At the outset Riches outlines his theoretical orientation, contrasting what he calls the “humanistic” approach which he proposes to follow, with the “scientific” which is presented as that used by most northern scholars. A disclaimer is made of any attempt at ethnographic completeness, together with a denial of the value of native mythological and cosmological knowledge, and an admission of the unconvincing nature of most of the societies considered. We are left with an approach that is based on empirical data but in which the ethnographer of environment and their societies together with assumed decision-making processes which shaped their societies. Given the subjective and speculative nature of this approach, I cannot see that the terms humanistic and emic (which are used synonymously) are appropriate.

Stripped of these questionable epithets, Riches’ method involves examination of statements about northern hunters on the basis of some premises which are built from a preliminary examination of ethnography. In short, he seems to be making a case for the deductive approach as an alternative to the largely inductive stance of most scholars of the North.

The premises which he evokes are overwhelmingly ecological in nature, as the author admits in his final chapter. However, he cautions that he is departing from the “use of the language of scientific ecology” as conventional ecological studies “are not necessarily explanatory relevance to this study, even if they are quite outside... Eskimo and Indian perceptions of the arctic and subarctic environment.” I do not feel that he can adequately represent Inuit and Indian perceptions without making greater use than he does of the ethnography which attempts to portray such perceptions.

In the last analysis the reader is left to judge whether the interpretations of previous studies of northern hunters, based largely on empirical data but involving as well some speculations, present more cogent arguments than those of Riches, which are more intuitive but whose validity must ultimately rest in the assessment of his identification of the Inuit-uniq designation with the “localational band”. This identification ignores the analyses of Stefanansson, Jenness, Birkert-Smith and Burch who have pointed out the elusiveness of, and the relative difficulty of, the -uniq postbase as applied to actual groupings of people. In addition to failing to refer to these authors in that context, omission of mention of other authors seems inexcusable. How can one discuss the problems of the band or of motives for aggregations in the Subarctic, as does Riches, without citing the relevant works of Slobodin and of J.G.E. Smith?

How can one claim to represent the emic approach to subarctic ethnology when the writings of Hallowell and Preston (to give only two appropriate names) are not mentioned?

In Chapter Five Riches concludes that “hunter-gatherer leadership is in fact exercised less often in respect of matters of production” than one might expect, yet his analysis of Inuit leadership rests almost entirely on premises related to production. His out-of-hand rejection of the importance of kinship factors related to leadership prevents him from exploring the subtle interactions that exist between the ideal and the actual, the nominal and the operational aspect in several Inuit societies.

Those ethnologists who specialize in the Subarctic are better qualified than I to comment on Chapter Six, where the question of family hunting territories is examined. In the seventh chapter attempts to analyze problems of contact-caused changes are particularly incoherent in the confusion of time levels and in the attempt to solve too many problems in too short a space. Riches’ struggles with the unfortunate concept of materialism are not successful and his speculations regarding the probable changes which occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Netsilik institutions fall well outside the realm of historical conjecture that will be acceptable to either social anthropologists or ethnologists.

If his refutation of Sahlin’s concept of the original affluent society in the final chapter is addressed to students of northern hunters, he is preaching to the converted, for this notion has met with widespread rejection beginning with the 1966 Man The Hunter Conference where Sahlin rather facetiously introduced it.

I find the greatest difficulty of this work to be its expansiveness. Too many problems are tackled, and the burden of both arctic and subarctic hunters is too great a weight to shoulder. The book is in fact an attempt at a tour de force of northern hunters as well as of a number of generalized hunter-gatherers. In most cases Richard limited the range of these problems and narrowed the scope of societies considered, and in doing so more adequately represented scholars whose works are relevant to the discussions, and taken into account more fully the nuances of their arguments as they differed or agreed with his own, he might have made a stronger case for the deductive approach and achieved a significant contribution to northern studies.

