

"En marche entre deux mondes: Prehistoire recente au Quebec, au Labrador et a Terre-Neuve."

John Hewson

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REVIEW

“En marche entre deux mondes: Préhistoire récente au Québec, au Labrador et à Terre-Neuve.” Special section in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec* 19, 2-3, (1989):3-116.

JOHN HEWSON

Recherches amérindiennes, one of the best anthropology journals on this continent, has directed its attention in this recent edition to the prehistory of Quebec, Labrador, the Strait of Belle Isle, and Newfoundland. There are seven articles in this special section, after a brief Introduction by the editors, Moira McCaffrey and Pierre Dumais. The collected bibliography, valuable by itself to anyone involved in Newfoundland studies, occupies pages 109-16 at the end.

The seven articles are as follows:

1. Préhistoire récente sur la côte sud de l'estuaire du St-Laurent: archéologie et relations à l'espace.
2. Regards Archéologiques sur les Béothuks de Terre-Neuve.
3. Contributions à la préhistoire récente de Blanc-Sablon.
4. Une réserve d'outils de la période intermédiaire sur la côte du Labrador.
5. La période préhistorique récente dans la région de Caniapiscau.
6. 1350 ans d'histoire au site GaEk-1 du Lac Caniapiscau central, Nouveau-Québec.
7. L'acquisition et l'échange de matières lithiques durant la préhistoire récente: un regard vers la fosse du Labrador.

The first article, by Pierre Dumais and Jean Poirier, concerns the recent prehistory of the south bank of the St. Lawrence. Comprehensive analysis

of the space, tools, hearths, and bones shows relationships with the archeological complex of the Labrador coast, indicating an Algonkian, probably Montagnais grouping. In fact, the suggestion of a ritual disposal of the bones of the bear ties in with descriptions of the Montagnais bear feast described in the Jesuit Relations, and more recently by Frank Speck.

The second article, by Douglas Robbins, is an archeological overview of the Beothuk, reporting on the published work of the last twenty years and showing how there is not yet sufficient conclusive information to settle such difficult questions as the distant origins of the Beothuk, or even their prehistoric relations with the peoples of the Canadian mainland. Could they be descendants of the Archaic Indians, who left such extensive archaeological traces at Port au Choix and elsewhere? But no Amerindian traces have ever been found between 3000 and 2000 BP (Before the Present), when the island of Newfoundland was occupied by the Palaeo-Eskimo. Far more probable is the proposal that the disappearance of the Palaeo-Eskimo opened the door for a new immigration from Labrador. But then again there are no traces of Beothuk-like assemblages at any site on the Great Northern Peninsula: just one projectile point from Cow Head, and one in the turf wall of a Scandinavian house at L'Anse-aux-Meadows.

As for the relations of the Beothuk with the mainland peoples, analyses of the archaeological materials available are presently underway to examine the three following possible scenarios:

1. Wide-scale contact throughout the Quebec-Labrador-Newfoundland region, as suggested by the similarity of cultural features in the tools and artefacts.
 2. A dichotomy between the Island and the mainland, suggested by the fact that the Great Northern Peninsula was apparently unoccupied.
 3. A sphere of resemblance between the Island and the immediate mainland (Southern Labrador Coast and Quebec North Shore), in contrast to the more distant areas of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula.
- All of these models could, of course, be applicable at different times, but there is sufficient dating information on the assemblages involved to allow for the detection of changes over a period of several centuries.

In a final section Robbins deals with the extinction of the Beothuk, pointing out how several recent surveys have pointed to such factors as disease and starvation, thereby replacing the myth of a systematic destruction of the Beothuk by the white settlers. He points out that there could not have been a significant contact with the Montagnais of the mainland, otherwise the Beothuk would presumably have been involved in the trade for fur and firearms, as were the Montagnais. Given their isolation and lack of motivation for trading with the white settlers, a hostile group invading their territory, he concludes that their disappearance was inevitable.

