact with Dorset people was not limited to Labrador. A nearly ten-foot (three-meter) length of yarn spun from the fur of arctic hare was recovered from a Late Dorset dwelling at a site on northern Baffin Island. Spinning was not a part of the technology of northern aboriginal peoples, suggesting that this specimen originated in a European community. This supposition is supported by the identification of several goat hairs in the yarn and by the discovery of very similar cloth made of yarn spun from hare fur and goat hair from Gård Under Sandet (Farm Beneath the Sand), a Norse farm site in the Western Settlement of Greenland (Rogers 1998, 1999; Berglund, this volume). The acquisition by the Dorset people of a length of spun yarn hints at a form of contact more complex than a simple trade in useful metal objects.

Far to the north, a piece of smelted iron appears to be associated with the Late Dorset occupation of a site on Axel Heiberg Island on the extreme northwestern fringes of Dorset habitation. Together with material of Norse origin recently recovered from a Late Dorset site in northwestern Greenland (Appelt et al. 1998), as well as the yarn from Baffin Island, this find suggests that contacts between the Norse and Dorset people, although probably infrequent, must have occurred over a wide area from Labrador to the High Arctic.

Another archaeological hint of such contact appears in the occasional representation of Europeanlike faces in the art of the Dorset. The Dorset people produced numerous small sculptures in ivory, antler, or wood representing a wide range of animals and humans or humanlike creatures (fig. 13.5). The art seems to have been intimately associated with their shamanistic religious beliefs and view of the world, and among their work are several forms of artifacts that may have been the equipment of shamanic



17.7



17.8

17.7, 17.8 DORSET FACES

Simply rendered human faces on bone, antler, and ivory are a common theme in Dorset art. This antler beam from a Bathurst Island site reveals an amusing Dorset profile (fig. 17.7), while the weathered bone from Axel Heiberg Island has a more typical stylized Dorset face (fig. 17.8).

practitioners. One such recurring artifact is in the form of a billet of antler, or occasionally of wood, containing relief carvings of human faces (figs. 17.6–17.8). The carvings on these batons depict a range of images, but a distinctive long and narrow face with a prominent straight nose and occasional hints of a beard appears on several specimens, one of which came from the same Baffin Island winter house that produced the piece of Norse yarn. It is tempting to suggest that these portrayals may represent the strangers who occasionally landed on the coasts inhabited by the Dorset people.

A possible early meeting with Dorset inhabitants of the barren east coast of Greenland may be described in *Saga of the People of Floi*, an account generally considered to incorporate much fictional material. There is also a possibility that some of the saga descriptions of *skraeling* whom the Norse encountered in Markland while on their Vinland voyages may refer to Dorset people. Aside from these, none of the encounters with *skraeling* mentioned in Norse sagas or annals can be convincingly interpreted as representing contact with Dorset

groups. Yet if the Norse made occasional visits to Labrador over a period of two or three centuries to obtain timber or other commodities, they would have sailed along the shores of Baffin Island and northern Labrador, areas occupied by Dorset people until the fourteenth century. Some communication with the Norse would seem to have been likely, and the archaeological finds noted earlier suggest that such contacts could have occurred sporadically from perhaps the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. These two peoples may have been more predisposed to establish a trading relationship than would the Norse and Indians. Both the Dorset and the Norse were comfortable in the tundra environments where such meetings would have occurred, and Dorset populations were sparse enough in many regions that they would not have threatened small Norse exploration or trading parties.

HELLULAND AND GREENLAND: CONTACT WITH THE INUIT

The most prolonged and probably the most extensive contact was to occur with the third group of aboriginals whom the Norse encountered, the Thule people who moved eastward from Alaska to occupy most of Arctic Canada and Greenland at about the same time that the Norse were venturing into the northwestern Atlantic.

The nature and timing of the Inuit expansion into the eastern Arctic is poorly understood. The process must have required a significant duration and comprised several distinct phases. Initially, it was thought that the ancestral Inuit must have moved quickly through the relatively unproductive channels of the central Arctic at some time between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Such a hazardous enterprise must have been propelled by a compelling motive, and it has been suggested that the Inuit of the western Arctic had learned that the eastern Arctic held a source of iron, which was an extremely valuable commodity in early Inuit culture (McGhee 1984c). If this hypothesis is correct, the attracting source may have been either the deposits of meteoritic iron deposits in northwestern Greenland or smelted metal that could be obtained by trade with the Greenlandic Norse. The Inuit of the western Arctic may have learned of either source, as well as of the rich sea-mammal resources of the eastern Arctic, from the Dorset Paleo-



17.9 HOUSE 4, SKRAELING ISLAND

Peter Schledermann's excavation team records the interior of one of the thirteenth-century Thule houses on Skraeling Island, off the east coast of Ellesmere Island, that contained Norse artifacts together with Thule-culture materials.

eskimo occupants of Arctic Canada.

