

# “‘The Eskimos’: some Comments” and Reply

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I regret that my review is held “a severe criticism” for I expected its first and last paragraphs to reflect my regard for “The Eskimos”. It would be superfluous of a review to dwell on the merits of a book by Dr. Birket-Smith. Conversely, criticism seemed necessary since many would accept so eminent an author’s account as “fiat”.

My criticism on mandibular form was provoked by a passage on p. 34. My failure to relate it to a subsequent passage noted in Dr. Birket-Smith’s comments, and with which I fully agree, only adds to my embarrassment. Dr. Birket-Smith is entirely correct and I apologize to him and to other readers of the review.

Regarding trace buckles, I was not disputing the author’s observation of 40 years ago. I think it reasonable to take the adjective “present” as a reference to the time of writing. Its context reveals nothing else to me. One may write, in the ethnographic present tense, “The Iroquois take scalps” but to write in 1959 that, “The present Iroquois takes scalps” is to invite criticism.

In noting supporting C-14 evidence for the age of Near Ipiutak, I was referring to the dates of the Near Ipiutak-like Norton stratum (Collins, 1953; Larsen, 1953). I also challenged Dr. Birket-Smith’s statement that Near Ipiutak was later than Ipiutak on other grounds: Larsen’s (1951) Trail Creek material seemed to me to indicate a priority for Near Ipiutak; Collins (1953) suggested Near Ipiutak preceded Ipiutak; Larsen’s careful summary of 1953 hardly suggests the reverse; Collins (1955) suggested that a more widespread Ipiutak-like culture likely preceded the more localized Ipiutak. Concerning Giddings’ views expressed to the 1958 Circumpolar Conference in Copenhagen, I may quote from that conference’s publication of his address. He noted (1960,

pp. 31-32) that Norton culture lasted a long time, "...south of Seward Peninsula, and in its last stages seems to be represented by Near Ipiutak culture which, with its pottery and lamps, must have diffused northward to succeed Ipiutak proper..." Thus in suggesting that Near Ipiutak succeeds Ipiutak, Giddings also implied that it was in part contemporaneous with it.

Dr. Birket-Smith has suggested that some archaeologists unduly stress differences and overlook similarities. I would say this of Giddings, perhaps more than of any other current worker in arctic prehistory; but it is no criticism for his problems require such an emphasis. Taking Giddings' view quoted above and recalling how the Near Ipiutak likenesses in the Norton stratum impressed Collins (1953) and Larsen (1953) I cannot but wonder when precisely Norton "became" Near Ipiutak.

On the terminological disagreement of Sarqaq-Pre-Dorset, I think it is wiser to retain for Sarqaq the original meaning as presented by Larsen and Meldgaard (1958) and Mathiassen (1958). Among recent writers Collins, Giddings, Harp, Knuth, MacNeish, and Taylor seem to follow this practice. I think the same may be said of Larsen who clearly distinguishes Independence I from Sarqaq (Larsen and Meldgaard, 1958). Conversely, Meldgaard, as Birket-Smith, prefers the larger meaning of the term. Is this not an instance where majority usage merits recognition?

On the matter of proliferation of names, I think the eastern arctic literature of the past 35 years defends itself well — perhaps too well. We handle some 4,000 years and a rather large area. Must we be restricted to a few categories such as Sarqaq, Dorset, Thule, Inugsuk? Such would produce a rising tide of precision-eroding adjectives. I have read no complaint of the Norton-Near Ipiutak division. These terminological problems border on others of theory and method including the deceptive dichotomy of "splitter-lumper"; I will only add that the expansion of terms engendered by the Midwestern Taxonomic System and by 30 years of work in the southeast and southwest U.S.A. did not make the archaeology of those areas utterly confused.

The defense of Dorset burins hardly rests on a single specimen from T-1. In 3 papers on the site Collins (1956a, b; 1957)

wrote of burins in the plural and labelled 17 illustrated specimens as burins or microburins. I expect he did not illustrate, in these preliminary papers, all the artifacts he classed as burins. I doubt that he misidentified 16 of 17. Also, some of the many spalls illustrated in those papers seem to be burin spalls. Intrusion is a possibility but I would note that there is no land higher than T-1 near that site, that its maximum elevation is about 23 meters, that Dorset first appears at 22 meters about Igloolik (Meldgaard, 1955), and that T-1 does not seem to represent the earliest stage of Dorset. Therefore, I wonder how much of T-1 was above the sea in pre-Dorset times. Seven burins were reported in a Dorset assemblage at Crystal II (Collins, 1953). If these are intrusive I would expect the other illustrated material to show more of a Pre-Dorset cast. A burin from Zackenburg (Knuth, 1952, fig. 14, 4) appears to have sidenotches, which is hardly a diagnostic of Pre-Dorset, but is a common attribute of Dorset, tools.

Regarding art and slate in early Dorset, I desperately wish I were in Copenhagen "to refer" to Meldgaard's fine material for little has been published on it. However informative that material is, it is not all the story for Dorset art or slate, any more than for burins. In restricting art to late Dorset, Dr. Birket-Smith employs negative and generally unpublished evidence to refute both Meldgaard and Collins. Of his Fury-Hecla material Meldgaard (1955, p. 175) noted that plastic art begins to appear in his Period III, which is middle, not late, Dorset. Collins (1956b, Pl. IV; 1957 Pl. IV) illustrated several typical art pieces from the early Dorset T-1 site. I would agree, however, that art pieces seem to be more scarce in early Dorset sites.

The comment on Dorset slate was challenged primarily for the categorical manner with which it presented an hypothesis and ignored the existence in the literature of frequent and comprehensive conflicting comment. Second, while polished slate is abundant in early Dorset, it does not appear so "transient" as to be absent in later Dorset sites. Such tools in Crystal II (Collins, 1950) cannot be early Dorset, can hardly be Thule products in all cases, and likely some of them are Dorset. The Mill Island slate tools (O'Bryan, 1953) are surely late Dorset although

they may reflect Thule influence. Rowley (1940) found a few polished slate tools at Abverjdar whose illustrations and site elevations suggest a rather late Dorset occupation.

Perhaps this reply will indicate that my review derived, not from strictures, but from the data and interpretations of other arctic workers. Disagreement is a healthy and inevitable part of our discipline; those noted here are no denial of my regard for Dr. Birket-Smith's work and "The Eskimos".

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