Diamond Jenness

An Appreciation

When Diamond Jenness accepted an invitation to serve as ethnologist on the Canadian Arctic Expedition under the direction of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, in 1913, he faced a challenge and an opportunity rarely offered a 20th century anthropologist. He was to make a three-year study of the Copper Eskimos around Coronation Gulf, a virtually unknown people who had been brought to the attention of the scientific world only two years previously through the investigations of Stefansson. An account of Jenness' introduction to Arctic anthropology — of his first year among the Eskimos of northern Alaska and his two years with the Copper Eskimos, the impressive results of these three year's work, and of his many other noteworthy accomplishments — has been given elsewhere (*Arctic* 23:71-81, June 1970). Suffice it to say here that the Copper Eskimos, the least known of all Eskimo tribes and the last to be studied while their native culture was still intact, became, through the works of Jenness and Stefansson, the most thoroughly documented of any Eskimo group. This was due to Jenness' industry and perseverence under the most difficult of field situations, and to a deep understanding of the Eskimos and their way of life obtained from observing and sharing the vissicitudes of their day to day existence through all seasons of the year. Another reason why Jenness was able to accomplish as much as he did was his virtuosity as a scientist, for he was that rare phenomenon, the all round anthropologist, with professional competence in all branches of the discipline.

At the conclusion of his Arctic field work in 1916 Jenness joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and saw active duty as a gunner with the Field Artillery in World War I. His war duties over, he returned to Ottawa as Anthropologist on the staff of the National Museum, and immersed himself in the task of

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preparing reports on his field work among the Copper Eskimos (1914-16) and the North Alaskan Eskimos (1913-14), to be published as Reports of the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18. First to appear was his monograph *The Copper Eskimos,* 1923, the first part of which, *The Life of the Copper Eskimos,* 277 p., is one of the classics of ethnographic literature, still regarded as the best description of any Eskimo tribe. Part B, *Physical Characteristics of the Copper Eskimos,* 60 p., described measurements and physiological observations on 126 individuals, the first anthropometric data to be recorded for a Canadian Eskimo population. This basic monograph was followed by a more popular but no less authentic and vivid account of the Copper Eskimos (*People of the Twilight,* 1928.)

Eskimo songs which Jenness had recorded on a phonograph were published in text, translation, and musical transcription and analysis in *Songs of the Copper Eskimos* (with Helen H. Roberts), 505 p., 1925; the 137 songs recorded and analyzed in this volume represent the largest collection of songs from any Eskimo area. Jenness' data on folk-lore and linguistics of the North Alaskan and Copper Eskimos were published in other Reports of the Canadian Arctic Expedition: *Myths and traditions from Northern Alaska, the Mackenzie Delta and Coronation Gulf,* 90 p., 1926; *Eskimo String Figures,* 90 p., 1926; *Comparative Vocabulary of the Western Eskimo Dialects,* 134 p., 1928; *Grammatical Notes on some Western Eskimo Dialects,* 34 p., 1944. His last major contribution to Copper Eskimo ethnology was *Material Culture of the Copper Eskimos,* 148 p., 1946. A still later volume, *Dawn in Arctic Alaska,* University of Minnesota Press, 1957, describes his first year in the Arctic among the Eskimos of Northern Alaska.

Jenness' archaeological publications were few and short, but they exerted a profound influence on Eskimo prehistory. He discovered the two oldest cultures then known from the Arctic — the Dorset culture in the East and the Old Bering Sea in the West ("A new Eskimo culture in Hudson Bay", *Geographical Review,* Vol. 15, No. 3, 1925, and "Archaeological investigations in Bering Strait", National Museum of Canada, Bulletin 50, 1926). His penetrating insight into the problems of Eskimo prehistory is further exemplified in short summary articles such as "Ethno-

logical problems of Arctic America," American Geographical Society, Special Publication No. 7, 1928; "The problem of the Eskimo", in *The American Aborigines, their Origin and Antiquity,* edited by Diamond Jenness, University of Toronto Press, 1933; "Prehistoric culture waves from Asia to America", Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report, 1940.

Jenness made field studies among a number of Canadian Indian tribes and published numerous papers on their ethnology, history and economy. His *Indians of Canada,* 1931, is the only comprehensive work on the Canadian aborigines as a whole, Indian and Eskimo, covering all aspects of their culture, historical background, and economic status.

After his retirement from the National Museum of Canada Jenness was again active in a military role, serving as Deputy Director of Intelligence for the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II, an assignment made primarily in recognition of his intimate knowledge of the Arctic, then becoming an area of strategic importance as air bases, radar and weather stations were being established throughout the Canadian North. From 1943 to 1946 he was Chief of the Inter-Service Topographical Section of the Department of Defence and later was responsible for creation of the Geographical Bureau, of which he was the first Director. Years earlier he had been directly responsible for the passage of Canada's Ordinance for the protection of archaeological sites in the Northwest Territories.

Dr. Jenness was a modest and quiet man, who seldom busied himself with professional affairs. Yet many honours came to him, including the Order of Canada, his country's highest, and honorary doctorates from five universities. And his colleagues elected him to the three highest offices in the profession — President of the American Anthropological Association, President of the Society for American Archaeology, and Vice-president of Section H (Anthropology), American Association for the Advancement of Science.

It seems fitting and in keeping with the character of the man that Jenness should devote his last years of research, long after his retirement, to an exhaustive study of the economic status of the

present day Eskimos and the question of their survival in the rapidly changing world of the 20th century. In a series of monographs published by the Arctic Institute of North America between 1962 and 1968, under the prosaic title of *Eskimo Administration,* Jenness traced the historical background of Eskimo-white contacts throughout the Arctic and examined the various policies of Eskimo education and administration in Alaska, Northern Canada, Labrador, and Greenland, with a critical and judicious appraisal of their accomplishments and failures. Accepting the Greenland model as the only successful one, he shows conclusively that the traditional Eskimo way of life, in Canada especially, is no longer possible, on a broad scale, under present conditions. He outlines the measures that must be taken if the Eskimos are to survive in an environment so greatly changed, and offers a program to ensure their livelihood and future existence as first-class citizens. Government administrators responsible for the education and welfare of the Eskimos are fortunate indeed to have this searching analysis of the problems Government must face, from a man whose knowledge of these problems and the means of surmounting them, was second to none.

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