The early Inuit migrants from the western Arctic are known to archaeology as the Thule people. Our views on the nature of relationships between these Thule people and the Dorset, Indian, and Norse peoples whom they encountered in the eastern Arctic are based on our reconstruction of early Inuit social and economic patterns. The Thule people probably lived year-round in small communities with an average population of approximately thirty to fifty people, although larger communities must have existed at locations where food was abundant. Most such communities may have supported at least ten to twenty hunters accustomed to working together and under the direction of an *umalik* (hunting captain). Armed with lances and with bows powered by a cable of twisted sinew, as well as with warlike traditions developed in the large competing communities of coastal Alaska, such a band of warriors would have been a formidable enemy. They could have easily displaced the small and poorly armed communities of Dorset people from prime hunting localities, forcing them to retreat to more marginal areas. They would also have been a fair match for the crews of Greenlandic Norse ships.

In their dealings with the Norse, the Thule people would not have been at any social, cultural, or technological disadvantage with the Norse communities in Greenland. The Norse left no known accounts of possible encounters with the Inuit in Arctic

Canada; the records of contact in Greenland are meager, report only a few instances of hostilities, and are difficult to interpret. In contrast, archaeological evidence demonstrates that material of Norse origin found its way into the hands and the trade routes of the Canadian Arctic Inuit. This evidence suggests that contact may have been considerably more extensive and complex than the few skirmishes mentioned in Norse accounts: discussions center on three quite different scenarios (Arneborg 1996, 1997). The first was the prevailing opinion among archaeologists during the first half of the century, when Inuit occupations had not yet been dated and when evidence of contact was limited to Inuit sites in Greenland. This view was based on the lack of historical records reporting contacts and suggested that Norse material in the hands of Inuit had been scavenged from the abandoned remains of the Norse colonies during the centuries after these colonies disappeared. This hypothesis assumed that Inuit sites containing Norse materials dated to later than the mid-fourteenth century, when historical accounts suggest a general Norse abandonment of the Western Settlement.

The past decades have yielded evidence for an Inuit presence in western Greenland significantly earlier than the disappearance of Norse occupation (Gulløv 1982), suggesting that Norse-Inuit relations must have been more complex than the simple looting of abandoned farms. Inuit sites in Arctic Canada at which Norse materials have been found have been dated to between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and the associated European objects were therefore most probably derived from direct contact between Norse and Inuit. This assumption leads to two alternative scenarios regarding the nature of such contact. On the one hand, it may be suggested that most or all Norse material in the possession of Inuit living far to the north and west of the Norse colonies was obtained as a result of a single event. Perhaps this was a successful attack by Inuit on a Norse ship's crew engaged in exploration or in the exploitation of a distant resource; perhaps the salvage of a wrecked Norse ship engaged in such activity; or perhaps a single major trading encounter occurring somewhere along the coasts of the eastern Arctic (see Schledermann, chapter 18). Alternately, the evidence can be inter-



17.10 a, b



17.11 a, b

**17.10, 17.11 REFASHIONING
NORSE IRON**

Both Dorset and Thule people used meteoritic iron from the Cape York meteor fall in northwest Greenland, but small pieces of Norse iron and copper—when they could be obtained—were easier to make into knives and points. Boat rivets were especially easy to hammer into blades and points.

interpreted as resulting from numerous minor encounters occurring over a period of centuries and in several locations. The spatial and temporal distribution of materials of Norse origin, as well as the nature of such materials, may allow us to assess the relative probability of these alternate explanations.

Material of European origin that probably originated with the Greenlandic Norse has been recovered from the archaeological remains of Thule Inuit settlements across much of the Canadian Arctic (figs. 17.10, 17.11). Unfortunately, precise dates are not known for most of these sites, which have generally been assigned to “Early Thule” or “Classic Thule” phases assumed to have existed between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries A.D. A knife blade of smelted iron has been recovered from a Thule winter

house on the Amundsen Gulf coast of the western Canadian Arctic (David Morrison, personal communication, 1999). This specimen may have been traded across the Bering Strait from Siberia, but it seems equally likely to have reached the area through trade routes from the eastern Arctic. Three small specimens of smelted iron have been found in Thule villages of similar age and located at a similar distance from Greenland on the west coast of Hudson Bay in the central Arctic (McCartney and Mack 1973). To the north, four early Thule winter villages on the southern coasts of Bathurst and Cornwallis islands have yielded several pieces of bronze and smelted copper (Franklin et al. 1981:16; McGhee 1984b: 75-76). Smelted iron objects have been found in Thule sites on Somerset Island (Whitridge 1999), northern Ellesmere Island, and eastern Axel Heiberg Island (Sutherland 1989, 1993).