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This important monograph summarizes the study of the technology, typology and distribution of 342 native copper artifacts from Canadian Eskimo and Athapaskan ethnographic and archaeological collections, with supplementary observations on several Alaskan Athapaskan archaeological collections. A uniform copper technology crosscut ethnic and temporal boundaries and produced finished artifacts which were all quite small. It was based on the folding of small sheets of native copper and the consolidation of these sheets by hammering into larger artifacts in a process clearly involving annealing and/or hot working.
The monograph begins with a skeletal overview of northern prehistory and a survey of the distribution of native copper artifacts in northern North America. Native copper was clearly significant during the last 1000 years in Eskimo and Athapaskan Indian technologies over a wide area. A few native copper implements apparently also occur in Arctic contexts (some problematical), but the relationship of these scattered finds to the much later flowering of the copper technology is not directly addressed. I doubt that extension of the roots of the sophisticated late prehistoric copper technology several millennia into the past as a minor and sporadically utilized element in Arctic Small Tool tradition technology is justified on present evidence.

Two major copper source areas are known, but unfortunately they are geologically similar and unambiguous differentiation is not possible by neutron activation analysis. X-ray fluorescence analysis was primarily helpful in differentiating smelted industrial copper from native copper.

Careful analysis of the copper-working technology is the major contribution of this monograph. Available ethnographic information on this topic is fragmentary and internally contradictory, highlighting the value of careful technological study using modern metallurgical techniques. Four "morphotechnological categories" are utilized: sheets, bars, tanged forms, and blanks. The first step in the reconstituted technology was the hammering of thin (usually less than 1 mm thick) copper sheets. Artifacts such as ulus and beads might be made directly from sheets. Other artifacts were made from bars. This study demonstrates that fabrication of bars from folded and hammered sheets required application of heat either through annealing (heating of a cold-worked piece to above 300°C) or actual hot forging. Tanged forms such as points and knives were created from sheets and bars by following one of four procedural sequences reconstructed in this report. A fourth category, the blank, seems usually to be large bar-like forms which have not been shaped into finished artifacts.

This typology mixes the technology of shaping with the morphology of the finished product in a sometimes confusing manner. For example, tanged forms may be cut from sheets or created in various ways from blanks and bars. Thus tanged forms do not seem to be conceptually equivalent to the other three forms.

Folding and hammering with heat treatment are the primary techniques of this technology. Secondary techniques such as cutting, abrasion and perforation vary in frequency from collection to collection, as does the frequency of sheets, bars and blanks.

More work with a larger sample is needed to clarify the significance of these differences.

The authors suggest that perhaps the absence of efficient tools for cutting large pieces explains the distinctive small size of the copper artifacts produced by the sheet technique. Comparative study of the technology which produced the more massive implements of the Old Copper culture in the Great Lakes region might throw interesting light on regional variation in native North American copper metallurgy.

This study effectively documents a homogeneous copper technology in northern North America in late prehistoric times. Most will agree that this shared technology indicates significant cultural contacts among the groups involved rather than a series of independent inceptions or trade exclusively in finished products. Perhaps the weakest part of the monograph is the discussion of the origins of this technology. The implications of its possible presence in ancient Arctic Small Tool tradition contexts, raised on pages 2-3, are never really considered. There is little archaeological documentation for the metal-working Alaskan "Neo-Eskimos" of the first half of the First Millennium A.D. posited on page 41. The reader may well wonder if these hypothetical metallurgists are the same as the metal-working Norton related peoples alluded to on page 3. Also, in my opinion, equation of the occasional piece of trade iron found in First Millennium A.D. Alaskan sites with the diffusion of metal-working technology from Siberia is highly premature.

The monograph concludes with a 231-item annotated bibliography which is itself a major contribution. This significant volume is not without flaws. Careful editing should have caught more of the fairly frequent typographical errors and bibliographic inconsistencies. Provenience of illustrated specimens is not given. A number of references, especially to archaeological reports, lack specific page numbers. This is always annoying when very specific points are in question. Nevertheless, all workers interested in the later prehistory of northern North America or in native American metallurgy will need to consult this important study. One hopes that it is the first of many fruitful collaborations between metallurgists and archaeologists in the north.