

**TRANSACTIONS OF THE CANADIAN
INSTITUTE, SESSION 1892-93, NOTES
ARCHAEOLOGICAL, INDUSTRIAL AND
SOCIOLOGICAL ON THE WESTERN
DÉNÉS: WITH AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL
SKETCH OF THE SAME**

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A. G. MORICE

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SESSION 1892-93.

NOTES

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WITH AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE SAME

BY THE REV. FATHER A. G. MORICE, O.M.I.

Read 4th November, 1893.

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INTRODUCTION.

"Archæological" is rather inappropriate in connection with the present monograph, whose scope embraces nothing archæan or really ancient. The prehistoric Dénés are the Dénés of but yesterday. For, what are the one hundred years which have elapsed since the discovery of their country compared with the twenty or more centuries which separate us from the famous civilizations of ancient Egypt and Assyria? Yet, to check possibly too sanguine expectations from such archæologists as may happen to read these lines, I hasten to declare that it is perhaps more easy to present the lover of technological lore with graphic illustrations of the arts and industries which flourished among the subjects of the Pharaohs and the Assyrian monarchs, than to thoroughly illustrate from actual specimens the *ensemble* of the arms, working implements, household utensils and ceremonial paraphernalia, which should concur in reconstructing the peculiar mode of life pursued by the primitive Dénés. The original Egyptians and Assyrians have left us, besides authentic records of their own doings on imperishable material what promises to prove well nigh unlimited stores of practical illustrations of their past sociology in their tombs, their temples and other public monuments. So that the antiquarian's task is greatly facilitated by the abundance of the material at his command. Furthermore, where the hieroglyphic and cuneiform chronicles fail to clear up difficulties of interpretation or to enlighten him on the particular use of ancient implements, he has only to delve into Herodotus and other historians for the desired light.

Not so, however, with regard to the prehistoric Dénés. As I have elsewhere demonstrated,* that family of American aborigines, and more especially the Carrier tribe to which prominence will be given in the following pages, is characterized by a wonderful power of imitation and self-adaptation which prompted it, upon the advent of the whites, to discard most of its native customs, indigenous weapons and working implements. As a natural consequence, many of the latter are now in a fair way towards complete obliteration. Moreover, the nation's historians, I mean the old men who witnessed the manufacture and use of some archæological articles the duplicates of which have caused speculations from more than one antiquarian, are fast disappearing from

* Are the Carrier Sociology and Mythology Indigenous or Exotic? Trans. Roy. Soc. Canada, Section II. 1892.

the scene of this world. So that the sooner the Déné technology is brought to light, the better it will be in the interest of science.

Indeed, should any value whatever be attached to the present monograph, I feel quite certain that it will be entirely on account of its opportuneness. Undertaken twenty-five years ago, it could probably have been made more exhaustive. After the lapse of an equal space of time, its usefulness as a contribution to archaeological knowledge would be problematical. I am at present the possessor of the only remaining specimens of some objects illustrative of the past Carrier sociology, and my familiarity with the language and original customs of the Indians to whose spiritual wants I minister, might not be enjoyed by a successor among them until time and circumstances deprive its use of much of its value.

These considerations, corroborated by the requests of scientists whose advice I have not the right to disregard, have emboldened me to attempt a description of such technological objects as can be illustrated from specimens in my possession or which are still in common use among the Western Dénés. The number of these, as will soon appear, is somewhat limited, and therefore my task cannot be very arduous. I only regret that my mineralogical shortcomings render an exact description of the material used in the fabrication of stone implements in a few cases impossible. For the identification of such rocks as are adequately described, I am under obligation to Dr. G. M. Dawson, Assistant Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa.

As technology is the prime object of this monograph, the industries of the Western Dénés will be mentioned in so far only as may be necessary for the clear understanding of the nature and use of the objects therein described. Which statement should not convey the idea that I intend to make light of their claims to importance in an ethnological contribution. With a little reflection, it will become apparent that all human industries need material aids or means to manifest themselves, and their results must also take a concrete form. Now, these palpable data, be they the products of human ingenuity or the instruments employed in their development, are *per se* technological items, and by reviewing the latter, one cannot help treating of the former. Therefore I simply mean to say that the archaeological, rather than the industrial, plan will be adopted in the following pages. In other words, our divisions shall be based, not on the industries of the Western Dénés, but, as far as practical, on the material of the weapons, tools, utensils, fishing devices and other implements under consideration.

As for the third, or sociological scope of this paper, I think that our title will be justified not only by numerous transient mentions of native customs and practices, but more especially by extended descriptions of the Aborigines' usages and superstitions in connection with fishing and trapping, their domestic economy as regards diet and remedies, their ceremonial dress, their habitations, etc. However, for more systematic information concerning the Déné sociology, the reader must be referred to another paper published some years ago under the title of "The Western Dénés ; their Manners and Customs." *

Mythology may be regarded as a mirror wherein the psychological ideas and the particular social institutions and mode of life of a people are faithfully reflected. Therefore I have not deemed it inconsistent with the nature of my subject to intersect the following pages with a few short legends or traditions, especially when these may prove a help towards the formation of a more correct idea of the objects hereafter described.

* Proceedings Can. Inst., vol. vii., p. 109, *et seq.*