The dispersion of these materials indicates the existence of widespread trade among the Inuit groups who occupied Arctic Canada during the Thule period, but tell us little about the way in which the metal first came into Inuit possession. The presence of specimens composed of meteoritic iron at most of these sites indicates the existence of trade in metal that originated in northwestern Greenland, the only known source of meteoritic iron in Arctic North America. A parallel route may have existed for the dispersion of Norse materials, perhaps from a single High Arctic source such as that described by Schledermann, chapter 18. The Thule culture sites located in the Bache Peninsula region of Ellesmere Island, and related sites in adjacent regions of northwestern Greenland, have produced the greatest concentration and widest variety of Norse materials known from an Inuit context (fig. 17.9) (Schledermann 1980, 1990). If this concentration is the result of a single event, as Schledermann suggests, then this event may also have provided the source for much of the smelted metal found in Inuit sites elsewhere in Arctic Canada. On the other hand, this diverse collection of metal objects may have derived from a diversity of sources.

A few Inuit sites in Arctic Canada have produced items that have greater potential for information on the nature of Norse-Inuit contact. One such item is a portion of a cast bronze pot excavated from a Thule winter house on the coast of Devon Island's

17.1
Scho
acqu
beca
wou
mate
a De
frag
reco
Late
Gre
199
17.
How
trad
on t
Islar
Why
carr
valu
cho
Stra
eng
trac
val
Skr
lan
fro
vici



17.12

17.13

17.12 BRONZE POT FRAGMENT

Scholars wonder how native people acquired bronze pot fragments because it is not likely that Norse would have traded such valuable materials. This example was found in a Devon Island Thule winter house; a fragment from a different vessel was recovered from a thirteenth-century Late Dorset site in northern Greenland (Arneborg and Gulløv 1998).

17.13 FOLDING BALANCE ARM

How did this fragment of a bronze trader's scale, found in a Thule site on the northwest coast of Ellesmere Island, reach this remote location? Why would a Norseman have carried—and parted with—such a valuable item on a trip into the ice-choked waters of northern Davis Strait? Could Norse have been engaged in formal European-style trade with Thule people? Like the valuables found at Thule sites on Skraeling Island and nearby Greenland, it was more likely obtained from the Norse by some act of violence or disaster than by trade.

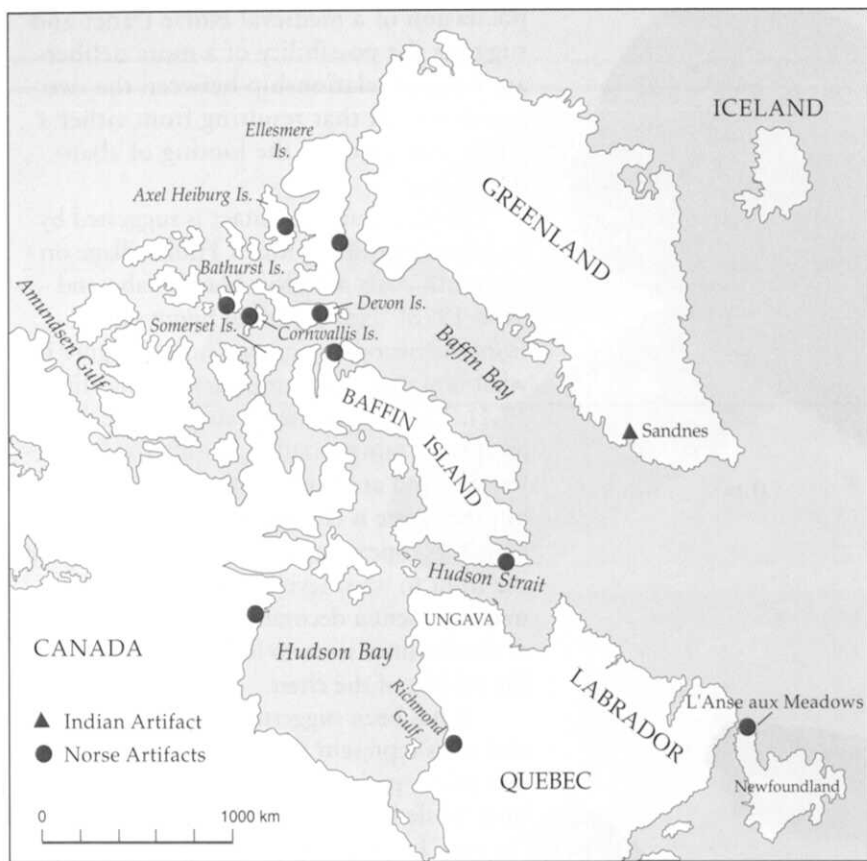
Grinnell Peninsula (fig. 17.12) (McGhee 1984b: 17). This pot appears to be of northern European origin and of a type first produced during the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. If the incident of Norse contact in the High Arctic described by Schledermann occurred during the mid-thirteenth century, this pot may have come into Inuit hands as a result of a later episode and hints at a more complex history of contact with the Norse. Fragments of bronze vessels have also been reported from Thule (Holtved 1944) and Late Dorset (Appelt et al. 1998) occupations in northwestern Greenland.

