

## DIAMOND JENNESS, 1886-1969



DIAMOND JENNESS

THE DEATH, on November 29, 1969, of Diamond Jenness marked not only the passing of Canada's most distinguished anthropologist, but also further decreased the rank of scholars within anthropology capable of significant research in most of its various sub-fields. Seeing himself primarily as an ethnologist, he made important contributions as well in linguistics, physical anthropology, folklore, mythology, ethnomusicology, and applied anthropology. Said to have disclaimed being an archaeologist, nevertheless his research and publications on Arctic and sub-Arctic archaeology have had seminal and lasting impact. At the organizational meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Pittsburgh, 1934, he was elected to the first Council of the Society. In the next year, he became the second president of the Society, serving in 1936. Therefore, although detailed obituaries have appeared elsewhere (De Laguna 1971, Collins and Taylor 1970), it is fitting that a summary of his impressive life of scholarship appear in this journal.

Diamond Jenness was born February 10, 1886, in Wellington, New Zealand. There, at the University of Wellington, he attended Victoria University College majoring in classical literature and graduated with first class honors in 1908. That year he attended Oxford, still pursuing the classics, but lured into anthropology in which he took a Diploma in 1911. As an Oxford Scholar under R. R. Marett, his first field research was on Goodenough Island in the D'Entrecasteaux group off New Guinea. He returned in 1912 and the following year was offered, and accepted, the opportunity of representing what is now the National Museum of Man on the Canadian Arctic Expedition. This important research had a tragic beginning. The *Karluk*, major vessel of the expedition, was caught by pack ice and unable to make shore. The expedition leader, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Jenness, and four others sledged toward Point Barrow for supplies, and a week later the *Karluk* caught by the westward current of the Beaufort Sea drifted helplessly toward the Siberian coast where the only other anthropologist, Henri Beuchat, perished with the rest on board. In the subsequent period, Jenness collected an impressive body of data, particularly on the Copper Eskimo, utilizing the then little-used field technique of participant observation. In traveling, he made the first archaeological survey east of Point Barrow, along Camden Bay and on Barter Island.

His Oxford M.A. in anthropology came in 1916, and in 1917 he left for Europe with the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a gunner. Following World War I, he joined what was then the National Museum of Canada as an ethnologist, becoming Chief of its Anthropology Section in 1926. That same year he conducted archaeological excavations on Cape Prince of Wales and the Diomed Islands. With the beginning of World War II, he left museum duties to become Deputy Director of Intelligence, RCAF, and later to fill other posts in geographic intelligence. In 1947, he retired from both the museum and the Intelligence Service but continued an active role in lecturing and writing, capped by his impressive 5 volume study of Eskimo Administration.

Archaeologists owe him a particular debt for 2 impressive works of inductive research. The first involved a skillful piece of typological assessment, the establishment of the Cape Dorset culture. In 1924, a large Eskimo collection, partially purchased and partially excavated, was sent to the

National Museum by Major L. T. Burwash from Coats Island and Cape Dorset. Jenness, recognizing that some of the artifacts resembled neither modern Eskimo assemblages nor the Thule types carefully established by Mathiasen during the Fifth Thule Expedition, accurately separated the mixed collection into modern pieces, Thule artifacts, and a third category of previously unknown tools. This latter group of 500 specimens (plus 4 others previously acquired by the museum from Southampton Island and Chesterfield Inlet) he accurately assessed as being older than Thule by virtue of its deeper patination and scratched line holes, a technique he presumed to have preceded knowledge of the bow drill. Even more impressively, he linked with the antler and ivory pieces a large number of chipped stone implements by virtue of the fact that their geographic distribution appeared limited to the range in which the unique antler and ivory pieces had been found. After logically deciding that in at least some sites Dorset preceded Thule (a contention hotly debated for some years), he concluded with the observation that this culture, although primitive, 'is certainly not the culture of the first Eskimo who settled on the coast and gained livelihood by hunting sea mammals. Of that earliest culture we have yet to find the remains' (Jenness 1925). This earlier culture was found 30 yr later.

During his work on the Bering Straits in 1926, his attention was caught by an elaborately decorated, deeply patinated harpoon head found by an Eskimo in a deep midden on Little Diomed Island. Similarly decorated harpoon heads were purchased from the local Eskimos. In the words of Henry Collins (Collins and Taylor 1970), "It was on this slender basis that Jenness postulated a pre-Thule ancestral phase of Eskimo culture in the western Arctic . . . its age . . . its relation to known Eskimo cultures in the American Arctic and . . . its relationship to the cultures of eastern Asia. Later investigations, which have revealed the Old Bering Sea culture in its entirety, have extended and reinforced but in no way contradicted Jenness' original postulations as to its age, relationships and origin."

Diamond Jenness, in his full life, received many academic honors and held many high posts in professional societies, demonstrating the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues. In addition to his presidency of the Society for American Archaeology, he was Vice-President and later President of the American Anthropological Association (1937-1940), and Vice-President of Section H (Anthropology) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1938). In 1962, he received the prestigious Massey Medal from the Canadian Geographical Society, and in the March following his death was awarded his country's highest honor, the Companion of the Order of Canada.

His complete bibliography, including over one hundred books and articles, appears with the obituary written by Dr. De Laguna. We include here only those specifically dealing with archaeological subjects.

De Laguna, Frederica

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#### Archaeological bibliography of Diamond Jenness

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(With Robert Bentham) Eskimo remains in S.E. Ellesmere Island. *Royal Society of Canada, Transactions, Series 3*, Vol. 35, no. 2:41-55.

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