

The Eskimos. Kaj BIRKET-SMITH, Forward by C. Daryll FORDE, Translated from the Danish by W.E. CALVERT, revised by C. Daryll FORDE, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1959. XV, 262 pp., 67 illustrations and 3 appendices.

This is the revised and enlarged edition of a 1936 text by the doyen of arctic ethnographers. It is based on wide personal field experience and a broad knowledge of the pertinent literature. Most aspects of Eskimo anthropology are covered in a remarkably rich summary. While it is not, unfortunately, the "best of Birket-Smith," it does several things. Among them, it corrects many misconceptions, including the common classroom error that Eskimo culture is homogeneous. Distinguishing varieties of Eskimo culture is one of the book's basic themes.

The ten major chapters deal with the discovery and conditions of the country, "Outer Character and Inner Qualities," the language, the food quest, "Fighting the Cold," The Society," "View of Life," prehistory, and the Eskimo-white contact. These are preceded by an excellent "Introductory," and followed by appendices summarizing Eskimo tribal groups, noting some rules of pronunciation, and providing a general bibliography.

The chapter, "Outer Character and Inner Qualities" is perhaps the least astute. The author's concept of "race," although unstated, seems to require refurbishing and poorly supported arguments are occasionally evident. After Collins' comments on the matter one is surprised to see the distinctive Eskimo mandibular morphology attributed to diligent chewing. It is surprising also to read (page 37) the unsupported statement that the Australian aborigines, "physically seem to occupy a lower stage than the rest of mankind." The few pages on "Inner Qualities" are well-motivated and offered with clearly-stated reservations. Nevertheless they will form a trying passage for any personality-culture specialist. The reference to McDougall's instinct theory will seem anachronistic to many, especially "the instinct of subjection" (page 52). On page 51, one reads, "A primitive trait which must not be forgotten is an often rather pronounced lack of self-control and a consequent absence of the feeling of responsibility." Page 53 notes that, "The Eskimos are easily influenced..." Page 54 adds, "The lack of any feeling of responsibility can make them cold-blooded witnesses of murder..." Conversely on page 55, the writer observes, "They are individualists insofar as nothing is considered more repulsive than aggressiveness and violence, while on the other hand, far-reaching helpfulness among campfellows is an inevitable duty."

The chapter "Origin and Development of Eskimo Culture" has been greatly revised but the result is rather a Cretan labyrinth with the inland origin hypothesis at its centre in the rôle of minotaur. It is some 35 years since Birket-Smith presented the most developed statement of that hypothesis. With arctic archaeology then barely born, the inland origin view of Eskimo culture was based on ethnological data and inference. The body of archaeo-

logical knowledge has grown since then. The present chapter indicates the great difficulties experienced by those trying to fit that coarse, cold body to a pre-tailored ethnological suit. The book is not marked by a theoretical or methodological sophistication and nowhere is this more evident than in the chapter on prehistory. One reads, for example, "An element that does not harmonize with the cultural pattern must be foreign;" (page 178). It would serve as an interesting hypothesis, perhaps, but for the moment it is not a demonstrated law. Exceptions readily come to mind. On page 179, the single explanation offered for the occasional spread of traits alone, rather than "in associated groups," is that, "...man's conservative tendencies will lead to selection from among any new elements which may appear." Even as one of the reasons, it is no explanation but only the illusion of explanation. In addition, the chapter is scarred by errors: polyhedral cores and micro-blades are found much farther south than Fort Liard (page 187) and their occurrences in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia are germane to arctic prehistory; that "...the present Central Eskimo very seldom use trace buckles..." (page 188) is at variance with my limited observations and the much broader experience of others I have questioned; it is generally held, and supported by C-14 dates, that Near Ipiutak culture is older, not younger, (page 189) than Ipiutak; the "whole" pre-Dorset "complex from the eastern Arctic has" not "been named Sarqaq" (page 191); published data indicate that true burins are not absent in Dorset culture (page 191); it is incorrect to say of Dorset that "Art does not appear till the late periods," (page 191) (both of these incorrect statements on Dorset use generally unpublished data to refute published data); it is by no means certain that, "The use of polished slate in the early Dorset phases was a transient phenomenon taken over from the Woodland cultures" (page 195).

A final brief chapter, "Eskimo and Whites," summarizes the contact and present situation in Alaska, Greenland, and Canada. Commenting only on Canada, I find the revision inadequate. While noting the federal government's positive attitude, efforts of the past decade in health, education, administration, and economic development have been largely ignored — no mention is made of the dental and tuberculosis program, nursing stations, rehabilitation centres, crafts development, job-training, school expansion, Northern Service Officers, etc. Conversely, Birket-Smith generously remains silent of our errors, failures and shortcomings in these areas. While the Hudson's Bay Co. is not an angelic host in the north, neither is it so mean and massive a monster as suggested by the author.

This generally negative review is not a just reflection of its subject which contains an abundance of excellent data and is surely as readable a summary of Eskimology as is available. I have focused on the three chapters found least impressive in order to offer a caveat to the many readers who might accept Birket-Smith's account as fiat.

William E. TAYLOR, Jr.,
Human History Branch,
National Museum of Canada.
Ottawa, Canada.