A Thule site on the northwestern coast of Ellesmere Island provides a further hint at the nature of Norse-Inuit relations. This evidence is in the form of a portion broken from a bronze balance of the type used by traders throughout the Norse world (figs. 6.1, 17.13). The folding-arm design of this balance was in use throughout both the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, but the large size of this specimen is not typical of the earlier centuries of Norse culture. This is a type of artifact we would expect to find in the

possession of a medieval Norse trader and suggests the possibility of a more deliberate form of relationship between the two societies than that resulting from either a single shipwreck or the looting of abandoned farms.

More extensive contact is suggested by an object recovered from a Thule village on the south coast of Baffin Island (Sabo and Sabo 1978). This is a small figure carved from driftwood depicting a human figure in what is apparently European clothing (fig. 17.1). The style of the carving is typical of local Inuit representation, with a flat featureless face and arms reduced to short stumps, but the figure is clothed in a hooded ankle-length European-style cloak or gown split up the front to waist level. Lightly incised lines may represent a decorative edging, and a pair of similar lines seem to indicate a cross on the middle of the chest.

It has been suggested that the gown and cross represent the clothing of a Christian priest, perhaps seen by the Baffin Island Inuit while he was on a missionary visit to the area. Large pectoral crosses do not, however, appear to have been worn by medieval priests but by members of crusading orders (Rousselière 1982). In fact, the costume depicted on this carving could well represent that worn by Teutonic knights during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when the order flourished in northern Europe. As their crusading efforts in Palestine declined, the efforts of the Teutonic knights were concentrated on fighting the Baltic and Slavic peoples bordering their power base in Prussia. During this period, the order attracted itinerant warriors from across northern Europe and served a diversity of religious and political causes. The growing influence of the Hanseatic cities in Norwegian trade after the establishment of their base at Bergen in 1344 may have provided the opportunity for individuals of this order to become involved in Norse matters. It would not seem impossible that such individuals would be attracted to missions organized to defend or rescue Greenlandic Christianity, such as those hinted at in fourteenth-century records. It is generally thought that expeditions such as that called for in 1355 by King Magnus Eriksson did not actually occur (Jones 1986: 101; Seaver 1996:111). However, a possible representation of a Teutonic knight from the eastern coast of Arctic Canada may suggest that this view should be reconsidered.



NORSE ARTIFACTS IN NORTH AMERICA

CONCLUSION

The sagas and other records written by early Icelandic historians make no distinction between the three quite different aboriginal populations whom the Norse met in northeastern North America. All are called by the disparaging term *skraeling*, and the sagas and annals refer only to occasional antagonistic encounters.

The archaeological evidence suggests a more complex series of relationships involving all three northern aboriginal populations and taking different forms in each of the regions the Norse occupied or visited at different times. The earliest contacts may have been with Indian inhabitants of Vinland encountered in the decades around 1000 during the early period of Norse exploration. Archaeological information relating to such contacts is practically nonexistent, providing slight confirmation for the saga accounts of brief and hostile meetings between Indians and Norse. No archaeological finds hint at Norse penetration of regions to the south or west of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, and in fact the evidence for relatively dense Indian populations in these lands strongly suggests that the Norse would have been wary of visiting such regions.