The third article, by Jean-Yves Pintal, reviews recent explorations and analyses of sites along the Quebec North Shore and Belle Isle Strait. The author notes that Tuck has already proposed that a continuum exists in the Strait of Belle Isle which relates Archaic Indian to later Amerindian (e.g. Beothuk) cultures, and that Pastore has proposed that a single prehistoric population lies behind the historic populations (Montagnais and Beothuk). After surveying the most recent findings, Pintal suggests that this latter appears to be a premature conclusion, and that the archaeological findings on the Quebec North Shore will turn out to be more complex.

The fourth article, by Stephen Loring, reports on the find of a cache of stone tools at Daniel Rattle (near Davis Inlet) on the central Labrador coast. The eleven stone tools were made from Saunders chert, from the interior of Labrador, a material that was widely used in the Intermediate Period (3800 to 1500 BP), and not found in the nearby campsites, which gave carbon-14 datings of 1890 BP and 1500 BP, the oldest dating for a site from recent prehistory in Labrador. In the recent prehistoric sites in Labrador, in fact, Saunders chert has been replaced as a material by Ramah chert (or quartzite — the jury is still out on the nature of the material) from the northern Labrador coast, indicating a change of lifestyle and/or trading patterns. The existence of a deep-notched biface, of Early Woodland style, in the cache at Daniel Rattle also suggests, according to the author, that there was an extensive communication network among all the nomads of the Far Northeast.

The fifth and sixth articles report detailed archeological studies from the centre of the Labrador peninsula, in the Kaniapiscaw region, on the Quebec side of the border. The sites date from 2000 to 1500 years ago, in the recent prehistoric period, and the cultural continuity and similar settlement patterns lead to the conclusion that these sites were occupied by the ancestors of the Montagnais-Naskapi (Innu), who may have migrated into the area. The linguistic evidence would indicate that their arrival could certainly not be any earlier than 2000-1500 BP: Montagnais and Plains Cree are still to a degree mutually comprehensible. Spanish, French, and Italian, which are no longer mutually comprehensible, have a time depth of only 1500 years, from the breakup of the Roman Empire, when they were all dialects of Latin, to the present day. The linguistic evidence suggests that the in-migration of the Innu is not more than 1000 to 1500 years BP.

The final paper, by one of the editors of this special section, goes back to this important question of the lithic sources: where the material comes from for the stone tools used during the Late Prehistoric period in the interior of the Labrador Peninsula.

Ramah silicate (if we are to avoid calling it either *chert* or *quartzite* we can use the generic term) is a strikingly beautiful stone, translucent and lustrous, with the texture of granulated sugar, consequently easily identifiable,

which comes from one of the most northerly inlets of the Labrador coast. Ms. McCaffrey tells us that "up to now, no other geological source containing this material has ever been discovered."

Mistassini silicate (or quartzite) is another remarkable stone, opaque, mostly fine-grained, with a typical waxy lustre. It is whitish grey, and often has bands of colour: pink, green, brown, or black. The only known outcrops are those of Lake Mistassini and Lake Albanel, in Quebec, about three hundred miles due east of the head of James Bay, and about 400 miles NNE of Quebec City.

The centre of the Labrador peninsula, the area of the vast iron ore deposits, has its own deposits of quartzites and cherts, and it is consequently somewhat of a puzzle why the silicates from Mistassini and Ramah were used instead, and that Ramah silicate is to be found not only throughout the Labrador Peninsula, but even more widely throughout Northeast North America. To add to the puzzle, the prehistoric inhabitants of the Labrador Peninsula used caribou bone and antler for tools of all kinds, including arrow and spear heads. McCaffrey suggests that this beautiful stone, "which shines like the colour of the sky," had a spiritual significance, and that this factor has to be taken into account in discussing its distribution, as well as the networking that obviously underlies its extensive circulation throughout the Northeast.

Recherches amérindiennes is to be congratulated on putting together this extensive collection of information and discussion, to which a brief review cannot do full justice. Some of these articles contain so much information they have to be re-read, and slowly, so that one has time to think, before the range of documentation they contain can be assimilated.

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