Contact with the Dorset peoples of Arctic Canada may have begun during the early Vinland voyages and seems to have continued at least occasionally for the following two or three centuries. These encounters most likely took place along the eastern coasts of the Arctic Archipelago and the adjacent treeless regions of northern Labrador and may have been incidental to Norse expeditions in search of timber, bog iron, or other materials unavailable in the Greenlandic environment. The Norse may have been tempted to contact Dorset groups to trade small amounts of metal for walrus ivory, narwhal tusks, furs, or other products of value in Greenland and Europe. The small amount of Norse metal recovered to date from the remains of Dorset settlements suggests, however, that if such trade did occur, it was not significant to either party.

The most extensive and enduring relationships between the Norse and aboriginal Americans appear to have been those that developed with the Inuit who immigrated to Arctic Canada, and subsequently to Greenland, during the period of Norse occupation. These were the *skraeling* who were first mentioned in Icelandic records as newcomers to the Norse hunting grounds in the mid-thirteenth century and who later are reported to have moved southward to the vicinity of the Greenlandic Norse colonies. The archaeology of Inuit settlements confirms this general picture, although suggesting that the date of Inuit arrival in the eastern Arctic was earlier than is indicated by Norse accounts.

The first contact between Inuit and Norse may have occurred in the far north, as suggested by Norse historical records, and this event may have resulted in the concentration of Norse materials found in the thirteenth-century Inuit villages of northwestern Greenland and eastern Ellesmere Island. Inuit groups may have been attracted southward into Greenland by the opportunities to trade with the Norse inhabitants, and the most extensive relationships between the two groups must have occurred along Greenland's western coast during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The widespread distribution of materials of Norse origin in the Inuit settlements of this period in Arctic Canada hints at another set of contacts, however, that may have occurred along the western coasts of Baffin Bay. Norse voyages to this region continued until at least the mid-four-

Summary of archaeological evidence of contact between Norse and Native North Americans, with an estimate of the century during which the contact probably occurred. Locations of North American finds are indicated on the map, p. 246. Date estimates are based on calibrated radiocarbon dates, stylistics, and literary records.

Century	Norse/Indian	Norse/Dorset	Norse/Inuit
11?	Stone weapon point from graveyard at Sandnes, Greenland		
11		Soapstone lamp at L'Anse aux Meadows	
11-13		Iron fragment, Axel Heiberg Island	
12-13		Copper amulet, east coast Hudson Bay	
12-13		Copper fragment, south coast Hudson Strait	
12-13			Norse coin at Goddard site, Maine
13			Norse material from Bache Peninsula sites
12-14			Iron knife blade, Amundsen Gulf coast
12-14			Iron fragments, west coast Hudson Bay
14?			Metal fragments, central High Arctic sites
13-14			Bronze pot fragment, Devon Island
13-14			Bronze balance fragment, Ellesmere Island
13-14			Iron specimens, extreme High Arctic sites
13-14			Carving of European, south coast Baffin Island

teenth century, and the occasional meetings the Norse had probably undertaken with the earlier Dorset occupants of this region may have been continued with their Inuit successors. The Inuit were accomplished sea-mammal hunters and had access to supplies of walrus ivory, walrus hides, and other materials extremely valuable to the Norse. Like their descendants of later centuries, they were probably willing to trade this material for small pieces of iron, bronze, or copper, which was a scarce and necessary raw material for the cutting tools and weapons of Inuit technology.

A regular and extensive trade probably never developed between the two peoples, but it seems likely that over a period of two centuries the Norse and the Inuit of the eastern Arctic came to know one another and took occasional opportunities to profit from a trade beneficial to both parties. The Greenlandic Norse must have known the *skraeling* of Arctic Canada as more than a threat to landing parties or prey for Norse attackers.

The Inuit must have appreciated the benefits of dealing with the strangers who arrived in wooden ships and whom they probably knew as *qadlunat*, a term universally applied to Europeans when they once again arrived in the Arctic. When Martin Frobisher's exploration parties visited Arctic Canada in the 1570s, probably little more than a century after the Norse colonies disappeared, the Inuit of Baffin Island appeared familiar with Europeans as either trading partners or coastal raiders (Seaver 1999).

The archaeological and historical records can do no more than hint at the nature of relationships between the Norse and the aboriginal peoples of northeastern North America. Yet these hints point in a consistent direction: toward a suggestion that over a period of several centuries these peoples knew one another and knew of both the dangers and the benefits of meeting with strangers whose cultures had developed on opposite sides of the world.